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“Follow the glow worms”:
a creative.~.relational wonder(ing) with trauma stories
who seek, and resist, being told.
Abstract

Like a moth, this thesis takes flight from Sophie Tamas’ (2010) explorations with survivors of partner abuse, to become a paradoxical, playful, and performative body-of-work which stutters and splutters its way between and beyond dominant understandings of trauma narratives to follow the living glow of trauma stories.

While attempting to find, tell, and make sense of violent yet silenced fragments from my teenage years, which both want and refuse to be told, unexpected emergences arrive - producing affective matterings and movements (Stewart 2011). These elusive emergences, these living sparks of light, these ‘glow worms’ invited me, and now you too, into a creative~.relational wonder(ing).

By this I mean a wonder-fuelled (MacLure 2013) journey of wandering with trauma stories; of creating~.relating with stories as they shift, change, and kick up against temporal, familial and narrative constraints. By tending, affectively, to what glows, and reflectively to what happens, and what gets produced, when we attempt to follow these glows I found I was able to travel across time and space, to return, remember, and relate-with trauma stories.

This body-of-work documents these travels and seeks readers who are willing to travel towards what is felt and sensed rather than what is known and told.

This process of creative~.relational wondering does not offer up concrete understandings or practical resolutions. Instead, it offers affective and evocative entanglements that, in their glowing movements and matterings, trouble the pursuit of explicit meaning and the privileging of coherent narrative in counselling practice and research, particularly in relation to stories of trauma where the impetus to tell, and thus to recover what is supposedly broken by trauma is becoming increasingly prevalent.

This thesis proposes something different; a generative and affective following of trauma stories as they shift and shimmer through different spaces, places, parts, and seasons.

Keywords: Wonder, Trauma, Stories, Glow Worms, Spirits, Atmospheres, Creative-Relational, Emergence, Performative, Play, Therapeutic Process

Word Count: 50,451 (excluding abstract, declaration, dedication, acknowledgements, footnotes, and references).
Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself, and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, to any other degree or professional qualification. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signature:

Date: 6th February 2023
Dedication

I dedicate this body of work to:

my maternal grandparents,

Derek and Barbara Brightman
(1924 – 2013, 1925 – 2017)
whose love, lives, and legacies made this adventure possible.

my undergraduate tutor, supervisor, and mentor,

Amal Treacher Kabesh
(1954 – 2022)
who nurtured the first relational fronds with my researcher self.

and

my clients
who courageously follow what glows for them.
Acknowledgements

This body-of-work came into being with and through the support of multiple fronds of connection. Here, I recognise some of the relationships whose presence in my world made it possible...

To the places and spaces, I walked, related, and created with in Scotland, England, Australia, and France – thank you for anchoring and expanding my explorations.

To the led in my pencils, ink in my pens, tech in my laptop, cups of tea (and coffee…and booze), chocolate treats, steadfast trees, playlists-on-repeat, soulful sunrises, and ‘Gold Helsinki’ desk on the 5th floor of the library - thank you for sustaining me, and this work, over the past 4-ish years.

To the formidable expertise, insight, and relational engagement, I was lucky enough to receive from: Nini Fang, who carved out space for the precious potential of glow worms to first flicker into being; Mark Price, who, with his wild and kind heart, stayed with me when I was lost without a light or a map, becoming kindred spirit rather than critical friend; Fiona Murray, who steadied unexpected storms and remained whimsical, robust and alongside me in the mundane as well as the most shakily intimate moments of this journey; and Karen Serra Undurraga, who, with warm hugs, snowflake flurries, and generous insights helped me to trust in magic, enough, to let this thesis go. Thank you all for being part of this adventure.

To the CPASS professional programmes team, in particular Tanya Richardson and Mandy Laing, thank you for nurturing my capacity to sit with, and reflect on, the uncertain process of following what glows.

To my peers who I’m grateful to have learnt and journey-ed with, especially: Nandini Manjunath, I will be forever thankful I took my first steps into the revolution with you by my side, and I can’t wait for the strides we will continue to cheer one another in taking. Jaz Halow and Mark Bonello, thank you for all the fun, booze, comfort food, 90s music, silliness and creativity Twinkle could wish for. She has found allies in you both. Andrés Lukauskis, thank you for believing in the lights and trusting I had it in me to follow where they led. I’m grateful for the seasons of shifting light our friendship has weathered. Neros/The Posts, thank you for our generative forays into post-qualitative possibilities. I’m glad we were strangers in the garden together; and Karen Kaufman - thank you for enthusiastically supporting my writings and wonder(ings). I look forward to all the cake, expansive conversations, and easy companionship that lies ahead for us.
To Bree and Gherki – you patiently helped me take my first steps into the world of counselling and have cheered me – and my parts on - ever since. With you, I found, and learnt to love, Little Girl.

To Nick - for your patience, generosity, humour, and persevering love which has seen us through so many improbably wondrous and impossibly bleak times. Thank you for holding on so tightly and graciously letting me take flight. I simply would not have managed this without you.

To my family - a thesis about trauma, which followed feelings rather than fact was never going to be an easy thing to accommodate - but you found ways to create space, time, and possibility for me. Thank you for doing all you could to cheer me on. I’m proud to become a ‘Dr Bateman’ – like my mum!

And finally, to you – my readers – writing emerged when I wrote to you, with your imagined presence; trusting the words would one day be read. Thank you for being here, for reading, for taking the relational risk to follow what glows.
Greetings

As you settle into your reading process, whatever that might be for you, a white woman in her late twenties or early thirties comes into view. Wearing sky-blue jogging bottoms, an oversized mint-green jumper, fluffy purple slippers, and a puzzled expression on her un-made-up face, she is both multicoloured and messy. Knelt amidst a sea of paper and encircled by mounds of books you watch her scribbling in a pink leather notebook.

She looks up, notices you, and stops scribbling. Her eyes widen with surprise and delight.

“Oh hello!”, she waves emphatically “You’ve arrived!”

Excited, she rushes over to greet you, papers crinkling under her slipper-ed feet, hairs flying free from the precarious bun atop her head. She draws closer and wavers. She’s unsure what sort of greeting to offer: a wave; a handshake; a hug? She wonders about social-distancing measures, cultural norms, and relational gestures. What might you be able and willing to receive?

She pauses, taking a moment to tend to the sensations and shimmers within and around her…

“I’m glad you found yourself here” she says with a warm smile, putting one hand over her heart, and holding the other out to you;

a gesture of movement, an invitation, an opening.

You take the risk and return the gesture, taking her hand in yours. Sparks flicker in the space between your palms. Seigworth and Gregg tell us that “affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness [...] that is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body” (2010, 1), and the affect – the vital force beneath conscious knowing and beyond emotion - of this moment of relational meeting, produces something...

A letter, with your name, sitting atop a curious box emerges.
I wonder what the arrival of the letter and box does; where do they take you? Their emergence is likely to create flickers - rhythms, refusals, invitations, reverberations (Seigworth and Gregg 2010) - which swell together to evoke a sense of something...Perhaps the flickers lead you to questions. Maybe you’re wondering “where am I supposed to begin?”

But, what if there is no pre-defined beginning, no set starting point?

The delightful trouble with this body-of-work¹ is its ongoing-ness – it’s multi-dimensionality; its folding and unfolding (Manning 2009)² nature. Deleuze and Guattari write: “a point is always a point of origin. But a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination” (1987, 293), and this body-of-work has no singular start or end and follows no predetermined path.

Instead, I invite you to take a moment to tend to the sensations and shimmers happening within and around you. Whatever tugs at your attention, or sparks your curiosity matters, and I urge you to follow these tugs and sparks – to read and receive in whatever order glows for you. It is how this body-of-work came to, and continues to come into being...

That being said, the letter offers a potential meeting place, between me and you; between this body-of-work and your body. It is an invitation for you to take up as you wish.

¹ I use the terms ‘body-of-work’, ‘research’, ‘thesis’, ‘inquiry’, and ‘adventure’ interchangeably to refer to the collective assemblage of writing fragments, quivering affects, and glowing artefacts that co-create this research.
² Erin Manning slowly became a trusted author in this body-of-work, my first encounters with her weren’t lightning-bolt shifts, but her work and writing, her thinking and theorising with and of the world was something that kept returning, folding, and unfolding with the pages of this writing (2009), in minor, meaningful, moving gestures (2016).
Glowing Gestures

“‘and what is the use of a book’, thought Alice, ‘without pictures or conversation?’”

(Carroll 1946, 1-2)

**Gestures**: I’m thinking of Jonathan Wyatt (2019) when I use the word gestures, and the connections he makes between Cixous’ writing as a “gesture of love” (1991, 41) and Manning’s “minor gesture” (2016). Jonathan says the two are connected if we see these gestures as immanent practices – forces that activate movement from within experience. The gestures offered up here; an **Invitation**, a **Map**, and a **Light**, emerged from within the process of this adventure as I grappled with responding to two potentialities without diminishing either; the process of following glow worms, and the desired outcome of submitting a doctoral thesis for examination.

These gestures are an open, outstretched hand, the first threads of dawn’s light, a twinkling harbour of bobbing boats, ready to set sail. They are, to adopt Jonathan’s language, “the movement, the gesture, **of** the world” (2019, 20 (italics in original)), **of this world** - the world of **this** thesis.
An Invitation

My dearest reader, hello,

I'm so glad you've found yourself here and this body-of-work has found its way to you.

In the book ‘The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society’ (2007), Margaret Shaffer and her niece, Annie Bowers, co-write about the homing instinct of books and the way writing finds the readers it needs, just as readers find the writing they need. What a wonder-full suggestion; it entertains a belief I've held since childhood - that words and stories, trees and plants, objects, and animals, have lives, spirits, 'vitalities' (Bennett 2010), of their own.

I am thinking with Jane Bennett when I use the word vitalities, who writes -

“by “vitality” I mean the capacity of things, edibles, commodities, storms, metal not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (Bennett 2010, viii).

This thesis-thing has a life, a spirit, a vitality of its own - finding kernels of wonder (MacLure 2013), gathering momentum (Wyatt 2019), taking written (Richardson and St.Pierre 2005), and performative shape (Spry 2011, Speedy 2015) with and beyond my deliberate intent. I know, at a difficult-to-articulate, gut-sensing, level, that it, and I, exist fluidly in this moment - both because of, through, and beyond one another, and because of, through and beyond a multitude of others, including you, our reader.

I realise not many doctoral theses will address you directly; most will keep you at a distance (‘experience-far’ Bondi and Fewell (2016) would say), casting you in the role of a critical observer, separating you from the inquiry itself, but I don’t subscribe to this view of the world. Instead, I turn to Erin Manning, who offers a different perspective: Manning, in her 2009 exploration ‘What if it Didn't All Begin and End with Containment? Toward a Leaky Sense of Self’, expands the predominant delineations between self and other as contained and autonomously-bounded by foregrounding relationality and ongoing emergence. She suggests that we (you, me, this thesis-thing for example) - are made up of entangled, multiplicitous, relational milieus which “fold in on and through one another” (2009, 35) in porous ways.

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Given this, I cast you, as reader, in a different role which acknowledges our co-existence. I believe, as you read, you’ll experience sensations, affects, and responses and I invite you to be moved and move with these affective intensities. In this thesis, your experiences, your entangled relating-with, and making-with the materiality of this work, matters (Haraway 2016), it takes this body-of-work further, continuing its process of becoming. To support the ongoing creative capacity of this research, I ask that you remain ‘experience-near’ and thus “close to the feelings and subjective states” (Bondi and Fewell 2016, 6) which emerge for you as you journey onwards. I ask you to notice what flickers and tremors, what reverberates and repeats, what twinkles and calls...

I appreciate this is unusual, but as you may well have sensed by now - this is not a traditional thesis. Inspired by Sophie Tamas’ (2010) and Freya Johnson’s (2021) work, this thesis troubles the shape of the usual; the ‘usual’ departure points and structures of a research process, and the ‘usual’ ways of doing, telling, and storying trauma. This means you won’t find clear and concrete answers in the pages ahead, nor will you have the familiar chapters of ‘Literature Review’, ‘Onto-epistemology’, and ‘Methodology’ to guide your way. Even this letter - offered as a potential meeting place - is more invitation than introduction. That’s not to say responses to these long-established concepts aren’t scattered like seeds in the pages ahead, but, these responses, like seeds, are dispersed in whimsical ways.

This is partly because this body-of-work - coming to life as it has through my participation in the Professional Doctorate in Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of Edinburgh - attempts to stay close to the process of therapy³. By this I mean the embodied, relational, and intimate journey client and counsellor navigate in their work together. In my experiences, as client and counsellor, as well as counselling student and tutor, this process is not linear and predictable, but dynamic and emergent. It often feels as if the therapeutic process has a life, a spirit, of its own which is entangled with the relationship between client and counsellor.

³ I use the terms ‘therapy’, ‘counselling’, and ‘psychotherapy’ as well as ‘counsellor’ and ‘psychotherapist’ interchangeably to refer to the field of work I engage with, as client, practitioner, researcher, and educator. This field of work values working reflexively and relationally to explore lived experience and relationships.
The interwoven connections between therapeutic process and relationship are widely recognised and form the basis of many approaches to modern-day psychotherapy (Lemma-Wright 1995, Boston Group 2010, Mearns and Thorne 2013, Knox and Cooper 2015). However, as McLeod (2001) points out, the process of therapy and process of research, can inhabit very different worlds; with counselling research often feeling distant and disconnected from the intimate, relationally-informed world of practice. Bondi and Fewell (2016) taking McLeod’s arguments further, advocate for research that is directly informed by the lived experience of practice, and therefore, context-specific, experience-near, embodied, relational, and intuitive.

In the early-Autumn of 2018, these readings, and the qualitative research course Between Counselling & Research 1, invited me into a world where process and relationship could be at the heart of counselling research. This ignited sparks of flickering connection, signalling a path I could take. Little did I know where those flickering lights would lead...but I felt inspired to “do” research that stayed close to the phronetic wisdom of lived experience (Bondi and Fewell 2016, Flyvbjerg 2001). As the trees continued to shed their leaves, Susan Brison (2002) and Sophie Tamas (2010, 2011a) appeared. Their evocative accounts with their lived experiences of trauma stoked the newly ignited sparks further; reading their words, I felt flickers within me take flight, like a moth (Tamas 2010), with stories of their own to share.

As I became more closely intwined with my research, an intuitive, and deeply intimate process with glowing moments of movement and insight materialised. This resonated with my experiences of the therapeutic process, where, as both client and counsellor, I find myself intuitively drawn to following, and tending affectively, to flickering resonances. In this adventure, I invite you to accompany me as I attempt to follow and affectively tend to glowing moments of movement and insight who I come to name and understand as ‘glow worms’ - living sparks of light and flight.

~.~.

If you haven’t already done so, perhaps now is the time to - open the box - the glow worm home.

You don’t need to proceed in a particular way, except, perhaps with open curiosity and a gentle heart.
Perhaps, for now, you only take a quick peek inside. Perhaps you rummage around, taking each object out, greeting them one by one. Perhaps you turn the box over, letting the contents spill out before you. Some objects are fragile, others fierce, some might roll away and avoid your gaze while others will be eager to share.

I wonder who greets you first.

The objects you see here are a collection of some of the glow worms I found as I attempted to follow the living glow of trauma stories. That’s a slightly misleading statement, as glow worms are multifaceted beings and therefore more than only an object, just as the stories written in these pages are more than only words. That being said, these objects, are important. They matter. They are, as Donna Haraway (2016) writes: matter that matters. With them, I travelled across time and space, and found unexpected story-fronds.

Now, it’s your turn to travel with them; what stories might they produce with you?

\~\~

My finding, and eventual following of glow worms resitutes the point of departure for this adventure; rather than defining and responding to an established question, my research came to adopt a continuous, emerging questioning. In following glow worms, questions and insights continually emerge: Where do glow worms take us? What emerges over time as we follow them? How does following glow worms produce fragments of trauma stories? What happens when all the lights go out?

The inquiry thus became an adventure that made space for attuning, tending, and responding to what emerges within the process of an inquiry, reflecting what can happen in counselling when we hold space for what emerges within the process of therapy. The ‘ing’s are important here; they illuminate the inherent movement of the process; the continuous folding and unfolding nature of a creative-relational inquiry.

Creative-relational inquiry, like the sea’s waves, and the shimmering nature of affect, centres around movement, Jonathan Wyatt first introduced me to creative-relational inquiry, he says it’s: “inquiry that seeks not to ‘capture’ and hold still, but to find a way, through desire, to do justice to the fluidity of process” (2019, 45).
Jonathan is a trusted presence. His writing, thinking, relating, ripples through so much of this thesis. He’s been in the background and on the periphery of this journey since he first interviewed me for the programme in March 2018, and, since then, there have been moments where he’s (both as author, and human) been invited in, sought out, and avoided, even shut out. His openness to movement within both his writing, and our entangled relating, carried my understanding of creative-relational inquiry further; encouraging me to wonder (and wander) with the creative-relational potentialities of glow worms and trauma stories, trusting that “something might happen. Something might be possible.” (Wyatt 2019, 21)...

Relating and wondering, curiously with glow worms means this inquiry honours a generative dynamic process (Wyatt 2019) where my lived experiences and relational encounters become grist for the research mill. This is similar to the process of therapy where a client’s lived experiences and relational encounters become grist for the therapeutic process. As this adventure unfurls, I become both client and practitioner, researcher and participant, and so, rather than practice informing research or research informing practice (Bondi and Fewell 2016, McLeod 2001), this body-of-work emerges in a space-between, becoming both practice and research, personal therapy, and professional doctorate. This produces further questions: How might following glow worms echo and relate with the therapeutic process? How might following glow worms echo and relate with the process of attempting to tell and relate with difficult life experiences and stories? What ethical dilemmas are encountered in a process of attempting to follow glow worms, and what echoes does this hold for research and practice?

So, where to from here?

If you’re seeking orientation, you may be drawn to A Map or A Light, both of which are offered up, like this invitation, as glowing gestures.

Throughout this thesis, I refer to some authors by their first names because these people, in my reading of their work (and sometimes, in my real-life-relating with them), have become confidantes, allies, inspirational pals who take this research further. Using their first names is an extension of my relational, experience-near approach and acknowledges the personal and productive impacts these people have had on this work.
A Map emerged as a playful, creative gesture to make some sense of where I was and where I’d been. Some of the materials you find in a glow worm home correlate to a particular ‘chapter’, and A Map shows this correlation. If a particular glow worm tugs as your attention, why not start there? Follow its living glow.

A Light emerged as a gesture of companionship and insight. It’s intended to support you in navigating the wilderness of this thesis by offering a place where glow worms are theoretically formed. It may be somewhere you’re tugged towards, or you may choose to turn away from its artificial light and instead follow the flickering luminescence of glowing fragments.

This invitation, its materiality as letter and its function as a potential meeting place, emerged as a gesture of remembrance and love. Letters, from my Grandpa, Derek Brightman, were affective, glowing, producers in this adventure and became a meeting place between us; holding my hand and steadying my heart. I hope this invitation offers a similar sustenance to you.

Perhaps you, like me, and Jane Speedy (2008), are drawn to personal stories: to the evocative, affective, power intimate accounts of lived experience hold. If this sounds like you, you might like to follow the luminescence of Glowing Fragments, and return, later, to maps and lights. These fragments attend to the sensations, affects, memories, movements, and matterings which emerged as I grappled with finding and attempting to follow the elusive lure of trauma stories – the lights of which became known as glow worms. They are stories that could have been left silenced and forgotten, unseen and untended to had I chosen to adopt a different approach and turned away from the strange flickering glows.

If you like to skip ahead to the final pages of a story and get a clearer sense of where we end up, or, perhaps more apt in this context, where we depart from as this particular adventure comes to a close, (On)Glowing Wonder(ings) may pull you in. Relating-with waves and shorelines on Kabi kabi and Jinibara Land, I playfully return to, remember, and relate-with glow worms to offer up a reflexive sense of where we’ve been, and where we might be going as glow worms expand beyond the endings of this thesis.

...
Maybe you’ve already abandoned this invitation, choosing instead to follow what tugged at your attention. Good for you! Whatever route you find with and through the wilderness of this thesis, I hope you will allow yourself to wonder with what glows and shimmers for you...

And so, dearest reader, I will leave you for now, with the words of my darling Grandpa which are my anchor when I feel lost without a map, or a light:

“leave the harbour with a brave heart and high expectations. For no matter how hard the winds blow, or how dark the night, you will come to a place we both know – “a far distant land” – and there, we shall meet again”.

Gael x
As this inquiry slowly emerged as a creative-relational adventure with glow worms, there were moments where I had no clear map, or light, to orient me. This sometimes left me feeling lost, uncertain of where I was, or where I was going. Like Alice in Wonderland seeking advice from the Cheshire Cat, I’d long to find a creature who might tell me: “which way I ought to go from here?” (Carroll 1946, 66) although, given I, like Alice, wasn’t sure where I wanted to end up, it is unsurprising that rather than finding a clear, pre-determined map, I – with glow worms – created maps in a variety of forms (highlighting, photo-taking, object-collecting, mind-mapping, journal writing, post-it-scribbling, the list goes on). I would later come to understand, through reading and walking with Powell (2016), that these multi-modal maps helped me make some sense of what was happening at an affective level as the adventure unfurled.

If you enjoy wandering, getting lost, and finding your own way through an unfurling adventure, then I invite you to feel you way through the neighbourhood of this thesis by following what draws you in and tugs at your awareness. You may find you create your own map(s) as the affects and concepts that flicker within this thesis continue to produce with, though, and beyond you in unpredictable, generative ways (Springgay and Truman 2016).

The map I offer here is a playful re-imagining of a Contents Map, while the following Glow Worm Guide is the light I didn’t have (immediate) access to, but which gradually emerged in the final-year of writing. Both the ‘map’ and the ‘light’ are creative-relational gestures of movement for you to engage with as you wish; they may help to give you a sense of where you are, where you might be going, or how the adventure — and the meanings and movements within it — emerged for me, as well as where those emergences moved me, because, as both Manning (2014), and Springgay and Truman (2016) contend; it is not about noticing and representing the emergence, but allowing the emergence to propel us somewhere, towards something...

...where might they propel you?
Figure 2 Glow Worm Map
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This story is about glow worms. That’s a bit of a complicated statement because all stories in this thesis are, in some form or another, about glow worms, so let me try again. This story is about how I conceptualise and inquire alongside glow worms. This story attempts to put theory and form to glow worms, offering an articulation into their relationally-entangled emergence, the fragmented stories their emergences co-produce, and the intricate subjectivities, ethics, and onto-epistemologies they evoke. This ‘Glow Worm Guide’ settled into storied existence much later than it appears here and, like me, you may choose to read it after journeying with Glowing Fragments. I offer it as a gesture of companionship and insight; a light which I sometimes longed for whilst navigating the elusive wilderness of wonder(ing) with glow worms.
You’re invited to join me as I follow glow worms; phosphorescence; living sparks of light and flight. These living sparks call out to me – like a lighthouse’s rotating bulb does to the seafarer; tugging at my awareness, alerting me, like the blue lights of an emergency vehicle, to something. Glow worms invite me, and now you too, to follow them somewhere.

“I feel them in [my] gut, or the quickening [of my] heartbeat…”⁵ (MacLure 2013, 229) and I have come to understand them with Maggie MacLure as the “wonder of data…[something that is]…pre-eminently material” (2013, 229) given that it exists in our bodies as well as our minds and - as I go on to suggest - is interwoven with the worlds around and within us. I also understand them, with Kathleen Stewart as Ordinary Affects – that is “the forces that come into view as habit or shock, resonance or impact” (2007, 1). Whether they trigger or glimmer, falter or take further form, I’ve learnt that “we feel [their] pull” (Stewart 2007, 29), and that following these pulls, or allowing these pulls to “drive us toward movement” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1) leads somewhere.

The tug to tell this story came to me during a fretful January night in the mist of a tumultuous few weeks where this thesis, and a significant relationship born within it, felt precariously balanced between life and death. I can’t be certain whether this story emerged while I was awake, asleep, or somewhere in-between, but by then, I had grown accustomed

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⁵ Throughout this thesis, any words in a direct quote that are in square brackets “[ ]” are my own additions or minor amendments to the quote as it reads in the original text.
to glow worms emerging in what Winnicott (1953) describes as transitional spaces – the spaces between internal and external realities - between waking and dreaming, imagination and reality.

MacLure helped me to see how this liminality, this experience of being “suspended in a threshold between knowing and unknowing […] prevents wonder from being wholly contained or recuperated as knowledge […] and affords an opening onto the new” (2013, 228). Together with Stewart (2007), these women invited me to be curious and speculate with these openings, to follow wonder as something felt, rather than known…

This is echoed, too, by my understanding of Eugene Gendlin’s ‘felt sense’ (1981) which he came to through his earlier explorations with the felt experience; that is his interest in how “meaning is not only about things and it is not only a certain logical structure, but it also involves felt experiencing” (1962, reprinted 1997, 1, italics in original). Gendlin conceptualises the felt sense as “a special kind of internal bodily awareness...a body-sense of meaning” (1981, 10). He sees it as being “less intense than ordinary feelings” (1984, 77) and by this he is emphasising its elusiveness, and subtlety. Gendlin advocates for sitting with this “murky edge” of uncertainty (2006) so that the felt-sense may unfold further, taking us somewhere.

In the witching hours between the end of a Thursday and start of a Friday an opening of flickering, persistent and multicoloured lights emerged – appearing and disappearing - producing new patterns and colours. Sitting with these strange flickers, somewhere between sleeping and waking, the flashing colours sporadically grouped themselves together into a pattern:

Later, as the gentle light of a winter’s morning accompanied me and the everyday rituals of my morning routine, that phrase; that faint glow of wonder re-emerged; trickling into my awareness as I watched
multicoloured trails of shampoo bubbles wend their way into the shower's drain: *glow worm guide*.

Sitting at my desk, a fresh cup of coffee beside me, damp hair twisted into a tight bun at the back of my head, I roll the phrase around my body: whispering it aloud, letting my tongue try it on before turning to my notebook and watching my pen produce a concrete curvature to the lights that had pestered me in the night.

My tongue and pencil began speaking and writing this *glow worm guide* into matter and materiality – or as Barad (2003) points out: into matter and materiality that has come to *matter* in this context of writing a doctoral thesis where language is considered “more trustworthy” (2003, 801).

Following the flickering lights of glow worms, I have found matter, materiality, sensations, and stories emerge. This process of articulating meaning from glow worm encounters translates the ’raw’ data (of, for example, flashing lights) into ’storied’ data (like this emerging story-guide).

There is a complicated, liminal process between the entangled relational experience of encountering a glow worm, and the *agential cut* (Barad 2007) that’s made in the articulation of the glow worm into storied, performative writing. *Glowing Fragments* offers insight into this process and tends to the tensions of finding and producing story fragments, through and with glow worms, as they unexpectedly emerge.

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Baird (2020) - in her quest for awe, wonder, and purpose in the form of phosphorescence - writes: “there are few things as startling as encountering an unearthly glow in the wild” (1). This goes some way toward articulating how startling my encounters with glow worms can be: they emerge unexpectedly and disruptively, usually when I am not seeking them, and sometimes, frustratingly, when I am seeking something else.

The unpredictable nature of glow worm emergence means they usually catch me by surprise. Jonathan (2019) notices how surprise can be “found in the space in-between”; as an “affect that picks us up and places us somewhere else” (59, 60). This resonates: my glow worms often emerge in
in-between spaces, they – similar to affect - arise not as Seigworth and Gregg write “in the midst” but in the mist of “in-between-ness” (2010, 1); in the rippling, dusty, spaces between bodies “(human, nonhuman, part-body and otherwise)” (2010, 1). Their arrival, like the flashing lights last night, surprises me, grabs at my attention, takes me and this research, somewhere else; producing new potentialities, new worlds (Stewart 2010).

These flashing lights and my movements with them, prompt me to expand MacLure’s (2010) suggestion that experiences of wonder reside within collected data. MacLure, in exploring qualitative research data, notices how, during analysis, “some detail – a fieldnote fragment or video image – starts to glimmer, gathering our attention” (2010, 282). These glimmers of wonder were shimmering within and around me before I’d completed any intentional ‘data collection’. Glow worms then, aren’t data waiting “out there” for me to find with a specific methodology, but instead they emerge through and with the relational entanglements of this adventure, producing unexpected fragments of trauma stories.

St Pierre, thinking differently about research data and methodology troubles the “linear nature of the narrative of knowledge production” (1997, 179) and asks what might happen if we disrupt this linear process by entering research “in the middle” of the process, by holding space for “transgressive data” (180) – that is the emotions, dreams and sensual elements of inquiry that usually go ignored. I understand my following of glow worms as a privileging of this kind of data; that is affects, sensations, and flickers of relational shifts and stirs. In this way, glow worms can be understood as emergent transgressive data; their unexpected presence not only transports me, and the trauma stories I am seeking, somewhere different, but it also fundamentally shifts the research approach, away from something structured and linear, towards what glimmers and glows with and around us as we are inquiring.

This approach aligns the process of research within counselling and psychotherapy more closely with the process of therapy, which is widely recognised as non-linear and emergent, and thus responds to Donnel
Stern’s (2013) calls for the emergent-relational-process of psychotherapy to be represented in our research.

Glow worms take this further. Like Stewart’s Ordinary Affects (2007), glow worms are not relegated to the world of research and inquiry, but flicker away in our everyday lives and relational encounters. Tending to these everyday extraordinary glows within psychotherapeutic practice also expands the process of therapy. Just as emotions, dreams, and sensual data can be disregarded in research approaches, particularly when an explicit research question and methodology has been established (St.Pierre 1997), I have experienced a similar disregard of ‘transgressive data’ (for want of a better word) in the therapeutic process – both as client, and therapist. While training may tell us to listen out and attune to the unspoken (Stern 1985), that which is on the edge-of-awareness (Gendlin 1984), the flight to capture and make sense of such elusive glimmers within therapy, is, in my experience, fast.

Behind this flight toward cognition and sense-making, is the increasing emphasis in modern society on quick-fixes, knowledge acquisition, and ensuring certainty. These values are also becoming increasingly influential within the world of counselling through an increased surveillance of professional standards (Totton 2011c) and 24/7 access to therapy through technological advancements including artificial intelligence (Zeavin 2021).

Glow worms are a refusal of this – their unexpected emergence if we pause, and dare, to notice and follow them, may disrupt the structure of an expected process, and expand the space; taking both client and counsellor, researcher, and data, somewhere new. As Jonathan (Wyatt 2019) explores in his creative-relational inquiry into therapy, stand-up, and writing, these ‘refrains’ in therapy – these incomplete, repeating, rhythmic productions “bear the potential for new constellations” (91); for new territories, stories, worlds and potentialities to be explored.

My conceptualisation of glow worms is an expansion of MacLure’s (2010, 2013) work as I’m curious about what’s glowing before we even begin
collecting data. Acknowledging the presence of glow worms in the
everyday shifts the point of departure in counselling research and practice,
away from overarching research questions and presenting issues, towards
what is tugging, relationally, at the attention of researcher, client,
counsellor, participant. This emphasis on relational tugs builds on
MacLure’s understanding of wonder being relational (2013, 229), she says:

“Wonder is relational. It is not clear where it originates
and to whom it belongs. It seems to be “out there,”
emanating from a particular object, image, or fragment
of text; but it is also “in” the person that is affected. A
passion: the capacity to affect and to be affected.”

I understand glow worms to be produced through – and also producing -
relational entanglements from within and between my body and other
bodies and their folding’s and unfolding’s with and beyond one another
(Manning 2009). What I mean by this is that glow worms, and all that
accompanies them are formed in, and through ongoing relational
entanglements.

This emergent-relational nature of glow worms means I (no longer) believe
glow worms are ‘out there’ waiting for me to find, but rather the creative
potentiality of a glow worm flutters into being through their momentary
glimmers and does not come to exist, that is, does not come to co-exist
(Murray 2020), without a relational tending to them which nurtures a
space for them to land.
As the day trundles on, sweeping me and my writing along with it ‘glow worm guide’ percolates, gathering form and function. It becomes, momentarily, a leaflet to support a glow worm exhibition. Scratch that; not an exhibition, a glow worm gallery; no, not that either. Perhaps a ‘glow worm game’ or ‘garden’...something through which glow worms can be shared in a way which gives them more space beyond these type-strokes.

I/we (the ‘glow worm guide’, the something ⁶and me) lose our way with writing; we can’t articulate the larger whole in language, at least not now, not yet. We only sense ‘glow worm guide’ will be a part of a larger whole.

That’s the thing about writing with wonder, “it is not a matter of simply writing the example down” (MacLure 2010, 282), because, even if writing might bring us closer to the affective experience, wonder is beyond what can be written. Attempting to write it though, isn’t a futile act, writing entangles with the affective residue of wonder to produce new shapes and possibilities. For example, putting structure and materiality to ‘glow worm guide’ through the act of writing this story changes ‘glow worm guide’ from those flashing, abstract, multicoloured lights in the night. Writing with glow worms in this way – takes them, and me, and you - us together – to new places and insights, in a process of continual becoming (Jackson and Mazzei 2011).

⁶ The something eventually emerges as the glow worm home you received in Greetings.
Laurel Richardson (2001) says we are already researching when we start writing, because writing is a process of gathering data; a way of producing knowledge that “document[s] becoming” (Richardson and St.Pierre 2005, 826). Following Laurel’s footsteps, I see my writing with glow worms becomes the tool I use to document the becoming of this research process.

This emphasis on becoming hints at a post-qualitative approach where, rather than outlining explicit ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and ethics I adopt a Karen Barad inspired “ethico-onto-epistemology” (2007, 409) which recognises the interrelatedness of ethics, knowing, and being, where the relational entanglements between ourselves, with other humans, and with more-than-human objects and matter mean we cannot step outside of ourselves or the worlds we are intertwined with and producing, and adopt an observational, separate, and autonomously-bounded position. Instead, our ways of producing knowledge, and relating with the world are interwoven in complex, folding, and unfolding ways (Barad 2007, Manning 2009, Haraway 2016).

Holding space for the shifting interconnectedness between ontology, epistemology and methodology means this body-of-work continually moves in entangled, creative-relational ways. Like the life of a glow worm in the wild, this inquiry has an energy to it which produces and reproduces itself, this energy is (part) of what transforms the flashing multicoloured lights from last night, into the shape of this ‘glow worm guide’, and beyond, in a continual, interwoven, process of becoming.

Latour (1993) believes the separation of nature and the lived experience of humans, culture, and society was never possible. He troubles what he sees to be the constructed dichotomy between, on the one hand, objectified, inert, scientific matter and the subjective meaningful discourses, and experiences of humans on the other. This separation is, Latour argues,
what Enlightenment and modern society was built on, but these binary separations are illusions for reworking.

Post-qualitative inquiry, and new-materialist approaches in particular, trouble this binary between the natural and social sciences by disturbing one of the ontological assumptions both sides are predicated upon – “that the agency in inquiry processes lies entirely within human minds” and “the foci of our inquiries [are thus] ontologically passive” (Rosiek and Snyder 2020, 1152). New materialists and post humanists (Barad 2007, 2003, Bennett 2010, Alaimo and Hekman 2008, Braidotti 2013) suggest, instead, that the foci of our inquiry are agentic – they act and are ontologically active. This fits with glow worms - who don’t passively wait for me to represent, translate, or make sense of them but respond to and *intra-act* (Barad 2007) with me, and the inquiry, as it continually emerges.

According to Barad, entanglement is not the joining of separate entities because that pre-supposes a self-contained way of being in the world, instead, individuals “emerge through their intra-action” (2007, 33). Barad says these indivisible entanglements means concepts and matter continuously intra-relate with and co-produce one another. This conceptualisation of entanglement splinters the separations between nature and humans explored with Latour above and emphasises how the world and matter around us doesn’t passively wait for our interactions but rather actively generates, responds and intra-acts with us. It ‘meets us halfway’ (Barad 2007).

This also echoes Haraway’s understanding of the entanglements between the human and more-than-human. In her book *Staying with the Trouble* she acknowledges how species of all kinds are entangled in a process of becoming-with: “we become-with each other or not at all” (2016, 4), in a process of what Haraway coins “sympoiesis (making-with)”(2016, 58).

Together, these conceptualisations of entanglement and intra-action reflect how we (and the meanings we make) are produced through our relational becomings-with.

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Insecurity swells as I write with this ethico-onto-epistemology of relational becomings-with. As much as parts of me are taken with this interwoven way of understanding the world, other parts feel uncertain, and anxious. They aren’t opposed to this position, but they are struggling to trust in it.

These parts of me struggle to trust. They struggle to find a place to land and an ontology to settle with, especially, a continually emerging one. Ontological security can be understood as a sense of trust in the reliability and coherence of one’s everyday world (Giddens 1990). In research, this translates as a trust in the reliability and coherence of one’s ontological assumptions and position. Bondi (2014) recognises how our sense of ontological security can be lost when the world we know and trusted in, is shaken, like with trauma.

This echoes the experiences of Sophie Tamas (2010) and Susan Brison (2002) who, writing their own trauma stories, both recognise how these traumatic experiences radically altered their ways of being and believing in the world, and themselves. I acknowledge that these insecure parts of me carry trauma hauntings (my own, and those silently handed-down from my family). These hauntings have produced, for me, “a total epistemic crisis” (Tamas and Wyatt 2013, 13), arguably a total ethico-onto-epistemological crises where I struggle to trust in anything; where I sceptically question any philosophical ground I appear to find.

It turns to dust in my hands.

Sitting with these dusty ruins reminds me of St Pierre and Pillow (2000) who work the ruins of qualitative inquiry. Increasingly disenchanted with the concepts and categories of “conventional humanist qualitative methodology” (St.Pierre 2021, 63). St Pierre and Pillow deconstruct the ruins of these concepts and approaches, and turn towards post-qualitative inquiry which, rather than beginning with “doing”, rejects methodology and advocates for a poststructuralist ontology of immanence (St.Pierre and Pillow 2000).

I welcome what working the ruins invites; a recognition of the underlying insecurity in concepts we take for granted; even in qualitative research,
including experience and subjectivity, but I struggle with St Pierre’s (2021) emphasis on reading poststructuralism and beginning with a philosophical exploration of concepts. It seems counter-intuitive to me, as if post-qualitative inquiry still has a method, a place of beginning – being that of reading and deconstruction.

I return to MacLure (2011), who questions why it is so difficult to work the ruins, why – even when we recognise there is a disintegration of secure understandings of language and reality, certainty, and coherence – we struggle to “escape interpretive mastery and narrative coherence” (998). MacLure recognises that while we may have “theorized decentred selves, partial knowledge, and layered accounts”, we still end up “digging up themes or stacking up categories” (998) in an attempt to work the ruins into something resembling knowledge. It seems in working the ruins, we are still continuing conveyor belts of knowledge production in an attempt to rebuild the ruins into something new, less ruinous.

There are parallels with this and traditional trauma recovery narratives where survivors are invited to work the ruins of themselves and their understandings of the world, to build something new, to ‘recover’, ‘rebuild’ and ‘remake’ the Self (Herman 1997, Brison 2002).

Rather than working the ruins of my trauma narrative, my self (and selves), and my ethico-onto-epistemological positioning into something else, something more than ruins, I am inclined to remain with them. Instead of fleeing the sometimes disconcerting, paradoxical and conflictual sensations these ruins evoke, I hope to treat them, as MacLure says, “as possible openings onto wonder” (2011, 1004 - italics in original) and allow myself “to be lured by curiosity, surprise, and wonder” (Barad 2012, 206). Working with the ruins opens this body-of-work to the interwoven potentialities of wonder, breakdown and insecurity.

Bondi, in her 2014 paper, explores how ordinary everyday experiences can also shift our trust in our ontological assumptions. In doing so she lets a little light into my ruins by helping me to consider the possibility that the
dust in my researching hands may not only be trauma’s doing but could also be reflective of a collective insecurity in the world. Bondi presents “ontological security and ontological insecurity as a continuum along which we all necessarily move, sometimes with great speed” (334). I welcome this continuum, it offers a spaciousness for my fluctuating positions, helping me move with glow worms as they emerge.

Refusing to settle with one coherent, articulated position but instead adopting a fluctuating continuum contributes to an ongoing sense of movement which emerges from my attempting to follow glow worms, as they, and me, “we, all, continue to become something other than we were” (Wyatt 2019, 47). This, I believe, positions this body-of-work as a creative-relational inquiry - a dynamic, generative process (Wyatt 2019) of moving and playing with possibilities as they emerge.

By tending, affectively, to what glows, and reflectively to what gets produced by those glows, my ethico-onto-epistemological position becomes a constantly emerging process: a creative-relational inquiry of following and unfolding with glow worms as they sway, shift, flicker, and fade. Although, ‘inquiry’ feels too formal, implies a sense of having to discover something, of inquiring into something, echoing the implication of working the ruins into something resembling knowledge rather than working with the ruins.

I shift towards a creative-relational wonder(ing) rather than inquiry; wonder(ing) recognises both the affective capacity of wonder glow worms produce, and the movements and matterings my uncertain wandering, and wondering with them produces.
Returning to the glow-worm-in-hand, uncertain parts of me have scribbled down a series of questions for ‘glow worm guide’ to answer: What about trauma stories? What do you believe about writing trauma stories? What do glow worms have to do with these trauma stories?

These questions are important, they invite exploration from which this story travels further, gathers movement and momentum. But, as I’ve grappled with the writing of this guide, I’ve found I don’t have simple answers to these questions. Scratch that. I’m not even sure I have answers, let alone simple ones.

What I do have are stories – often only fragments of incomplete, messy stories – but, as Jane Speedy (2008) reminds me, these stories have meaning, and offer the potentiality of a ‘lit-up’ moment. Jane Speedy, glass of Chianti in hand, Lighthousekeeping by Jeanette Winterson tucked under her elbow, offers camaraderie throughout this adventure.

We share a long-held love of sweet biscuits and stories, particularly personal narratives. We are both curious about the way “in which people, including myself, tell and re-tell stories of their lives and, in so doing, shape the lives that they live” (Speedy 2008, xv). Jane has encouraged me to let this passion for stories be the beating heart of this body-of-work; even in their messy in-between-ness – between reality and imagination, because in doing so layered meanings emerge (2008, 2013). These meanings, Jane tells me, are impactful both personally and in relation to psychotherapy where clients explore and rework their life stories (Speedy 2008).

Inspired by Sophie Tamas (2010) and Susan Brison (2002) who bear witness to themselves in the aftermath of trauma, I initially approached my research as an evocative autoethnographic exploration with my own trauma story, in the hopes of gaining a deeper personal and social understanding (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011) of the relational traumas I experienced with my first boyfriend.
I was/am attracted to the way autoethnography disrupts and expands the usual shape of research within the academy and how it aligns with psychotherapy: “autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner 2000, 739). In a similar way, psychotherapy is a place of self-exploration which also connects the personal to the cultural; I explore, with clients, how their personal lived experiences and relationships intertwine and are influenced by multiple complex layers, including the cultural.

Despite feeling drawn to autoethnography, my relationship with it became complicated: as ‘I’ attempted to write, the ‘I’ of autoethnography quickly disintegrated in my writing hands: ‘I’ could never quite hold my ‘self’ together long enough to form a story. The ‘I’, I was writing from kept shifting and changing. The ‘I’ I was writing from drifted away, becoming different parts of me with different versions of a story as well as different ways of sharing their story.

Ron Pelias, and his book Methodology of the Heart (2004) brought some solace during this disintegration of the ‘I’, his words: “The heart learns that stories are the truths that won’t keep still. There is always another version, another eye to tell what it sees, another voice ready to speak.” (2004, 121) resonated and reassured my fluttering heart. Helping me to follow the multiple stories in their unexpected emergence.

As time went on, external others whom I was writing with, and about, disrupted the ‘I’ of my writing further, as did more-than-human others: seasons, pine-seeds, places, spaces, smudges, and thistles emerged, asking for their part in the process to be witnessed. The stories were no longer ‘mine’, no longer personal experiential accounts that had been waiting, lurking ‘out there’ to be compassionately retrieved and worked through. ‘I’ was no longer contained, autonomous and clearly bounded but porous, multiplicitous, and folding in, on, through and with a “fielding of associated milieus” (Manning 2009, 35). With Manning, I realised “there is no single identity, only a policing of the category” (2019a), and my understandings
of subjectivity and experience splintered into a kaleidoscope of intricate multiplicities which I explore further in the following section.

This splintering of the ‘I’, of the ‘Self’, didn’t only belong to an onto-epistemological shift, but was also intricately connected with stories of relational trauma which, as Sophie and Susan point out, are inherently fragmented because they attempt to put narrative sense to the disintegration of a Self we once knew, and trusted, to carry on (Brison 2002, Tamas 2009a). Sophie suggests a different approach: rather than seeking fixed meaning in our trauma stories, we let our story-receivers see the insensibilities and fragmentations that live within us (2012). This helped me to leave some of the stories in Glowing Fragments undone and not necessarily neatly wrapped up in neat explanations.

While I grapple with the “I” of my autoethnographic story-telling, Jane tells me “all writing is an embodied and imagined accumulation of selves and stories” and therefore collaborative (Speedy 2012, 355 - italics in original). Wyatt and Gale take this further still, presenting me with the term “assemblage/ethnography” (2016, 300) - that is autoethnography which is “bound up in changing, complex, multiple interconnections” (301) and which “not only talks about the spaces in between selves and others but also the spaces we are a part of and create” (305). Together, these extended imaginings of autoethnography spur me onwards. I spring for the term multi-ethnography to describe my research; ‘multi’ resonates more than ‘auto’, holding the door open for this research which has, since I first put pen to paper, always been more than one (Manning 2013), more than me, more than research on the ‘Self’.

The trauma stories I am attempting to write with then, whilst still broadly connected to stories I lived and experienced, morphed beyond clearly bounded autoethnographic accounts towards a moving, multiplicitous emergent wonder(ing) As Rosiek and Snyder posit: my research was becoming “ontologically generative” the story fragments that emerged were creating, not just representing reality (2020, 1152).
Rosiek and Snyder, understanding stories through an agential realism lens, see stories as emerging as relational agents within the process of inquiry through our entanglement (as narrative researchers) with them. They recognise that this understanding of stories is grounded in new materialist theory, but speaking to one of the tensions with new materialist and post human theory - they also point out that “the new materialists are not the first to work with the idea of nonhuman agency” (2020, 1153). The ontological recognition of stories as living, emergent, beings has – they explain - been a significant part of Indigenous theories of knowledge in ways that “predate the very idea of Europe” (2020, 1154).

I’ve felt this tension simmering under the surface of my theorising. The tension transports me – moving me back in time, and place, to Australia, to Tracey Bunda and Deborah Bird Rose whose teachings and insights into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to knowledge fundamentally shifted my understanding of the world. In 2011, as a twenty-year old exchange student from the UK, Bird Rose told me that Indigenous knowledge is sacred, and “country is the place of belonging. The people, the other living things, the water and soils, rains and winds, all bring each other into being, nurturing and impacting on each other” (Bird Rose 2002, 92).

Tracey Bunda invited me to walk with and listen to the trees, the water, the leaves, and the birds. She troubled my understanding of linear pathways of knowledge, showing me how Indigenous knowledge is predominantly oral and relational, created through entangled, constantly unfolding, storied relationships between Country, Ancestors, and the evolving body (Phillips and Bunda 2020). In a co-authored book titled Research Through, With and As Storying (Phillips and Bunda 2020) she writes: “stories are alive and in constant fluidity as we story them” (7) and reminds me “we are drawn into stories. We imagine we are there, and through that vicarious encounter are affected and wonder” (44-45).

Phillips and Bunda’s writing about being drawn into stories and their comments on affect and wonder captures my attention, reminding me of
glow worms. Perhaps my wondering with what I call glow worms, is a wondering with the living glow of trauma stories (Rosiek and Snyder 2020, Phillips and Bunda 2020) as they struggle and stutter into existence with and through my wonderings.

I notice my reticence of going further here...

As a white, British, westerner I’m unable to understand the intricacies and depth of Aboriginal and Indigenous knowledge or cultural tradition in the way they are intended. This is because they are not intended for me, and my exclusion from them is both rooted in my own colonial history and interwoven with Indigenous approaches to knowledge where ancestry and position within community is connected to knowledge sharing and acquisition (Bird Rose 2014). Aware of this positioning, I have felt reticent about misappropriating Indigenous knowledge and theory for my own academic gain, despite the resonances and reverberations I feel with it. In some ways, the white, western, new materialist and post-human approaches feel safer; easier for me to work with and kick up against. Perhaps this is why I turn more frequently to white authors like Erin Manning, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, and Maggie MacLure.

Sophie Tamas, grappling with the tensions of attempting, as a non-Indigenous settler-academic to develop adequate anti-colonial storytelling practices asks me: “but which colonial insult is greater, ethnocentric judgement, or intellectual disengagement?” (2019, 380).

I realise there is a balancing act to navigate here; between respecting Indigenous knowledge, claiming a comprehensive understanding of such knowledge, and whiting-out the presence of such knowledge through silence and disengagement. There are also traces of generational trauma and racism in the navigation of this balancing act where Indigenous stories and approaches to knowledge are left behind. There is already a significant gap in academic literature of ontologies, stories, papers written by Indigenous authors, and, those that do get published in academic journals, are referenced far less than white authors on similar topics - this body-of-work, with its white author repeats a similar pattern.
My discomfort in working with Indigenous knowledge is sad. My fear of getting it wrong, misappropriating, or taking up writing space is unfair to Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples and knowledge, and myself. With Karen’s (Serra Undurraga 2022) prompts and her concept of meta-reflexivity, I realise that despite my best intentions, my reserved way of relating with Indigenous scholarship (re)produces dynamics of silencing and segregation and overlooks my capacity for working sensitively and respectfully. Working response-ably with Indigenous scholarship requires, courage, discomfort, and ongoing reflexivity to consider, what is being produced in assemblage (Serra Undurraga 2022).

In attempting to navigate this balance, I don’t have “a clear set of solutions” but rather I hope to “evoke and share” (Tamas 2019, 376) the uncertainties and discomfort I encounter with Indigenous knowledge. I also want to acknowledge the new materialist approaches which emerged, perhaps more comfortably, are not the only way of conceptualising stories as agents; there are understandings and Indigenous story-telling practices which predate and expand beyond these western explorations. These understandings are both within and outside of academic scholarly writing because, like glow worms, they have an affective liveliness that reaches far beyond the white-washed walls of academia (Phillips and Bunda 2020, Marker 2008).

Like glow worms, the influence of Indigenous approaches to knowledge through stories, sensings, and connections to land, informs my wonder(ings) in ways that are felt; created through the spirited force of affect rather than always explicitly seen in concrete references and concepts. This feels more attuned to the spirit of Aboriginal knowledge, which I first encountered in and through my body’s reaching out towards
and connecting with the whispers of the land as I walked the banks of Maiwar on Turrbal/Jagera land.\footnote{‘Maiwar’, is the traditional word used to refer to what is also known as the Brisbane River. The University of Queensland is situated, on Turrbal/Jagera land.}

Navigating some of these tensions in their own work, Phillips and Bunda suggest that rather than asking how to bring stories to life, they say we should be asking: “How do you (re)create a living story [in writing]” (2020, 85). They, like Sophie (Tamas 2010) Spry (2011) and MacLure (2008) advocate for a poetic, performative endeavour, or, as they describe it: “a poiesus (making) with aesthesis (sensation that produces affect)” (Phillips and Bunda 2020, 85). Glowing Fragments offers an insight into this process of attempting to recreate a living story through poetic, performative fragments of affective sensings and sensations.

In my own wonder(ing) with the affective capacity of glow worms, I began to wonder if glow worms are the flickering residue, the living glow, these stories produce in their ongoing emergence as they are seeking and resisting being related-with, or, perhaps more apt, as Others seek and resist them. In this way, glow worms are separate from trauma stories, but within the wonder(ings) of this adventure, which is turned towards trauma stories, inherently connected with them.

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As I play with ‘glow worm guide’ and writing unfolds to tell you about kaleidoscopes of intricate multiplicities, a memory emerges...

I’m transported to a Sunday morning in February 2019 when, while walking in the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, I was tugged towards a tapestry exhibition. I remember walking through creaking rooms in Inverleith House, sun streaming in through windows, lighting up the fabrics hanging on the walls.

I remember following the intricate, multicoloured threads of each tapestry as they intertwined with other threads. Standing, sensing, with the milieu of threads before me, I was moved by their tasselled presence...

... and I began to catch hold of the moving co-presence of my multiple inner selves, intertwining and colliding, producing the complex tapestry of ‘me’.

I caught hold of a Narrative Self, called Writer – a creative and imaginative, part who loves stories and sweet treats. Writer, like Jerome Bruner (2004), believes we come to know the world, and understand ourselves (and sense of Self), through the stories and the self-narratives we continue to create. Writer is well-liked, but often over-worked. She tells stories “in order to
live” (Didion 1979, 11) and believes, like Holman Jones that “stories are our way into understanding – to theorizing, and thus to knowing and working to change – our culture and ourselves” (2016, 230).

I caught hold of an Embodied Self, who doesn’t have language but rather feels along with sensations and affective resonances. As Arthur Frank writes: “the body is not mute, but it is inarticulate; it does not use speech yet begets it” (2013, 27). Frank goes onto suggest that telling stories with, and about the body, forms a sense of the embodied self. This is something Osborne-Crawley echoes when she writes about how her body, in the aftermath of sexual assault was “trying to say something my mind could not” (2020, 75). Listening to the rhythms of my embodied self, expands the stories Writer creates; offering insight into multi-sensory realities.

Thinking of Edward Casey who acknowledges how “our lives are so place-oriented and place-saturated” (1993, ix) and how our body’s continually take us “into place” (1993, 48), I catch hold of a Geographical Self. That is a Self who is co-created through its encounter with place, through my body reaching out and folding in with place and place reaching out and folding in with my body (Larsen and Johnson 2016, Manning 2009, Page 2020). This understanding moves me beyond the essentialist, separate conditions of “place” and “self” towards an understanding of what Larsen and Johnson (2016) describe as place-self-becoming. These understandings are rooted in Indigenous traditions of interrelatedness with place, and the more-than-human ontologies of the pluriverse (Larsen and Johnson 2016).

As I recognised in the previous section, the emergence of these internal parts is a troubling of the “auto”, and the “I” (Jackson and Mazzei 2008), a demonstration of the self as a tapestry of multiplicity.

Remembering the exhibition tapestries, the evocative arrival of different parts including those above, as well as Critic, and Trust (socially-situated and discursive selves), Little Girl, Twinkle, Survivor (child-like, wonderous, playful, and traumatised selves), as well as many others, I realise that while I might momentarily catch hold of these parts, they are fleeting and always
on the move – entangling, with other parts and presences beyond my skin, continually becoming-with in entangled, relational, always-more ways (Barad 2007, Manning 2013, Manning 2009). My memory of the tapestries collides with this thesis which I recognise is co-authored by multiple parts of me, as well as multiple human Others beyond me (like Grandpa), as well as multiple more-than-human Others (like glow worms). What emerges is a kaleidoscope of intricate, intra-relating multiplicities.

This makes me think of Susan Fairfield (2001) who points out how the modernist understandings of subjectivity - as something singular and unified - underpin traditional psychotherapy, with its focus on helping client’s to access a coherent, integrated, and authentic sense of self. This makes it challenging for us, as psychotherapists, to hold space for different kinds of difference, and multiple subjectivities, particularly when they’re paradoxical and in conflict. Fairfield says, “pluralism is as close as we can comfortably get right now to a postmodern clinical practice” (2001, 236) but that multi-subjectivity is still an illusion because for postmodernists “any description we give of subjectivity is no more and no less a story than any other” (2001, 226) because a postmodern view of subjectivity is that it’s always being produced, and thus impossible to pin down. She advocates for holding space for the tensions and uncertainty that arise between our modernist and postmodernist hopes and their paradoxical implications in practice. This helps me remain open (in practice, and research) to an evolving pluralism which respects different conceptualisations of, and relationships with, subjectivity. The Glowing Fragments in this body-of-work hold space for the paradoxical tensions between different parts and their different paradigms, subjectivities, and stories, which are also, always on the move.

This holding of space for multiple stories and entangled subjectivities speaks to Robert Mizzi’s concept of multivocality which he uses to provide “space in autoethnography for the plural and sometimes contradictory narrative voices located within the researcher” (2010, 2 - italics in original) and, I believe, created within and beyond the researcher through relational
entanglements. Mizzi talks about the spaces multivocality can foster in narrative research by splintering the illusion of a singular or coherent narrative. He describes these spaces as both plural and fragmented (2010), which echoes, for me, Jane Speedy’s (2013) acknowledgement of the fragmented writing spaces which emerge as we attempt to tell multi-ethnographic stories.

My trusted sort-of-colleague-maybe-friend Karen Serra Undurraga (2020) invites me to expand these relations and understandings of subjectivity further; she asks me to think about what these different subjectivities are producing, where their fragmented emergence and sometimes paradoxical collisions take me, and my research. I like what she says about reflexivity, how “we” turn upon ourselves, we relate to ourselves – not from a sovereign place - continuously producing this very self” (2020, 923). This takes the Glowing Fragments further – they are more than multi-voiced stories bearing witness to inconsistencies and incoherence, they are multi-voiced stories who, in attempting to be reflexive about stories, carry on producing stories and selves in complex, multiplicitous ways.

Reading another paper (Serra Undurraga 2022), I breathe a sigh of relief when Karen acknowledges: “I cannot rely on my intentions to be posthumanist. I cannot simply assert my identity as, say, relational and performative, and then expect that all my conceptualisations and practices will adhere to that identity” (3) - this is generative for me. It expands the space available to paradox in the process of this adventure; where my hopeful posthuman positioning as becoming-with the more-than within and around me, is inevitably tripped up and turned away from, especially when uncertainty, fear, and critique rear their formidable heads. I’m not sure this body-of-work goes so far as to fully practice Karen’s concept of performative meta-reflexivity (2022) but I can see how different assemblages come together and attempt to reflexively relate to my selves, the world, glow worms, and trauma stories in unexpected ways.
Experiencing and opening myself to the multiple, unexpected, and ongoing emergence of glow worms presents different challenges and rewards. Inevitably different parts within me relate to and with these disruptions in their own unique and continually-shifting ways, which also contributes to the production of multiple layers of emergence and disruption: a complex, messy, entangled web of multiplicities, who collide and reproduce in ways that lack consistency and coherence.

Karen, thinking with Haraway’s concept of response-ability (Haraway 2016) encourages me to police my paradigmatic consistency less, and instead be open to and curious about my ways of relating which may betray my best intentions (Serra Undurraga 2022) with and beyond this research.

This encouragement returns me to my earlier acknowledgment, with Barad (2007) of the interrelatedness of ethics, knowing, and being: just like with tapestries and kaleidoscopes, ethics - that is our response-ability to be and cultivate imaginative, sensitive, and responsive ways of relating to those we are becoming-with (Haraway 2016) - are interwoven into the unfolding, relational process of this wonder(ing) with glow worms. Sometimes, this process produces unanticipated encounters including hospital visits and the death of a thistle in *Heart-Felt Interruptions* and woodland fires in *Scorched Earth*. That being said, it can also produce movement and transformation, including the way a haunted yellow smudge becomes a *Dandelion* and memory gaps become *Gold Dust*.

I struggle, here, to speak of ethics as something extracted from the stories and glow worms themselves. This again speaks to the interrelatedness of ethics, with ontology and epistemology, but, similar to how I relate with client’s in practice, I realise this struggle also comes from my acknowledgement that stories and glow worms have lives, spirits, vitalities of their own (Bennett 2010). They are living agents (Rosiek and Snyder 2020, Phillips and Bunda 2020) to whom I have response-abilities but cannot (given I am not omnipotent) guarantee their safety. I expand further on these ethical sensitivities within specific contexts in *Glowing Fragments* but here are some themes I tentatively hold:
Glow worms are wild and unpredictable:

Baird describes finding the glow of luminous beings ‘in the wild’ (2020, 1), and, as much as I have offered up theory in this story-guide in an attempt to ground them as concept, glow worms are beautifully wild and evade capture, particularly within academic disciplines. They emerge in wild spaces and places and in unpredictable ways.

So, let them take you by surprise and move you somewhere, even, and perhaps especially if that somewhere is an unexpected wilderness.

Glow worms are not always pleasant:

Despite their representation in popular culture as twinkling bioluminescence, glow worms are not always delightful. They often startle and shake, pursue and pester. Their wonderous, affective, emergence can conjure “cerebral disappointment” and a sense of failure (MacLure 2013, 229), as MacLure explains:

“Wonder is not necessarily a safe, comforting, or uncomplicatedly positive affect. It shades into curiosity, horror, fascination, disgust, and monstrosity. And the particular hue or tenor that it will assume is never entirely within our control.” (MacLure 2013, 229)

In the wild, during larvae stage, some glow worms switch on their lights to lure in and devour prey (Tyler 1994); a predatory act of survival. In this adventure, as in practice with clients, their lights sometimes lure us into dark uncanny spaces, where trauma and pain, terror and loss lurk in the shadows. The intense horrors they hold, and produce, can leave those who come into relationship with them feeling as if glow worms are “too much”, and they need to take cover by seeking critical distance from the affective intensity of their disconcerting glows. Sometimes I, too, have had to turn away from the intensity of the glow, from the moments where their lights led to stories and sensations I wasn’t yet ready to receive. I’ve been scared some stories might burn my retinas or set fire(s) to the worlds I know.

So, turn away and rest when you need to. Press pause, find shelter, tend to the building of your own glow worm home.
Sometimes all their lights go out

There may be moments when all the lights and lures have been snuffed out and it feels as though they will never return (see Stark Blank Page).

A warning here: when all the lights go out, be careful not to shine this (or any other) ‘light’ too brightly. Artificial lights can disrupt and disorient glow worms, prompting them to go into hiding. They cannot be pinned down through explicit theories, concrete ethical tick-boxes, artificial captures, and over-excited-seeking (however decent the intentions). They are best found, and followed, when their flickers and glimmers are trusted as enough to take you somewhere…

So, be patient (as best you can), sit in and with the darkness, notice what the stuck place brings.

A glimmer, a glow, a tug, a cut will eventually return (see Becoming Snowflake) in a different entanglement, in an unexpected way, with a different kind of invitation you might, eventually, feel propelled to follow.
Glowing Fragments

“Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet”

(Hopkins 1881)

Fragments: Inspired by Jane Speedy (2013), this section is a collection of stories, some of which I’ve purposefully left as the “disjointed fragments of writing that refused to write themselves into anything coherent” (27).

If Gestures is where I offer up materials to sustain you on this adventure, and Wonder(ings) is a reflexive space for relating-with glow worms as this adventure draws to a close, then Fragments is the adventure itself; the beating heart of this thesis, where the evocative process of wonder(ing) with the living glow of trauma stories is shared in ways that bare my complex spirit and soul (Pelias 2004).

These Fragments are emergent, unpredictable, and sometimes unbidden, just like the process of therapy (Stern 2013) and, just as therapy does not necessarily leave a client with something conceptually ‘known’, but perhaps something ‘felt’, finding a concrete sense of meaning with these fragments “is not guaranteed” (Manning 2006, 45). Instead, I invite you to attend to the sensations, movements, and matterings (Stewart 2007, Stewart 2011) which emerge for you as you read.
**Yellow Smudge**

*Do you see it?*

*The yellow smudge.*

*It seeps out sometimes; staining the atmospheres around me*

---

The yellow smudge holds violent yet elusive stories from my teenage years and my relationship with my first boyfriend. These stories seek, and resist being told and received. Like Sophie Tamas, my ‘trauma story’ feels like “show and tell and hide and go seek all at the same time” (Tamas and Wyatt 2013, 5). Each time I try to put words to these stories, the shards shatter, turning to dust in my hands.

The dust catches on the wind and is carried away…

rendering me story-less.

Yet still stained. **Yellow** pulls me in. The yolk-like smudge smearing my surrounding **atmospheres** (Stewart 2011); emanating from my body into the force-fields around me.

Glowing. Luring.

This reminds me of Kristeva’s concept of abjection (1982): my trauma story produces a sense of horror and becomes something unnameable; something I (and others) attempt to separate ourselves from with distinct borders. And yet... as Kristeva acknowledges, these manufactured borders are flimsy and paradoxical: the yellow smudge **lures** me back in, back toward the abject; re-entangling me with something I try to leave unremembered.

The luring, leering, yellow smudge pesters me to share a story I’m unable to tell.

Dominant narratives around trauma and recovery turn up this pestering volume. Trauma heavyweights like Judith Herman (1997), Babette Rothschild (2000), and Peter Levine (1997), put forward helpful arguments and approaches which describe trauma as a terribly distressing event with devastating effects. They go on to suggest recovery is possible; through re-establishing safety, re-connecting with the body, and re-telling the trauma story to a receptive, empathic, audience.
The emphasis on (re)telling trauma stories reverberates in my wider world: It bounces off the media-fuelled *Me-Too Movement* in 2017, which saw women around the world tell their personal stories of sexual assault (Nicholls 2021). It vibrates with the cacophony of stories I receive, as I work to establish a trauma-informed sexual misconduct support unit at the University of Queensland that same year, as the University attempts to respond to a *National Report on Sexual Assault*\(^8\). It oscillates with the demands of my counselling training in 2018, where I’m encouraged to offer up reflective stories relating to formative experiences within my own life. Like others before me have recognised (Brison 2002, Jervis 2015), it’s as if the bearing and baring of one’s trauma narrative, is a claiming of status, and selfhood.

These encounters leave me hopeful, they *pull* me in.

They also leave me feeling insecure, ashamed of my own silence. I resent the way words get stuck behind my own gritted teeth and clenched fists, refusing to be spoken, written.

I tell others I intend to produce research which ‘makes sense’ of trauma through the telling of my own trauma story. I say I’m approaching my inquiry through a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Ponterotto 2005) which acknowledges the subjective nature of trauma narratives and how these are influenced by each individual’s personal and cultural positioning. I say I’m intrigued by the complex process of telling, witnessing, and receiving, trauma stories. I claim this research will offer insight into these processes – which is valuable to counselling and psychotherapy practice, and the wider cultural context where gendered violence requires our urgent attention.

Behind these declarations I harbour an unspoken embryonic kernel of hope; that through the telling and witnessing of my own testimony, *I* might recover. I might be a *happier* person, a *better* therapist, an *empowered* survivor with a voice that doesn’t shudder into silence.

I come to this research project then, like a client might come to therapy: the yellow smudge with its story, is my presenting issue – the something that needs attending to – the thing I’m weary with, hurt by, resentful of; the thing I’m hoping to resolve, recover from, to - dare I write it - *cure*...

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\(^8\) The report, titled “*Change the Course*” was conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission at the request of Australia’s 39 universities to gain greater insight into sexual assault and misconduct at Australian universities.
Daffodils with Derek

It’s early-2019. My first spring in Edinburgh. A challenging, expansive time. I work with my first clients, grapple with flickers of desire, consider transferring into the doctorate programme.

Lost in thought, I walk the blustery Edinburgh meadows. It’s cold out. Grey, sludgy. A flicker of yellow catches my eye. Is that a daffodil? I think to myself excitedly. Walking closer I see its yellow petals wavering like a beacon on the hill, signalling the approaching spring. The daffodil’s arrival interrupts my thoughts, transporting me to Grandpa.

~

Born on the northern hemisphere’s shortest day of the year Grandpa begrudged the long dark nights of winter, so much so that every June 22nd (the day after the longest day of the year), he would solemnly declare winter was on its way. Conversely, he delighted in the first daffodil of spring - a sure sign of longer, warmer, days. He had a notebook dedicated to daffodils, where he would annually record the date, time, and location of his first daffodil sighting, a custom my aunt – his eldest daughter – continues now. I’ll call her later. I think to myself. See if my sighting makes it into the record book.

In the twilight years of his life the first daffodil of spring remained a cherished conversation topic: in 2012 I called him between lectures at the University of Nottingham to tell him about the daffodil I’d spotted that morning, only to discover he’d spotted one ten days earlier. He went on to contemplate the fragility of daffodils, and the fragility of life, and a sort-of-acknowledgement danced between us; a sorrowful recognition of the fragility of his life.

Fourteen months later, he took his final breath.

~

Today, I sit with this daffodil, remembering...

Years before I ever imagined myself becoming a researcher, Grandpa wrote me letters. These letters were rich and varied in content; reflective musings, offerings of love and support, details of his training
as a navy-lieutenant, and preparations for landing at Gold Beach on D-Day\(^9\) in World War Two. After his death, I discovered he’d also written a series of letters detailing his philosophical view of the world which he titled *Dice in the Sky*. Written in his distinctive scrawl, these letters, which remain even after his physical body has left my life, are precious. They have journeyed with me, to a life in Australia, and back again. They have folded themselves into my purse for important milestones and tucked themselves into my pocket on days I’ve needed a little extra courage. Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996), emphasise the importance of supporting the continuation of a relationship with a loved one after their death, and I realise, this daffodil, and Grandpa’s letters, continue our connection; he is here, writing and inquiring with me.

Today, I sit with this daffodil, wondering...

I wonder about trauma, and research, and Grandpa, and me. I wonder about the life-threatening violence we both experienced in our teens; his on a Gold Beach with a war, mine in a Yellow Room with a boy.

I wonder, with Judith Butler (2004) about life’s precarity, particularly in the face of violence, and with Stephen Frosh (2019), about what gets passed down between generations, relationally, emotionally, narratively.

I wonder whether Grandpa can journey with me and this research; whether we might find, tell, and witness his story, as well as my own.

I wonder about letters, and their role in this research. I wonder about writing letters to, and from, and with Grandpa as a route of inquiring with our respective trauma stories.

\[\sim\]

Later, at home, I re-read Grandpa’s letters. I notice how they capture the uncertain curiosity he also felt about his experience. He writes: “*Those of us who were nineteen years old on D-Day were never as young again. After this day, I began to ask questions.*” He goes on to write about how, as children,

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\(^9\) D-Day, or Operation Neptune as it was codenamed, took place on Tuesday 6 June 1944. The operation saw the Allied forces (including but not limited to the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Soviet Union, Poland, Norway, and China) come together to launch the largest sea, air and land invasion in history on the Normandy beaches in Northern France. France was, at the time, under Nazi-German occupation. D-Day is widely recognised as the catalyst for the liberation of France, and eventually the Allied victory in Europe.
we begin our lives with an “in-built sense of wonder”. He says, if we follow wonder with childish enthusiasm, even into difficult places and spaces, we find misty glimpses of something elusive.

I resonate with the misty glimpses. I feel drawn to following wonder and asking questions; as if curiosity brings something to life, breathes a liveliness into something that might otherwise feel set in stone. As if wonder, brings movement, possibility, creativity...

Playing with wonder reminds me of Maggie MacLure (2010, 2013), who writes about the affective experience of wonder producing both research and researcher in an entangled manner. This relational entanglement is conjured through the body as well as the mind and produces the research and researcher in ways that feel as if “I have chosen something that has chosen me” (2013, 229).

Perhaps Grandpa’s story, and letters are choosing me, as much as I am choosing them...

\[\ldots\]\[\ldots\]

This unexpected interlude opens me to the possibility that following the wavering beacon of the daffodil, and the glow of Grandpa’s letters, may not necessarily be about “meaning-making”, but about the affective experience of wonder the daffodil and letters create with me, and my inquiry. By this I mean my relating with the daffodil, and the letters, carried/s me somewhere; towards something. Creating pathways of possibility for me to wonder and wander with.\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\) I have italicised words in this paragraph in recognition of their connection with conceptual understandings (eg: creative.\(^{*}\), relational wonder(ing)) which came much later in this inquiry. Their flickering presence was here long before their conceptual articulation.
Finding Glow Worms

This writing fragment is tied to the land of Nobles Lane which lies on the outskirts of a little village called Bluntisham in the flat fenlands of Cambridgeshire, England. It is a place, we, the multiple parts of Gael, called our permanent address for almost two decades; from age 3 to 22.

This writing fragment begins with me, Writer. I’m an imaginative part of Gael who loves stories. I’m fuelled by hot drinks, sweet treats, seasonal shifts, and writing that moves – that is to say writing that “only really knows what it’s after once it has begun to make its way into the world” (Manning 2016, ix). A year-or-so into writing this professional doctorate, I wasn’t really sure where we were going, or why, but I found myself drawn to writing stories.

Laurel Richardson introduced me to writing stories; she told me how they help her to “find something out. Something I did not know before I wrote it” (2001, 35). Laurel, and her friend Betty St Pierre, told me how writing stories help to “situate one’s own writing in other parts of one’s life” and “can evoke deeper parts of the self, [and] heal wounds” (Richardson and St.Pierre 2005, 824). Their writing gave me hope, of who we might find, and how we might heal, by writing stories.

This story emerged as I attempted a writing story about the house at the end of Nobles Lane...

~ ~ ~ ~

There is a higgledy-piggledy house that stands alone at the end of a narrow, pot-holed lane.
It is not the place where Gael was born. But it is the place where she grew up.

Drainpipes with chipped moss-green paint sit garishly alongside the yellow-white walls of the higgledy-piggledy house which looks out over wind-beaten crops under flat grey skies.

Inside, cobwebs congregate in the corners of the ceiling, and dust settles atop surfaces.
It is still and quiet. Strangely so. As if sounds, sensations, and movements, get suspended there.
Paused from producing impact.

In the heart of the house, there is a steep mottled-pink staircase and a wobbly banister.
At the top of the steep stairs is an enclosed, shadowy, landing.
It is the place where all the doors meet.
A little girl, possibly five, maybe six, sits at the place where all the doors meet.
Watching the doors.
She is wearing a woollen navy dress, patterned with miniature red and white roses.
Her brown hair contrasts against her milky-white skin.

The doors facing the girl are made of a heavy, gnarled wood.
Each door is closed; leaving her huddled, small and alone, on the shadowy landing.

The little girl shuffles towards one of the doors.
Scattered granules of sand appear at her feet, as if a beach lies behind it.
The little girl presses her ear up against the door.
Fleeting wisps of sound fade in and out:
crashing waves; muffled explosions; high-pitched whistles.

The little girl wanders off to another door.
Black and white feathers litter the ground.
Gathering up some feathers, the little girl throws them into the air between her and the door.
Some are mangled and bloody; they stick to her hands, and burrow under her skin.

The little girl notices a rag doll, flopped against another door.
She ventures toward it.
This door is made up of shards of multi-coloured glass;
Yellow; red; white; one long, jagged, silver pane; some milky-toned; others colourless.
She stands on her tip-toes to peek through the panes.
Eyes widening in fear, she veers away from the door.

Another door appears fleetingly.
It flashes into being with neon-blue lights, and tubes that billow out from its surface.
and then, without a sound, it fades away.
The little girl sits at its stoop.
Watching it appear and disappear.

It’s disorientating here - with these dusty doors.
It feels as if behind each door there is a story to be told; which I, Writer, feel a pull to tell.
But the wood is thick, the echoes elusive, and the girl little.

I wonder if I could help her to open the doors, so we can hear more,
understand, explicitly, what the wisps, feathers, panes, and lights are trying to tell –
perhaps make some sense of this suspended place.
Little Girl: You’re telling it wrong.

Writer: (startled, as if shaken from a trance) Sorry? Who’s that?

Little Girl: It’s me! Little Girl. Who are you?

Writer: ah, hello Little Girl (smiles warmly) I’ve heard lots about you. But I don’t believe we’ve met, I’m very happy to get the chance to talk to you.

Little Girl: (arms crossed over her chest) It’s not about doors.

Writer: (grimaces) oh dear….oh no… (pauses and slumps her chin onto her elbow) …are you sure? It seemed to be opening something; an entryway so to speak – into the unnarrated stories of past hauntings that Judith Fewell (2015) tells me can get passed down through generations of familial and cultural silence. It seemed to me like the doors kind of captured where we’re at; how locked away the trauma stories seem to be, from being told, written, witnessed - don’t you think?

Little Girl: Nope (shaking her head vigorously) You’re wrong.

Writer: Oh… Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. What to do, what to do.

Little Girl: There was dust. And silence. So much silence. I was so lonely (bottom lip begins to quiver).

Writer scribbles furiously into her notepad, nodding along.

Little Girl: But you’re wrong about the doors. It’s not about doors.

Writer: ah. (her face lighting up) So some things fit. But maybe I need you to help fill in the details?

Little Girl wanders off, out of Writer’s sight.

Trust – a fiercely protective (and sometimes know-it-all) part of Gael, and Practitioner, who is compassionate, reflexive, and relationally-attuned - emerge in her place, accompanied by several people Trust introduces as the “trauma experts”: Robert T Muller, Judith Herman, Peter Levine, Bessel Van Der Kolk, and Babette Rothschild.11

11 The creative and discursive arrival of these trauma experts, and the adoption of a stage-play-like structure is inspired by Sophie Tamas (2010) and in particular the “Act II – Asking Books” section from her book (2011a) Life after Leaving: The remains of spousal abuse.
Trust: I warned you about this Writer, Little Girl doesn’t do details. You’re asking too much of her and it scares her away.

Writer: oh (grimaces) sorry, I’m so sorry. I’m still new to all of this myself (looking awkward and shifty) Is she ok? Will Little Girl be ok?

Practitioner: (looking warmly into Writer’s eyes) Oh Writer, it’s okay. It’s okay not to know. It’s okay to make mistakes. None of us are perfect. Besides, vilifying yourself won’t get you anywhere, Mearns and Thorne (2013) say it forecloses the possibility of relational depth, makes it more about your guilt than Little Girl’s needs, or stories.

Writer: So how do I tend to her needs? Should I leave her be? Let her come to me when she’s ready?

Practitioner: That’s a lot of pressure to put on a little girl, especially if, like she’s said, she’s lonely. Leaving her might reinforce her sense of loneliness and isolation. Perhaps there are ways for you to show her you’re here and you’re willing to receive her story, on her terms.

Trust: Precisely. You need to show her that she can trust you.

Muller (2018): In many ways, working with trauma, particularly relational trauma where “trust has been broken” (3) comes back to attachment; you have to work to establish trust, and a secure relational attachment, so the trauma narrative can be safely told, received, and witnessed – the process of which helps trauma survivors to recover.

Herman (1997): yes, “recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life” (155), and while the trajectory of recovery may oscillate, and isn’t linear, progression through these three stages is part of recovery.

Trust: (looking thoughtful) Hmm, so you should help Little Girl feel safe, Writer. When it comes to telling trauma stories, the need for establishing safety is well-documented. Isn’t that right Herman?

Herman (1997): Feeling safe enough to tell is important, yes. It’s around power and control; helping a client – or in this case Little Girl - to feel in control of her narrative, her body, and, in time - as part of stage three - her external environment.

Trust: Van Der Kolk and Levine’s work can help with this...

Van Der Kolk (2014): it’s all connected to the automatic nervous system (ANS) – the regulatory system within our bodies is responsible for accelerating and decelerating our responses. This includes the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), responsible for arousal, which speeds up the heart and prepares
the blood and muscles for quick action, and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) which slows the heart down and “promotes self-preservative functions like digestion and wound healing” (77). My approach to working with trauma recognises how “the body keeps the score” (86); that is to say trauma is stored in the body and so, recovery requires the reestablishment of safety, trust, and connection between body and mind.

Levine (1997, 2010): I agree. I believe traumatic experiences can leave a “residue of energy”, that can, “get trapped in the nervous system where it can wreak havoc on our bodies and spirits” (1997, 28). This means that when working with trauma, clients first need to be equipped with the tools to regulate their nervous system – this can help them feel safe, enough, to engage with trauma residue so it can be released.

Rothschild (2000): developing a client’s capacity to put on the ‘trauma brakes’ can also help with this; feeling empowered and in control of the narrative as it unfurls helps them feel more able to engage with the bodily sensations trauma stories can evoke.

Trust: Perhaps Little Girl’s “it’s wrong” and her wandering off just now were an example of this - a way of her putting on the brakes and establishing her own safety.

Levine (2010): Perhaps. Though they might have also been an example of the nervous system employing a freeze response in an attempt to avoid the danger she may feel about engaging with trauma stories. It’s pretty normal to experience this episodic ‘freezing’ or numbness. It could be her body’s over-sensitive alarm bell is stuck on ‘freeze’. When ‘flight’ (running), and ‘fight’ (attacking) are not available in the face of traumatic danger, we employ a freeze response, we ‘play dead’, like an animal might do in the wild.

Practitioner: Woah, woah, woah let’s slow down a minute here. I’m not disagreeing with any of you, I hold you and the approaches you put forward in high regard, but we’re making a leap here on behalf of Little Girl; about what ‘trauma’ and ‘safety’ and ‘the body’ and ‘mind’ even mean to her...

Researcher: (a part of Gael who loves to learn by mulling over, and moving with, ideas and theories from multiple angles, bursts onto the scene with a stack of precariously balanced books in her arms, and post-it-notes in her hair) Not to mention what ‘trauma’ and ‘safety’ and ‘the body’ and ‘mind’ mean as concepts in a multiplicitous, emergent, creative-relational inquiry... but whoops - I’m interrupting here, jumping ahead...(takes a post-it from her hair, she scribbles frantically)...I’ve noted it as an exploration for another place and time...please, (gesturing to Practitioner) continue...
Practitioner: All we really “know” from Little Girl at this moment is that “she was so lonely”, that “it’s not about doors”, and Writer was – at least with the doors - “telling it wrong”. The expert knowledge offered up here is helpful – it inevitably journeys with us in our interactions with Little Girl - we cannot, like Husserl (1931 [republished 2013]) asks, bracket it off. But it is external knowledge, it comes from your frame of reference. I am advocating for remaining open, enough, to hear what Little Girl’s experience might be – however different or disruptive that may be...

There is a long, awkward silence.

...Look, how about we (gesturing to the group of parts and trauma experts that have gathered) go and make ourselves a cup of tea, free up some space for Writer and Little Girl to use as they wish.

Trust, Practitioner, Researcher, and the accompanying experts fade from the scene.

Writer remains. She pulls out a pink leather notebook and chews anxiously on the end of her pencil. Scribbling the word SAFETY? into the next available page, she watches, bewildered, as the words ‘roots’, ‘trust’, ‘comfort’, ‘blanket’, and ‘suffocation’ trickle onto the page.

Unbeknownst to her, Twinkle – a mischievous and creative part of Gael who loves to play - darts onto the scene and sits coyly beside her.

Twinkle: (nudging writer’s shoulder with hers, and smiling broadly) heyyyyyy writer, what cha doing?

Writer: oh (distractedly) hello Twinkle (staring with confusion at the pages of her notebook) Well I was trying to tell the story of Gael’s childhood and describe the Bluntisham house. I thought if I could just conjure up a sense of that house then Little Girl might feel at home, enough, to begin to tell her story...but now I’m not so sure if that’s a place that will help her to feel safe.

Twinkle: (yawning dramatically) if you ask me safety is overrated.

Writer: hmm well – that’s not particularly surprising. There are stories about you, Twinkle, you’re known and not-best-liked for chasing after risky endeavours.

Twinkle: Pffft, (shrugs gleefully), Little Girl likes me - we have fun.

Writer: (chuckles jovially) you make a fair point there. I wonder, would you tell me more about the fun you and Little Girl get up to?

Twinkle: Hmmm, that’s the thing – Little Girl and me, like Sophie (Tamas 2021) – we’re more of showers and feelers than tellers and thinkers ...but I will tell you one thing...that house isn’t going to help, it’s not a place we ever felt we belonged to, or with (turning to Writer with a sparkle in her...
eyes)... It’s the homes in the wilds you want to be writing about (winks) — the ones you find outside, underground, in your imagination (she taps on Writer’s forehead with her home-made wand).

**Writer:** Sorry? Homes you find outside... underground? Did I hear you right Twinkle? UNDERGROUND?

**Twinkle:** (giggles excitedly, and tugs at writer’s hand — sending writer’s pencil flying) c’mon Writer, let’s go on an adventure (with a flash of her wand, Twinkle disappears into a cloud of sparkling seeds).

Writer looks up from her notebook and finds herself in a familiar garden.

*The garden of the Bluntisham house at the bottom of Nobles Lane.*

Lush green grass, with pockets of clover, blankets the ground, and the sound of a nostalgic bird song fills the air. Bees flitter in and out of awareness, one of them settles on a bright fuchsia bush - its bell-like blossoms putting on a colourful display from one of the many flower beds bordering the edge of the garden. Beyond the borders, crops sway in the breeze, stretching flatly out to the far-off horizon.

There is a clump of dandelions beside Writer; she notices they’re at different ‘life’ stages; some still buds, some a blossoming yellow, others a fluffy seeded white.

*She sees Little Girl shuffling about on all fours a few meters away, under a strange looking tree. The tree is higgledy-piggledy. Its trunk a greyish-white with mossy-green patches. Its branches are festooned with fuzzy reddish-brown seed pods. As Writer draws closer, she realises Little Girl is in deep conversation with her pet rabbit – Snowflake.*

Little Girl: *(whispering surreptitiously)* I know why she’s here Snowflake, she’s seeking stories - just like so many of them do... but she’s getting it all wrong. Can we show her our way? Can we?

Snowflake: *(in a wise and croaky voice)* I don’t see why not. Might do her some good (nibbles away at some grass and then sighs deeply). Of course, if she is an adult, like you say, she might well have forgotten how to follow her imagination, and then, well, she won’t be able to access our way; she’ll try too hard to ‘make sense’ of it...

Twinkle: *(popping into the scene and showering both little girl and Snowflake in glitter)* sense making (yawns dramatically) — what a snooooze-fest.

“A talking rabbit!” Writer thinks to herself, “this IS exciting and imaginative stuff”

Flicking through the pages of her notebook, she finds notes Researcher has diligently made on imaginative stories as a way of researching...

Ellis and Bochner (2016), advocate for writing autoethnography like a novelist; by this they mean writing personal stories that deal with the real, and messy “dimensions of human experience”, in
“visceral, sensual ways” (38). They say writing evocative autobiographical stories is particularly helpful when grappling with difficult life experiences because they allow the author to “live in multiple realities simultaneously” – an “imagined reality” and a “practical reality” (28). I like the possibility this presents; I can see how writing imaginative stories based on lived experience offers an expansive space where the multitude of realities within and beyond Gael (including that of Snowflake the rabbit, thinks Writer as she reads) have space to expand this inquiry beyond a single, linear narrative.

*Writer realises it’s gone quiet.*

*Looking away from Researcher’s notes, she finds Little Girl, Snowflake, and Twinkle have vanished.* Exasperated and more than a little confused she flips through her half-started scribbles, at a loss. Just as she engages with a narrative, just as she attempts to ‘make sense’ of it, she loses the threads. They disappear - like dandelion seeds in the wind.

*Exhaling with a mixture of sorrow and frustration, Writer slumps down, cross-legged in the grass, rubbing her eyes and knocking her glasses askew. Her trusty notepad falls into her lap, carrying with it the heavy weight of stories who seek, and resist being told.*

*Practitioner emerges and sits quietly beside Writer.*

*Writer:* It’s just so bloody hard…I feel this immense pressure to tell a story and I believe, at least in my gut, that this story has value. But each time I’ve tried to tell this story – that is, each time I try to tell it in the way I think I’m supposed to tell it – making some sense of it along the way - I encounter threads, possibilities, openings, and then I lose them. I’m left with silence.

*Practitioner:* an immense pressure to tell, a finding, a losing, sense-making, and then silence (*she pauses, exhaling heavily*)...oooooooft

*Writer:* (sighing too) yeah...the silence feels heavy...frustrating, thick...(*pauses*)...and yet somehow familiar.

*Practitioner:* Familiar?

*Writer:* like it’s baked-in to the story I’m trying to tell...

*Practitioner:* hmmm, baked-in to the story, almost like the silences, and the losing of the threads are part of the story too?

*Writer:* maybe...part of the story, or part of the process of telling, writing, narrating the story...
**Practitioner:** I don’t know how helpful this will be, but it’s making me think about working with clients. I find it can be helpful to listen into the silences. To follow as far as the threads go, and then listen out for the affect that’s held, or perhaps produced, in what’s leftover. Sometimes those affects tell us more than words ever can.

Stern helped me with this, he calls it “affect attunement” (1985, 138) which he sees as sensing along with the affective state of the other. I suppose it’s an expansion of the empathic process Rogers (1975) advocates for - the process of stepping into and feeling along with another’s world. My experience of the empathic process is it’s often elusive and happens in moments beyond speech and coherent language. Stern’s (1985) explorations with affect attunement makes space for this elusiveness; he moves beyond the idea of having to name a concrete emotion, and opens up space for following what emerges, affectively, in the therapeutic encounter.

**Writer:** hmm– following as far as the threads lead, listening, sensing, feeling along with and beyond...

**Practitioner:** Gail Boldt (2020) has deepened my understanding of this too... She challenges the “privileged and unproblematized attention we, as teachers” and I would argue, as psychotherapists and researchers too, “give to meaning-making, conscious thinking, and words” (230)... We can place so much emphasis on the sense-making, on what is coherent, tangible, explicable...

**Writer:** ...That’s where we were hoping to go with this research – we’ve been hoping to make some ‘sense’ of trauma through the telling of my trauma story. But every time I try to tell, I seem to be making less ‘sense’...

*Sophie Tamas flickers into being – joining Writer and Practitioner as they sit beside the dandelions from her “bean den, in her back yard” (2020, 0.09). Together they are sharing wild yet kind places. Sophie is a cherished presence. Her writing, her courage - though that’s too flimsy a word – inspiring so much of this work. She is Sophie to us: Ally, Trailblazer, Compassionate Challenger, Friend.*

**Sophie** (2009a, 2009b): Telling trauma stories is complicated, messy, frustrating. We can’t articulate all of the fragments through the structure of language, particularly when we try to tell those stories in our academic voices. “We are talking about being broken and undone. But our voices as we speak do not sound broken” (2009b, para 10). Perhaps though, we might find ways to “write ourselves differently” (2009b, abstract), to bear witness to, and create our trauma testimony differently.

**Writer:** Could you say more Sophie, about writing ourselves differently? I keep losing the threads of Little Girl’s story. I’m with her, and then she’s gone. I don’t know how to capture her story; I seem to keep getting it wrong...
Sophie (2020): maybe it’s not about capturing, maybe you can’t know her story yet, maybe “it has to do with what” the story “does in you, performatively, which you can’t know until it’s written” (6.07-6.12) or perhaps spoken, performed, lived, received, related with...

Writer: I remember the performative presentation of your experiences in Playing the Survivor: How and if women recover from spousal abuse (2010). I felt moved; you brought to life personal narratives with theory in ways which helped me to construct new meanings because of what they left me feeling. I think Spry (2011) talks about this too – conceptualising performative autoethnography she recognises how “deeply transformational” it can be for performer and audience. She recognises how a performative approach to autoethnography enables a deeper understanding and articulation of a topic. Is that what I’m attempting here too? A performative autoethnography?

Sophie: ...perhaps it’s a question of what sort of knowledge you’re seeking to produce. Perhaps the knowledge you’re producing with Little Girl will “come slowly, obliquely, and well salted with tears” (2009b, para 20). Perhaps your words won’t “strike some gong of resonance that marked them as true, but they could make you [and others] feel something” (2009b, para 20).

Writer: Hmmm...knowledge producing feelings rather than theories, I like that...and I can see how performative autoethnography, through music, art, theatre, and I suppose in my case, through performative writing and poetry holds space for meaning to be created through what is felt (Spry 2011), through what is accessed beyond only speech and language ...towards what is created and re-created... I like the movement...

Practitioner: I resonate with this too – clients often tell me they wish they could tell a clear and coherent story, or they come in seeking clarity. They ask me to make sense of them as if I have the answers and can uncomplicate the mass of knotted threads within them. I feel a pressure to respond – to wave a magic wand and perform a cure – which is understandable in a capitalist society that increasingly values concreteness, certainty, and clarity (Totton 2011b). But I find the flight towards explanation and clarity can also take us away from something less articulable – sensings, feelings, not-quite-knowings flitter and flicker; they also have a story to tell.

Sophie, Practitioner and Writer watch a pale cream butterfly flitter around Sophie’s bean den, meandering between lush green leaves.

Sophie (2020, 6.13-6.18): “if you quiet your mind, listen, with your fingers on the key-notes, just build a story that floats”
**Writer:** ...floating, listening, moving with rhythms, with qualities beyond language, with what flickers and glows; perhaps the stories I’m seeking might be shown, not told (Tamas 2021)...

*Writer sighs deeply and flops backwards, feeling the springy, spongey support of the grass mould to the shape of her back. She gazes up at the blue sky with its wispy clouds and inhales deeply; the scent of rich green grass helps to soothe her weary head. Lulled by nature’s blanket and the warmth of the air around her, Writer lets her eyes droop. Sophie and Practitioner fade away. Her breathing slows as she falls into a state between waking and sleep...*

*As Writer dozes, she notices a small hand beckoning at her from beneath the higgledy-piggledy tree. With growing curiosity, she shuffles along on all-fours to get a closer look. The grass underneath her is peppered with the fuzzy reddish-brown seed pods from the tree above which imprint themselves onto her hands and knees. Beyond the beckoning hand are two small eyes, and then, a gleeful smile, belonging to Little Girl.*

**Little Girl:** Yesssss! You made it (*beaming from ear to ear*). At last.

**Writer:** Why hello Little Girl! I’m so happy to see you again – even if it’s through a dream, or is this a daydream? I’ve lost track...

**Little Girl:** (*giggling*) silly Writer, of course you’re dreaming - you can only get here through dreams.

**Writer:** And where is here Little Girl? Where is it you are?

**Little Girl:** Come and see! Snowflake showed me the way years ago now I can show you.

**Writer:** I’m not sure I’ll fit in such a small hole Little Girl, I’m too fond of my chocolate biscuits!

**Little Girl:** YUM. Chocolate biscuits are my favourite (*giggling mischievously and rummaging around in the pockets of her dress*) Look, I’ve got one we can share down here (*she brandishes a slightly dishevelled and fluffy chocolate digestive at Writer)*.

**Writer:** Okay, let’s give it a go, here I come.

*Writer squeezes her eyes tightly and dives headfirst into the hole. Rather than hitting her head on the mossy roots of the tree, she is surprised to find the inside of a mossy tunnel, with Little Girl sitting merrily beside her, stretching out her arms for a hug.*

**Writer:** (*squeezing tightly*) thank you for inviting me Little Girl

**Little Girl** wriggles out of the hug, placing part of a fluffy, half-melted chocolate biscuit in Writer’s hand. She toddles off, further into the tunnel, sucking on her part of the biscuit.
Writer stares with wonder around the tunnel...
Beneath her feet is dewy, deep emerald moss. It feels soft and strong and smells like woodlands; the curved walls are sandy in texture and as Writer peers closer she notices tiny pebbles and seashells framed intermittently along the walls stretching out before her.

There is a rhythmic whooshing sound of waves lapping against the shoreline as the curvature of the sandy walls meets the ceiling of the tunnel which appears to be made up of bright blue ocean waves.

Focusing intently on the place where the ceiling and the walls meet, Writer notices some sparkly like objects shimmering amidst the shoreline, like glowing fragments; visible and then hidden as the waves rhythmically roll against the wall.

A particular fragment catches some light from the rabbit hole above and shines directly into Writer’s eyes. It is too bright. She has to look away.

“What is this place?” Writer whispers in wonderment.

There’s a chaotic clattering close by, and Writer turns to see Twinkle emerging from one of the sandy walls with a sparkly fishing rod and bucket in hand..

Writer: (with delight) Oh hello Twinkle, I didn’t know you could visit here too?

Twinkle: course (shrugging coyly) – wasn’t I the one who told you about homes you’d find underground (Twinkle winks and sticks her tongue out)

Writer: (chuckling) that you did Twinkle, that you did. So, is this the home you and Little Girl made when the house up there (Writer nods toward the rabbit hole entrance) didn’t feel like home?

Twinkle: (cocks her head to one side, looking thoughtfully at Writer as if undecided about how to respond). It’s where we come to play, to have adventures, to hold onto moments, memories, movements which others hide or turn away from. Little Girl calls it her “tunnel of lost things”.

Writer: (whispering under her breath) lost things, lost things...Is that what those glowing fragments are Twinkle? (Writer points at the shimmering objects along the shoreline) Lost things?

Twinkle: (with a mischievous grin) I call those “glow worms”.

Writer: (speaking slowly, as if learning a new word in an unfamiliar language) Glow worms...?

Little Girl bumbles back into view, merrily humming a tune Writer does not recognise.

Twinkle, apparently familiar with the melody, joyfully joins in with Little Girl, vigorously waving her sparkly fishing rod as if conducting an orchestra.
As the tune comes to an end, Twinkle dives into the roaring ocean waves above, and Little Girl curls up in a mossy alcove close to Writer’s feet. Writer crouches down beside her.

**Writer:** *(whispering)* Would you like to show me where this tunnel leads, Little Girl?

**Little Girl:** *(yawning sleepily)* It’s different every time. Take a step. It always goes somewhere...

*Writer looks down at the mossy ground beneath her. “Here goes” she thinks to herself as she tentatively places her left foot forward....*

*...The woodland-ocean tunnel fades away and Writer finds herself ‘back in the real world’, standing, beneath the sweeping fronds of a pine tree...*  
*Writer realises she is in a familiar place: the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. She comes here frequently, finding both solace and inspiration amongst the sprawling trees and meandering pathways. Writer was here recently, with this tree, in this spot, writing in her trusty notebook...*

**23rd September 2020**

There is a pine seed at my feet. I pick it up, gently turning it over in my hands. It has many layers and is still on its stalk. It feels young. I feel a pang of sadness. I look up to the pine tree it came from. Its fronds are swaying in the breeze. A single pine needle spirals away from the tree to the ground.

I continue to watch the tree. Watching it, watching me.

I feel it watching me as I turn back to the path which forks before me – left or right? I grapple with which path to choose – aware that either choice leads to a loss. The decision weighs heavily, and I stand for a moment, frozen with the weight of it.

I notice small bugs, framed in the dappled light – moving in this moment of suspension.

I wonder what makes it so difficult to choose.

I think of my research – of the paths not chosen. I think of what is unheard, unspoken, unwritten. I feel a deep sense of sadness for what – no that’s not right - for **who** seems to be getting left behind; dropped **too soon**; the parts of me who have, for many years, been left behind, abandoned, neglected. The parts of me who feel rather than think; who experience rather than speak; who value stories over science, and imagination over analysis.
I feel the pine seed fizzle in my hand. It has energy, a life of its own. I realise that for all the loss I fear, there will also be a gain – something created, experienced, produced, through the path I do choose as well as the one(s) I don’t. Loss doesn’t have to be the full-stop of something.

I put my left foot forward, choosing to turn right, around an overgrown bush and out of sight.

Writer notices the pine seed in her hand is emitting a soft glow, she gives it a firm squeeze...

... Writer finds herself back in the tunnel, glowing pine seed still in her hand.

Little Girl is playing in the moss at Writer’s feet, and Writer crouches down and gently passes the pine seed to Little Girl whose eyes widen. She snatches the seed, hiding it quickly within her dress pockets.

Writer: (speaking softly) I think I understand why I went back to that scene in the Botanics little one. I think maybe you were trying to show me the value in returning and remembering. I think you were also trying to show me something about loss?

Little Girl stares at Writer, tears welling up in her eyes.

Writer: (sitting beside Little Girl, and putting her arm around her) It’s okay, it’s okay. I realise you can’t find the words, you feel it, I feel it too, but we can’t speak it, can’t tell it. There will never be enough words. There will always be more...

Little Girl burrows herself into Writer’s lap, and howls. Writer weeps quietly, cradling Little Girl.

Together they mourn something, perhaps many somethings, that are not-quite-known.

Eventually, Little Girl’s sobs shift and settle, and she stirs from Writer’s arms.

Fishing into the pockets of her dress, she pulls out the pine seed.

It glows in the palm of her hand.

“What would you like to do with the pine seed Little Girl?” Writer asks tenderly.

Little Girl gazes upwards, her eyes focusing on the shoreline, where the lapping ocean waves meet the curved sandy walls. She smiles at Writer, gesturing for her to take the pine seed.

Writer caresses the glowing pine seed in the cup of her hands. She stands, and walks slowly to the sandy curved wall, raising her cupped hands she offers the glowing pine seed to the ocean overhead.

A shimmering wave emerges softly and slowly to meet Writer’s outstretched hands like an old friend. She feels the gentle wetness of the wave encircle her hands and lift the glowing pine seed from them.
The wave moves, like an exhale, back into the roof of the tunnel, and then out across the adjoining wall, and back again. Writer watches as the pine seed nestles itself into the sandy caress of the wall.

The shoreline is peppered with glowing fragments. They shimmer brightly in the light. This time, Writer does not need to look away. As the waves resume their rhythmic lapping, revealing, and hiding, the glowing fragments beneath, Writer hears a tinkering tune. The tune is familiar – it is the melody Little Girl and Twinkle sang together. Sensing and swaying along with the melody, Writer recognises notes, notes that float together to form a phrase: “Glow worms”.

~ ~ ~ ~.
“Follow the Glow Worms”

P-Emmy: Hello Writer, I’m Project Manager, the organiser in Gael’s world. I’m well-liked for my ability to translate complex ideas into tangible realities - you can call me P-Emmy, I’m here to help. I believe you know Critic (gestures towards another part, sitting in the shadows, with narrowed eyes) who takes her responsibilities of identifying inconsistencies, and keeping Gael safe, very seriously.

Anyway, I’ve got a little agenda of things we’re looking to clarify in this meeting in the woodland library12 (hands Writer a neatly written list of bullet points). We’d like to start by discussing the intellectual jigsaw puzzle to ensure the foundations of this research are secure, then we’d like to clarify some things about the glow worms you found. We’d like to hear about what you want them to ‘do’, and how you’re going to ensure critical distance.

Writer: (warily) Um, okay... I’m not sure I have the answers you’re seeking.

P-Emmy: Okay, well if you need to point us in the direction of others who do know, that works too. Right then, do you know what I mean when I say the jigsaw puzzle?

Writer: Um, well jigsaws are a thing in the Bateman family. For as long as I can remember Gael’s Dad buys her mum a jigsaw for Christmas, and every Boxing Day she’ll begin by finding the four corners, then she’ll build the border, and then, gradually, the innards get filled in.

Critic: (eyes rolling) Eurgh, no Writer. That’s not the jigsaw we’re referring to. We’re talking about Mason’s “intellectual puzzle” (2002, 5)...do you know what that is?

12 The woodland library lives and grows with and through and beyond Gael. It is not a tangible, concrete, permanent place, and yet it is a place parts-of-Gael frequently visit. It’s not your average sort of library. There’s no archiving system; or librarian holding court. This library is an ever-shifting, seasonal woodland. Stories live and grow here: dangling from the branches of trees, hiding beneath piles of leaves, taking shelter in tree-trunks, lounging on the banks of the brook which meanders through the wood.
Writer: (turning pink). Oh yes, of course, silly me. Well, I’ve written about that with Researcher. Bear with me (Writer powers up her laptop and begins clicking through folders and files)...Oh yes, here we are, BCR2, the second-year qualitative methods research course. Researcher and I wrote:

“Preparing for the ‘doing’ of qualitative research feels like undertaking a jigsaw puzzle. First we find the corners: the ontology, epistemology, topical area, and purpose of the research to stabilise the project and know where we stand (Mason 2002). Then we formulate research questions, methodologies, and ethical considerations - offering a structured boundary that clearly outlines the “intellectual puzzle” (Mason 2002, 13). We spend time thinking with these pieces and figuring out how they fit together.”

P-Emmy: Okay, great. What we’d like to talk about are those four corners: the ontology, epistemology, topical area, and purpose of the research – as well as the research questions we’re working towards.

Writer: Um, well actually, that paper went on to trouble taking such a structured approach. With Fiona (Murray 2017) we began to get curious about how we would ‘design’ a research project when the very act of structuring interrupts the emergent process of inquiring. We started to touch on post-qualitative research and talked about how we’ve been drawn to the way such an approach values process rather than output (St.Pierre 2018) and as MacLure puts it: gives permission for us to follow “the productive capacity for wonder that resides and radiates in data, or rather in the entangled relation of data-and-researcher” (2013, 228), particularly because this reflects Gael’s process-oriented approach to working with clients.

Critic: Hmmm. But you received feedback to say there was ‘an undercurrent of doubt running beneath the surface’ of the paper which made it hard for the reader to trust in your argument. Unless you can offer some certainty, then the safest course of action is to identify a coherent structure.

An awkward silence settles.

Critic stares at Writer, her eyes narrowed, willing her to speak.

Writer looks at the ground, biting her lips, lost for words.

P-Emmy twists the computer towards her and begins re-organising files, checking to see if she can find a way of tying together recent work.

The silence continues. The tension builds.

Critic: WRITER! We can’t just sit here in silence...Say something. Write something. About what glow worms are. Where they come from.
**Writer:** The thing is Critic I don’t know how to answer those questions. I am uncertain – and perhaps that’s the point. These glow worms are only just emerging, and it feels too early to pin them down with words and theory. We need longer to come into relationship and experience them. Bondi and Fewell say: “we acquire what might be called practice-based wisdom” (2016, 31) through experience, through living our lives and relating with others – in this case, glow worms. We need to give the relationship time to emerge before we pin it down into something certain.

**Critic:** But people don’t get it; I don’t get it. What are these weird glow worm things, how do they fit, and what’s the point? C’mon now Writer, you need to instil more confidence; you need to offer something that makes coherent sense, offers theoretical expansion, and is tangibly meaningful for it to count as knowledge– this is doctoral research after all, not a personal development project.

**Writer:** I’m not sure the two are as mutually exclusive as your comment implies, Critic. Perhaps this inquiry is both a personal development journey and doctoral research. Besides, I don’t know what’s happening, I’ve just been fumbling around, finding unexpected glows...it’s like Winterson says: “the continuous narrative of existence is a lie. There is no continuous narrative, there are lit-up moments, and the rest is dark.” (2004, 134)

Twinkle bursts onto the scene, her sparkly fishing rod in one hand and home-made wand in the other. She skips up to writer and whispers gleefully in her ear... “Follow the glow worms!”

**Writer:** hahaha, yes like Twinkle says - I’ve realised allowing myself – ourselves - to be moved by glow worms eventually leads to something. They move me, in ways beyond words and structure...towards what is shown, experienced, lived, felt, sensed rather than what is told, learnt, theorised...

**Twinkle:** (singing loudly and enthusiastically) follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms.

**Critic:** (lashing out to grab Twinkle’s fishing rod) Give me that. (wrangling it out of her hands)

**Writer:** (walking over to a dancing Twinkle) Critic, you should be listening to Twinkle...

**Twinkle:** (jumping up and down excitedly) Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms.

**Critic:** Pfft. She’s talking utter nonsense, like she always does. Besides following Twinkle has got us into enough trouble in the past. Mark my words Writer, she’s not worth listening to!

**P-Emmy:** (tapping away on the computer) perhaps I can help here. When I’m feeling stuck and uncertain with a project, I often find it helps to return to the beginning and remind myself what
question(s) I was hoping to answer. Now let’s see (scans through different files on the computer), ah yes - in “Yellow Smudge”, you wrote about producing research that ‘makes sense’ of trauma through the telling and witnessing of testimony. So maybe the research question is: “How does the process of telling and witnessing trauma testimonies help people make sense of themselves and their trauma?” Personally, I like the focus on making sense here.

Little Girl appearing whilst the other parts are focused on the screen, stomps her foot on the mossy woodland ground and presses the power-down button on the laptop so the document fades from view.

“This IS NOT THE PROCESS” she wails loudly.

“You said you trusted in my process” she cries, tugging at Writer’s fluffy slippers with tears streaming silently down her face.

She turns to run. Writer, desperate to reach out, tries to catch her by the arm, but she’s gone...

Silence settles once more. It sticks, and sinks in.

Trust, Practitioner, and Researcher, sensing trouble, emerge, joining Writer, P-Emmy and Critic in the Woodland Library.

Trust: (brandishing a finger furiously at Critic and P-Emmy) WHAT ARE YOU DOING. I’ve told you countless times before to keep out of this!
**Critic:** Eurgh. Of course, you would show up wouldn’t you Trust? *(sarcastically)* Self-righteous trust is here to save the day.

**Trust:** I’m not having this Critic. The way you and P-Emmy butt in, interrupting processes as they unfurl, trying to make them “make sense”, trying to “structure” and “explain” them *(Trust uses her fingers to make air quotes)* – those are acts of violence.

**Crust:** *(scoffing)* Pffft. Must you be so dramatic! It’s not like we’re pinning anyone up against a wall with a knife to their neck. We’re trying to keep everyone safe. How can you possibly accuse us of violence?!

*Trust, seething with fury, strides deeper into the woods, muttering under her breath.*

After several moments she re-emerges, carrying a thick stack of precariously balanced books “Time to educate yourself”, Trust screeches, hurling some of the books at Critic.

“*Read ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1998)* where she uses the term epistemic violence to draw attention to the ways in which marginalised groups, and their local knowledges, are routinely silenced, dismissed, and belittled in preference for Western epistemic practices. Spivak says knowledge held by marginalised groups is being violently eliminated.

“*Enrique Galván-Álvarez*, Trust continues, “also writes about epistemic violence, recognising it as: “one of the key elements in any process of domination.” He says, “It is not only through the construction of exploitative economic links or the control of the politico-military apparatuses that domination is accomplished, but also and, I would argue, most importantly through the construction of epistemic frameworks that legitimise and enshrine those practices of domination.” *(2010, 12)*”

**Critic:** *(shrugging)* I don’t really see your point. You’re over there, hurling books at me – which *is* an act of violence, attempting to argue that me and P-Emmy, trying to put structure and coherence to something vague and uncertain, is somehow a violent act of domination. I mean, doesn’t that sound a little over the top to you? Besides, are you forgetting that you’re white? *We’re* white? How can you claim to be outside of Western epistemic practices, that’s a little ignorant.

**Trust:** *(through gritted teeth).* Nice innocent act Critic; belittling the arguments I’m offering up only reinforces what I’m saying.

Firstly: your comments around “not getting it” and thus insisting on a clear and coherent articulation of the point of glow worms is illustrative of the dominant discourse in social science where knowledge is only considered valid if it is objective and evidence-based, despite being at odds with psychotherapy practice, which is inherently subjective and experience-near *(Bondi and Fewell 2016).*
I would argue that your continual refusal to acknowledge that an unstructured, emergent approach could be meaningful, constitutes what Kristie Dotson, a black feminist philosopher building on Spivak’s epistemic violence, describes as “pernicious ignorance” (2011, 238) where you refuse to meet the marginalised parts of Gael’s world – like Little Girl, or Twinkle “halfway” (2011, 235). You shut them down and out before they, and their stories, have a chance to formulate.

Secondly: yes, coloniser blood runs in all our veins in complex and often disavowed ways (Morgan 2021). You, P-Emmy, Little Girl, me, we’re white. We’re in a privileged position, and I agree with Morgan’s acknowledgement that whatever burden we may bear “we do so without the added burden of racism” (2021, 10). However, that doesn’t mean we share the same privileges. Grouping all of us together in that way conflates our experience and ignores our different ways of being and living. This is something Yurval-Davis (2006) explores in her conceptualisation of ‘different kinds of difference’ where she highlights the relational specificities which can get lost when we insist on particular identity factors being grouped together.

Let’s think about this in relation to Little Girl and Twinkle for a moment. They are regularly ostracised, by more dominant, “adult” parts of Gael’s world. Only moments ago, you were saying Twinkle isn’t worth listening to. Dalal (2015) would see this is a form of Othering - you’re segregating Twinkle, labelling her way of being in and understanding the world as unworthy. This ignores her individual experience, and the ways her experiences might inform our collective understanding of glow worms, or trauma stories, or therapeutic practice, and that, Critic, is a form of epistemic violence. But now, you’re grouping Twinkle in with us, as white, and therefore unable to experience epistemic violence. This not only defends against the possibility that marginalisation and violence happens within and between us – Gael’s multiple parts - but implies only those who are non-white could be Othered, which is, in itself, racist.

**Writer:** If it helps, Critic, it’s not just you. I’m guilty of it too. Sometimes I try to quickly translate what I sense and feel from Little Girl into tangible language. In *Finding Glow Worms*, I kept trying to make sense of what was emerging, rather than letting myself follow.

Now, I’m the first to admit how language can take something further: Laurel Richardson and St Pierre (2005) helped me to see how my writing becomes a form of inquiry; a way of processing; a way of storying emergences. But, in other moments, the language I use to represent these emergences also limits; it puts structure to something that’s continually emerging, sometimes prematurely.
**Researcher:** Carlson (2020) explores the relationship between language and inquiry. He says:

“Instead of striving for research that produces stability in knowledge production and certainty in understanding phenomenon, the post-qualitative is an invitation to compose research from a place of immanence to produce uncertainty, and champions the ineffable, the felt impression of things.” (2020, 2)

This reminds me of some of St Pierre’s (2011) other work, where she says post-qualitative research is inherently uncertain, because it’s in formation.

So maybe the uncertainty we feel in inquiring, and our readers might be feeling in reading, and potentially our clients feel in therapy, **matters**? Maybe we don’t need a coherent structure because glow worms are inherently uncertain, incohesive, and there is something meaningful in that?

*(pauses thoughtfully for a moment)*

Maybe trauma stories are too?

**Critic:** *(with disdain)* Are you suggesting this has somehow become a post-qualitative inquiry? Because you daydreamed down a rabbit hole and found a glowing pineCONE? Whatever next?!

**Twinkle:** *(jumping up and down excitedly)* Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms.

**Critic:** And now this one wants us to “follow the glow worms” *(mockingly imitates Twinkle)*

**Researcher:** Well, to put it simply; yes. Like Speedy (2008) describes, we seem to be shifting away from our original onto-epistemological arguments, towards the unfurling nature of post-qualitative possibilities. Away from a question of: *How do people make sense of trauma?* Towards an ongoing questioning of: *How we struggle, relate to, and engage with the process of ‘storying’ trauma.*

**Writer:** It’s a bit messy right now – our onto-epistemological understandings are turning to dust in my writing hands, hence the thread of uncertainty we’re feeling.

**Critic:** Hmmm, well doesn’t St Pierre (2018) also say something like a study that begins as a qualitative study cannot be made post-qualitative, and, as P-Emmy pointed out earlier – our starting point with this research implied a qualitative approach.
Researcher and Practitioner who have been exchanging palpable glances appear to morph together. The boundaried edges between them blur and it becomes impossible to identify who is responding, other than to say they are responding together, as Practitioner.~.Researcher.

Practitioner.~.Researcher: Firstly, we’re allowed to disagree with what people like St Pierre put forward, and, frankly, we don’t feel as strongly about what does or doesn’t constitute a post-qualitative project, but we do believe moving away from an established research design in post-qualitative inquiry is important. St Pierre (2018) argues that any design, any methodology, “is a trap” (11), and instead, post-qualitative inquiry “begins with an encounter” (11) and follows emergence. This echoes Jackson and Mazzei (2011), who say post-qualitative inquiry can also be described as post-methodological as there is no set, systematic process.

We connect with these arguments, and this is why we’re finding ourselves opposed to your insistence on a coherent and articulated design. We’re questioning why desired outcome needs to be the point of departure and suggesting, instead, that our point of departure is multiplicitous, and includes this experience of grappling with an emergent process. We’re curious about what might emerge when we hold space for the research to be moved – to be transported somewhere –beyond a search to find something ‘known’, beyond the need to ‘make sense’ of trauma.

This connects with our valuing of creative-relational inquiry (Wyatt 2019) – a term we feel more at home with than post-qualitative, because it centres around movement, and feels free-er – less tied up in theoretical bow-strings. As Jonathan says, creative-relational inquiry “seeks not to ‘capture’ and hold still, but to find a way, through desire, to do justice to the fluidity of process” (Wyatt 2019, 45). And it is process, not outcome, we are valuing here.

We’re also drawn to process because it reflects our approach in practice with clients where we are less preoccupied with presenting issues, sense-making, and solutions, and more invested in each client’s relational encounter(s) with and beyond the therapeutic process.

We’re applying the same thinking here: as this inquiry gathers traction, it’s becoming a creative-relational adventuring where we daydream down rabbit holes, meet in a woodland library, and attempt to follow what glows.

Twinkle: (still singing) Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms.

Practitioner.~.Researcher: (laughing warmly) yes, just as Twinkle says, following what glows; following what calls out to and moves us. We attempt to nurture this following in practice by allowing the therapeutic process to be directed by what emerges, and glows for our clients.
This nurturing was inspired by Eugene Gendlin and his work on the ‘felt’ sense. Gendlin describes the felt sense as “a special kind of internal bodily awareness...a body-sense of meaning” (1981, 10). It is, “murky”, and on the “edge-of-awareness” (1984, 2006), emerging slowly, and only when we pause to tend to what else may be happening for us in a moment. This internal sensing, Gendlin explains, is different from emotion: more subtle, and less obvious which makes it difficult to recognise and articulate. In a Western society like Britain’s today, which values knowledge and fact, the felt-sense is often considered, “less sophisticated than what we can think” (1984, 83).

Gendlin says sitting with clients at the “murky edge” (2006) helps them stay with and unfold their own felt-sense. He recognises how this process has an implicit sense of movement (1981), and “carries the body forward” (2004, 3), perhaps not towards ‘knowing’ but towards an emerging ‘sensing’.

This is something we are intrigued by: how what tugs at and unfolds in our awareness takes us somewhere. Even, and perhaps especially, if we don’t know where we’ll end up...

**Twinkle:** YES! Follow the glow worms. Follow the glow worms.

**Critic:** But **WHY** glow worms? Why does she keep calling them that?

**Practitioner-Researcher:** We don’t want to speak on behalf of Twinkle, she has her own stories – some of which she’s already shown you, but we can speak to why we’ve resonated with that term.

*(they begin rummaging through papers)*

ah yes, here you go Critic *(they push forward two extensively highlighted papers).* Maggie MacLure writes about data that ‘glows’ - data that “seems to reach out...to grasp us” (2013, 228). MacLure has engaged our curiosity since we first met, through her article *The Wonder of Data* (2013). It’s unlikely we would have come to the term glow worms, or to the process of following glow worms without her. In her 2010 paper *The Offence of Theory*, MacLure says particular data pulled at her and her fellow researchers, sparking their wonder. By allowing herself to be *pulled in* by the productive capacity of wonder, new understandings emerged (2010).

Building on MacLure’s arguments, we agree that a sense of wonder is not ‘held’ within data itself, nor is it held within ‘Gael’ waiting to be found. Rather, wonder is created through the relational entanglement between Gael and the unexpected twinklings which sometimes emerge as she tends to the sensations and shimmers surrounding her. These sensations spark curiosity, tug at her attention, produce her and this inquiry in complex, shimmering ways. These shimmering glow worms echo some of what Gendlin recognises about the potential of the felt-sense as a form of emergent data (2004), as a place of wandering...maybe, to play with MacLure too; wonder-ing?
We believe, in responding to Twinkle’s call to follow the glow worms, we’re attempting to follow something close to, but also expanded beyond, Gendlin’s felt-sense and MacLure’s glowing data, towards feeling along with the complex threads of a trauma story as it continues to emerge.

**P-Emmy:** Well, feeling along with what emerges is all well and good, but Gael still has to tell something, she can’t only submit a “glow” for her doctoral research project – she still needs to produce something written and articulated.

**Critic:** Precisely - that’s Writer’s job.

**Trust:** That may be so, but you’re both jumping ahead, focusing, again, on outcome. Rather than asking “how do we translate the glow into a story”, we need to let ourselves listen, and be with the glows in the wild.

**Critic:** Hmmmm. Can’t Gendlin (1981) help us with that? In the psychotherapeutic process of Focusing, he advocates for holding a non-judgemental, inquisitive space. He also offers a detailed framework of six classical steps including: clearing a space; felt sense; handle; resonating; asking; receiving. If you’re drawing on Gendlin, wouldn’t you apply this?

**Practitioner~Researcher:** Great points Critic! We value Gendlin’s work as a way to invite connections with the felt sense, and we’re not against some of the Focusing steps he puts forward, particularly the emphasis on clearing a space, the felt sense and receiving. However, we’ve found the steps Gendlin offers can stifle the complexity of what is emerging by bringing in structure and translation too soon (which isn’t too dissimilar to what you’ve been attempting to do here, in the woodland library).

Gendlin touches on this complication too. In his book on Focusing (1981), he recognises how a set of instructions, like the six steps, offers familiarity and structure which can close off other ways of engaging with the felt-sense. In a talk he gives in 2006, he also says: “the Six Steps are not very good. It would be better to start teaching Focusing from the murky edge, and from welcoming the guests” (2006, 5:46-6:01) as they emerge. We’re more on board with this approach; with welcoming the guests, the glow worms, as they emerge – and remaining curious about where they might lead.

Gail Boldt’s (2020) work supports this. She advocates for working with the non-sensical rhythms which emerge in practice with clients. “Fast and slow, near and far, loud and quiet, hard and soft, chanted, sung, and shouted” Boldt says “these qualities all matter, are all material” (2020, 237), if only we can tune ourselves in, listen, and receive rather than jumping to sense-making.

**Writer:** Eventually, we might figure out how to write these emergent glows, but first we need to let ourselves notice what glows, what emerges...
**P-Emmy: (looking intrigued)** Hmm, interesting. Are you saying we have to take the risk of following something we can’t identify, or structure?

**Critic:** Are you saying we have to wander around, waiting for glowing lights?

**Practitioner~Researcher:** yes! Just like we invite our clients to do in practice, we have to take the risk; the embodied, affective risk of encountering and experiencing relational senses and sensations which are entangled within and beyond ourselves.

**Trust:** Following glow worms is a risky act of resistance. In response to the external dominant pressure(s) to define, and know, where we are going when researching, we are, instead, claiming that glow worms, in their multiplicitous, marginalised, not-quite-explicable-mattering, matter.

**Practitioner~Researcher:** Following their shimmering, relational emergence, matters. Sensing along with them matters. Perhaps responding to them matters, too. We believe they might lead us somewhere, towards something, if only we dare to follow them.

*Critic and P-Emmy exchange glances, before raising their eyes to the pink-and-purple hued sky.*

*Together, they take in a slow, measured breath. Their exhale carries a collective whisper:*

“follow the glow worms”.

*Twinkle takes flight into the dappled sky,*

*as she soars overhead, the trees begin to sprout starry blossoms which sparkle in the ebbing light.*
Heart-felt Interruptions

I’m supposed to be resting, not writing.

This fragment wasn’t even supposed to be here.

Not just here, in this inquiry – but here, in my life.

I never imagined nor pre-empted its existence; and yet it’s here, interrupting.

Interruptions.

They’ve haunted my sleep recently.

Persistently waking me in the nocturnal hours.

Drawing me in with their whispers and glowing lights.

Like the glimpse of blue, I caught this morning.

As I made my way home, to rest.

The blue of a thistle which pricked my fingers as I picked it.

Reminding me, it’s not mine to pick.

In the witching hours of this morning, as I sat in that dark room in A&E with chest pain and shortness of breath, I saw brief glimpses of the lines my heart’s beats make.


Drawn out like a graph on a sheet of paper.
The doctor with the distracted eyes whips away the sheet, the sheet with *my* heart’s beats.

He tells me: “your scan is fine, normal”

Everything is fine. Normal.

So why then does my chest feel like it’s being slowly crushed?

At least that’s the word I offered up to him; the medical professional who deals in symptoms, diagnosis, and cure.

I wish I could’ve told him how the stories I am seeking, and searching through,

are being slowly, yet precariously, stacked atop my chest like a Jenga tower;

the players seemingly unaware my fragile heart is the foundation on which their tower is balanced.

In the witching hours of this morning, as I sat in that dark room in A&E with my chest pain and shortness of breath, I watched as my crimson blood was drawn away from its intended journey,

back towards my heart, and directed, instead, into a tube.

To be tested. Interrogated for information.

It’s 7:10am, almost time for the change in shift. My doctor returns, looking weary, and tells me:

“The tests came back, and all looks clear. You’re good to go”

All looks clear. You’re good to go.

If all looks clear, why can I *still* not catch my breath?

If I’m good to go, why can I not trust in my heart to tolerate where I’m going?
I’m a psychotherapist, not that the doctor ever asked.

I knew how to regulate my breathing when I woke up at 2:30 this morning.

I knew the desperate ache in my chest could be a panic attack.

I knew I’d been experiencing stress lately and sleepless nights.

I knew how I was supposed to settle my jangled nervous system.

Often though, “we know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 1966, 4)

I remained calm, strangely calm, and sat with my body as it spiralled.

It wouldn’t, couldn’t, settle.

The pain persisted; branching off from the centre of my chest and spreading like treacle into my left shoulder, and down to my wrist, bringing with it waves of nausea.

Waves that lead me to dial 111, and eventually, shamefully, to my local A&E.

Everything is fine. Normal.

All looks clear. You’re good to go.

= 

My heart isn’t under attack nor arrest, at least not by your tests.

But your tests speak a different language.

They don’t tell you how I lost faith in my heart when it fell for someone it shouldn’t;
they don’t tell you how it was conditioned, early in life (Rogers 1959), to silence its sensitivities in order to soothe the discomfort of others;
they don’t tell you of the trauma stories who haunt its chambers,
or how much it aches to share this research journey with Grandpa.
Your tests won’t tell you how my body has been screaming in strange, strained, and pained ways.

Warning, like an alarm bell (Levine 1997), of the horrors I am journeying toward.

They don’t tell you how afraid I am; of following what I fear lies ahead.

They tell you, and you tell me:

Everything is fine. Normal.
All looks clear. You’re good to go.

And I’m supposed to feel reassured by this; like my heart is not at risk.

But your ‘all clear’ tests, conflict with my persisting pain,
telling me, something I’ve been trying to avoid:

my heart is at risk,

by scholarship which, like the light of a female glow worm,
both lures it in and breaks it (Behar 1997).

A morbid wish emerges;

I wish your tests did have something to tell,
I wish you’d outline the remedy; my route to recovery.
I wish I could pop a pill,

“avoid the [emotional] labour of exploring” my aching heart (Leader 2009, 17).

And, while I know, theoretically, this is a clash of conflicting onto-epistemological beliefs:

The medicalised, positivist knowing which separates bodies from mind, spirit, and emotions to achieve over-arching objectivity.
Where the accompanying promise of recovery is a god-trick, reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies (Haraway 1988, Totton 2015).
which trickle down, to present psychotherapists as modern-day fairy god mothers with quick-fix solutions to bolster our capitalist societies (Lemma-Wright 1995).

Vs

The experiential, embodied *relating*
where human bodies, with their sensations and multiplicitous states of arousal, awareness and experiencing, are recognised as places of knowledge and communication (Estés 1992) which have the ability to transport us to stories and memories – the experiencing, telling, and witnessing of which can help trauma survivors to recover (Herman 1997, Levine 2010, Van der Kolk 2014).

Vs

Entangled, emergent, becoming and bodying (Haraway 1991, Manning 2013) where things, and bodies, are *always* in relational becoming; co-becoming with the world they move in, and with, and through (Manning 2013), in continually reverberating ways.

Where the shape and world of my ‘body’, and ‘trauma’ (Johnson 2021) shifts. Folding and unfolding beyond my body as symptom, as alarm bell, as broken; towards my body *interrupted*; towards my body-in-relation (Manning 2006); towards my body *relating with* the body of machines to create a body of lines, becoming language for translation, deconstruction, divide...

...towards my body, returning home, reaching out toward another body – the body of the thistle – which draws my blood as I draw its life.

_What I don’t know is where, or even if I dare to go on from here..._

With my splintered heart, shaky breath, pricked fingers, and wilting thistle – the risks, in writing, in following glow worms, in feeling along with and beyond my body – with the bodies entangled with mine, and this inquiry - are mounting.

Who gets out of this with their heart in-tact?

Who gets out of this alive?

After all, glow worm larvae are predatory (Trusts n.d.)  ~.~.
For some time, we appear to come together.

Even Critic seems excited and committed to following glow worms.

Anticipation fizzes in the air – a sense of this is going somewhere!

We – Writer, Trust, Critic, P-Emmy, Practitioner, and Researcher - begin searching.

With no sign of Little Girl or Twinkle, we decide to go on a glow worm hunt.

Critic brings along Twinkle’s sparkly fishing rod.

P-Emmy comes equipped with all manner of adventure items; she gives her torch to Trust.

On dry evenings in June and July (Trusts n.d.), best, Researcher’s been told, for glow-worm-sightings,

we keep our eyes peeled for twinkling lights.

We call upon glow worms to show up, whispering a chant under our breath;

“We’re going on a glow worm hunt, we’re going to catch a big one, and we’re not scared...”13

“We’re not scared” snags and falters in our throats.

Still, we carry on hunting.

13 Inspired by my childhood memories of Michael Rosen’s book; We’re Going on a Bear Hunt.
Despite clear skies and the warmth of a mid-summer’s evening, there are no glowing lights.

No twinkles.
No calls or tugs.
Nothing shimmers or connects.

We’re met with silence.

It’s as if all the glow worms have fizzled out.

This silence carries on for days.
Days become weeks.
Weeks begin to fold into months.
The feeling, finding, following has stalled, and we begin to panic.

Critic: this is taking too long; we can’t just keep hoping for flickers to emerge and light our way. I’m tired of fumbling around in the dark. You said if we “waited for the calls, listened out for them” then something would happen, but there’s nothing.

P-Emmy: The clock is ticking. We are running out of time. Deadlines loom. Our supervisor becomes increasingly impatient. We’re panicking too...

Critic: What if glow worms were just make believe? A nice story Writer made up. What if there are no glowing lights to follow?

These remarks stir up discomfort, fuelling flickers of insecurity.
I, Writer, gnaw on the inside of my lips. Twirl a pencil distractedly between my fingers.

I tell myself that reading will shift this funk.
I tell myself I have to shift this funk.

Researcher, joining me, flicks through some of her neatly-made notes.
Researcher: Look here (she finds some notes titled “Glow Worms in the Wild”): glow worms, like many natural creatures living alongside humans, face continuing habitat destruction and fragmentation (Trusts 2020). Artificial light, in particular, can impact significantly on glow worms: the bright glare prompting females to switch off (or never switch on) their luminescence (Trusts 2020).

Hmm, like tourists with their smart-devices who seek to capture the radiating light of glow worms, and in doing so unintentionally damage their habitat, it may be we’re attempting to shine too bright a light on glow worms.

Perhaps we are drowning out their desire to emerge through our desire to find them.

Practitioner: (thoughtfully) Perhaps our intention to follow shifted – subtly, but significantly, into a forcing – a hunting? Perhaps the glow worms fear we’ll entrap them in research and structure; perhaps they feel pressured to be something other than what they are? Perhaps our collective seeking has unwittingly snuffed out their lights?

Researcher: (absorbed in her pink notebook) Marker (2008) talks about this. He considers how the inquisitive white researcher - seeking to understand indigenous knowledge through an unacknowledged white lens - unwittingly appropriates such knowledge for their own gain. This, Marker says, forces indigenous ways of knowing to fit within western frameworks.

Maybe we’re repeating something similar with glow worms? Colonising them, hunting them down to produce knowledge we can sell to the academy. Knowledge which might buy us a revered, and seemingly impossible, place within the hallowed halls of academia (Marker 2008).

Trust: (turning angrily to Critic) this must be your doing. First you had to be convinced to take glow worms seriously, once we manage that, you attempt to appropriate them – coming in here with a fishing rod you stole from Twinkle. A fishing rod you haven’t bothered to understand or considered seeking permission from its owner to even hold.

Critic: (retorting with anger) I’m getting sick of your accusations, Trust. You fail to see how your treatment of me is hypocritical: you continually shut me down in your privileging of parts you see as marginalised. Have you considered it might have been your obsessive focus on finding glow worms that made us feel like we had to hunt them down for fear of disappointing you. If you want to throw blame and shame around for why the lights went out, remember you’re the one shining the torch.

Tension crackles between Trust and Critic and accusations fly as they each attempt to assign responsibility for why the shift from following to hunting, happened.
Practitioner, Researcher, P-Emmy and me – weary with their persistent conflicts, and much more curious about the elusiveness of the glow worms’ luminescence agree to meet in the Woodland Library in the morning. Even if we can’t find a light, we hope perhaps we might build our own map with the help of the stories who live there; something to orient us in the dark.

I smell it before I see it; a charred bitterness hangs in the air and irritates the back of my throat. As the woodland comes into view, I see wisps of smoke swirling in puffs above the treetops. An orange, hazy glow catches my eye and I hear an unmistakable crackle.
Fire.

The woodland library is burning.

Small fires are licking at the pages of the trees.

Stories who shelter here, who found a home here, are scorched and singed.

Putting my palms to the blackened earth, I’m told a story...

~.

At dawn, while the rest of us were sleeping, Trust and Critic squared off in the woodland library.

Arming themselves with theoretical warfare, they hurled accusations against one another.

Trust accuses Critic of forcing the process into a hunting with stolen goods. She says Critic is seeking to appropriate glow worm sensings and sensations for her own gain.

Critic accuses Trust of stifling the process with her high expectations, moral high-ground, and obsessive fixation with “giving voice” to particular parts. She says Trust has shone too-bright-a-light on glow worms and disrupted the very process she claimed to protect.

Both are enraged and fierce.

Both are determined to have their argument accepted by the Other.

They didn’t intend to set fires.

They didn’t want to hurt the stories, or the woods,

but the sizzling tension between them is so evocatively charged, it carries sparks;

these sparks settle upon the stories sheltering in the woodland, catching alight.

~.

The war in the folds of this fragment is between Trust and Critic, but it’s not only their war.

It’s a war which rages with and beyond me; where the collective fans the flames of the personal,

just as the personal fans the flames of the collective.

It’s a war which rages in political realms:

between right and left;

Between western patriarchal capitalist societies and what they label as “the rest”;

Between humans and the natural world we live in.
It’s a war I’ve been attempting to circumnavigate for months.
I thought I could avoid it if I held space for everyone’s story.
I see, now, this doesn’t always mean keeping the peace.

Despite my best intentions, my peace-making position, my attitude of “multidirectional partiality” (Mearns 2002, 18), where I attempted to hold open dialogue and nurture accepting relationships, war has emerged, in and beyond the woodlands.

Later, Karen will gently remind me: “our ways of relating do not follow from previously formed intentions but emerge in assemblages” (Serra Undurraga 2022, 1).
But for now, I sit and watch the stories burn.

Something is breaking, rupturing, dying.
I stop trying to save it.

Something is also shifting, becoming, emerging.

~ ~ ~ ~

This fragment, like the one before and the two who follow¹⁴ is, amongst other things, about ethics; the ethical implications of attempting to follow glow worms. To put it another way the always shifting ethical implications of relationally-entangled researching, which, like any relationship, is risky, uncertain, and can lead – despite our best intentions, to conflict, anguish, cuts, and scars.

_________________________

¹⁴ It’s important to say these four fragments didn’t emerge in the linear, narrative order they imply in this thesis-structure, instead they emerged somewhat concurrently during several months of murky misunderstandings. My encounters with a thistle, scorched and stark pages, and a snowflake, produced stuttered, staccato-ed writing, which eventually, became these four fragments. This accompanying reflective exploration of ethics emerged later, in the aftermath and with the support of Karen’s (Serra Undurraga 2022) concept of performative-meta-reflexivity.
Nursing my singed soul and stories, I turn to Jonathan for comfort. Walking with his words, I realise how the kicking-up-against-one-another dynamics between Trust and Critic constrain me, constrain this inquiry, “constrain us” (Wyatt, 2019, 136). On the surface, Trust and Critic represent a binary; two opposing sides. Upon closer inspection, their arguments merge to share an underlying assumption: both of them seem to believe glow worms – and trauma stories - lack agency, and lives of their own, and are, instead, at the mercy of my writing tools, researcher’s notes, Critic’s scepticism, Trust’s expectations, and our collective seeking of a doctorate. This underlying assumption implies a common binary in research – is it ethical or not? In this light, glow worms are cast (as Critic points out), as the vulnerable Other requiring protection through a governable, critically distant, ethical approach.

Assuming this approach with glow worms, and with my selves, is an exhausting and futile task. It was relieving to stop trying to circumnavigate conflict and let the fires burn. It was also sad, producing injuries and losses I’m not sure can be repaired. It was also expansive, the decision to sit and watch the stories burn moved us beyond the binary, creating a space where stories and ontologies don’t have to verse one another towards victory, but rather can be followed, “seen, witnessed, in all their fullness, complexity and nuance” (Wyatt 2019, 142). It was also (eventually) generative15.

It feels important to write this, to burst the sometimes-stifling bubble of being “ethical or not” that can be enforced by the soulless academic machine (Pelias 2004) as it seeks out fact and certainty.

While I recognise the value and importance of ethical review boards in research, and professional bodies in counselling and psychotherapy, I also resent them. I resent the rigid roles they cast me, as researcher and practitioner, and clients, or research participants, and data, in. In practice, I’ve been inspired by Nick Totton’s (Totton 2011a) advocation for ‘Wild Therapy’ – a therapeutic practice which embraces the complicated wild terrains inherent in being-in-relationship within our human and more-than-human ecosystems. In research, I’ve been inspired by Jonathan (Wyatt 2019) to expand beyond the binary of ethical or not towards an unfurling creative-relational ethics which continually emerges from moment to moment. This unfurling creative-relational ethics is entangled with my reading of Jonathan Wyatt (2019), Karen Serra Undurraga (2022), and particularly Donna Haraway (1988; 2016) who says we need to respond in situated ways rather than imposing ready-made, defined-in-advance frameworks. Haraway’s (2016) concept of response-ability advocates for accountability and

15 As witnessed and explored in Becoming Snowflakes.
responsiveness between humans and non-humans: by “cultivating collective knowing and doing” (34), “sympoiesis (making-with)” (58). My emerging adoption of unfurling creative-relational ethics values moments of relational affective encountering, gestures of creative becoming, and a symbiotic responsiveness to these encounters and becomings.

I don’t want to pretend to you, or my ethical review board, this approach makes following glow worms safer. Nor do I want to claim there won’t be casualties along the way, there already has been… but this approach makes space for these risks and casualties to matter, to become a fragment in this multi-layered story.

For example, in heart-felt interruptions, when my heart falters, and panic strikes, my grappling with the enormity of this research becomes part of the story, as does my plucking of the thistle’s life. I don’t (only) continue with my achy-breaky-heart because I believe scholarship which “doesn’t break your heart, just isn’t worth doing anymore” (Behar 1997, 143), but because I believe scholarship which holds space for your heart to break, and the loss of a thistle’s life to be seen, witnessed, related-with matters, is worth doing, produces affective understandings and response-abilities which take us further…closer to what Pelias (2004) describes as research of the heart; that is research which produces “empathic connection” (7) with what it means to be fully human within the academy, and I argue, what it means to be fully relating-with the human and non-humans this following of glow worms entangles and produces with.
I am the stark blank page.
Numb.

Colourless.

Silent.

Empty.

Depleted.

Barren.

Two-dimensional.

Lifeless.

Perhaps it's not that the glow worms have fizzled out...

Perhaps it is me, who is fizzling out...
As the long golden days of summer tick by, heavy blankness sticks around, and sinks in.

I try walking in nature to spark something.

I walk well-worn paths in Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. Previously, these paths offered comfort, inspiration, hope, twinkling emergences. But today they are quiet, lifeless, blank.

Except they’re not.

They’re bustling with people and birdsong. I see flashes of orange against rich emerald backdrops. I notice delicate purple petals strewn around the roots of a tree. I see butterflies flutter between blossoms, and children delight in sprinkles from standing hosepipes.

I see signs of life, lustre, vitality, but all I feel is stark empty silence; the blankness of a stale page.

We – my partner and me, weathering a rut in our relationship – go on a camping holiday to the Outer Hebrides. I sit alone at a beach in Vatersay – a tiny idyllic island with crystal clear waters that, if it weren’t for the biting Scottish wind, could fool me into thinking I was in Australia. I watch the unique-to-these-islands ‘machair’. Dainty yet robust wildflowers, dancing in the Hebridean winds. I listen out for a tug; a call - willing them to glow, to become glow worms.

The blue trumpets shake,

petals of yellow and white sway.

But there are no calls, no glows.

The machair feel more robust than me; more able to withstand fierce gusts,

and somehow, more feminine too...

Tears weave their way down my face, the tracks they leave quickly dried by the wind, leaving no trace.

June and July became August and September.

I watch the vibrant colours of October gradually decay.

Still, I’m faced with the bleakness of the stark blank page.
How am I supposed to write, produce, create when glow worms have gone into hiding? How am I supposed to write, produce, create when I, myself, am as stark, and blank, as a page? How am I supposed to write, produce, create when I’ve lost the desire to live? Especially if my writing is created from my capacity to feel; from my affective, embodied, experience...

What happens to writing, creativity, life, when you’re lost without a map, or light? When you’re alone with the stark blank page.
It’s twenty-past-three in the afternoon on a damp December day. The starkness of the page feels as bleak and persistent as the winter weather outside, and as desolate as the landscape within: like Silver in Winterson’s (2004) novel ‘Lighthousekeeping’, I feel as though “there [are] two Atlantics; one outside [...] and one inside me. The one inside me [has] no string of guiding lights” (21).
These pages are no longer blank.

Type-strokes emerged,

Became words;

Morphed into sentences;

produced narrative(s) (Speedy 2008) which, in turn, become an escape route - offering language to an experience that felt, at the time of living it, un-narratable. Un-languageable.

The presence of language, the materiality of these words, offers some respite; bringing life, story, substance to the bleak desolation. This emergence “permits movement”, and “bears weight” (White 2016, 124); breathing some life into the void.

I remember what Laurel (Richardson 1997) has told me about writing: how words, writing, brings life, substance, sustenance to my world - offering momentum, possibility, relationship. I remember Jonathan too, who introduced me to Laurel. He describes writing as “the movement we make towards the other and towards the world” (Wyatt 2019, 19). I let myself relish these miniature movements, the curves and squiggles my pencil makes.

I welcome writing’s return, it brings possibility, relief, an exhale.

.~

.~.

Perhaps this liveliness, this sense of spirit, of sustenance, is why, as trauma survivor, I so desperately seek words, sentences, stories. Maybe the tantalising promise of telling my trauma story isn’t only tied to the possibility of recovery and re-integration (Herman 1997), of making sense of my self/selves (Brison 2002), but perhaps it is also the sense of aliveness I feel when words come, when language forms, when I can put type-strokes and story to something.

With writing, I’m no longer the stark blank page. No longer bleak, numb, deplete, barren.

Writing gives me life. Like they did for Manning (2019a), in ‘The Perfect Mango’, words temper the temptation of ending it all.

Suddenly, I have hope.

Suddenly, there are possibilities.

Suddenly, I feel alive, I want to live.
And yet,

And yet...

these type-strokes, this coming together of sentences, the emergence of story on these pages is complicated, because their presence is at odds with my experience where no words came...

As relieved as some parts of me feel, others are worried these words offer (re)assurances that:

- I shifted the funk;
- my discomfort, my wish *not to live* subsided;
- I *recovered* a stable sense of self, a purpose for living.

These parts feel words are a smokescreen; putting distance between me, you, and the evocative intensity of the stark blank page.

These parts worry that somehow these words rescue other parts of me, and perhaps parts of you from something they themselves haven’t been, perhaps can’t be, rescued from.

These parts let me, Writer, know they can let this slide, for the purpose of *this* story, for what this fragment is attempting to tell with both type-strokes and blank spaces. But they ask me to remember them. They ask you remember them.

Remember the parts who do not have words, language, eloquent type-strokes to fill the void of the stark blank page. Who don’t have smudges of yellow, handfuls of glitter, letters in Grandpa’s scrawl.

Remember the parts who *are* the stark blank page.

They’re here too.

And so, the stark blank page is no longer just a stark blank page. Just like I cannot be simultaneously inside my-selves experiencing, and beside my-selves noticing (Tamas 2009b), writing, forming stories...

This inevitable gap between my “personal experience and its narration can be troubling” (Bondi 2013, 9); I am both troubled by it and motivated to trouble it.

It takes me somewhere...

Perhaps it wasn’t that I *couldn’t* write.

Perhaps it was something more like I *wouldn’t* bring myself to *writing*...
Turning to Fewell (2015) and Alexander (2015) who both explore how unspeakable stories get passed down generationally, within families, my silence could also be understood as something familial; a personal pattern learnt from generations before me where elusive stories of trauma are smothered with a blanket of silence.

I’m thinking of Grandpa here; how he struggled to speak into his story of D-Day. Eventually, he turned to writing, but found the story came in “blurry pieces” with lots of “gaps”. I’m thinking, also, of my Granny – his wife – who never spoke of her experience of being the only family member to be evacuated from London during the war. I’m thinking of the connections I’ve made on her behalf, between that experience and her “tumultuous mental health” including diagnoses ranging from “extreme schizophrenia” to “manic depressive disorder” – the details of which remained silent and unacknowledged within our small family network, until she was admitted to hospital when I was sixteen. I’m thinking of their daughter, my mother, too; how she remains silent or requests silence when difficult topics enter her atmosphere. We don’t talk about how she nearly died when I was five, or how I nearly died when she was fifty. Generationally, patterns of silence, of feeling unable to find the words to tell, emerge.

Following this generational thread, it feels as if producing no narrative at all helps to avoid inconsistencies, and blank-out the discomfort trauma stirs up. I wonder if the prospect of clapping loudly into long-overlooked spaces through an autoethnographic approach (Murray 2021) raised the stakes and prompted familial shadows to snuff out the delicate lights. Perhaps the “good daughter” part of me, still seeking my mother’s affection, stifled the glow worms into silence in the hopes of securing our family’s safety and avoiding risk. Arguably this is still an ethically violent move, grounded in the history of colonial violence (Morgan 2021) that precedes me. Parts of me continue to white-out anything other than knowledge which feels acceptable to the dominant narratives I, in my white, middle-class position, reap privileges from. Perhaps my silence seeks to secure the safety and survival of long-established familial traditions. *Whose silence, and whose secrets, am I keeping?*

~.~.

There is *more* to this story...
Relationally intertwined as I am, writing personal stories inevitably includes others (Butler 2001, Tamas 2011b, Adams 2016, Wyatt 2019) and in this adventure, these others include my family members; Grandpa, Granny, Mum, Dad, Brother, Aunt. As well as partners - past and present – friends, supervisors, confidantes. As well as trees, thistles, sand, water – and many more. In my ethics application I positioned this as multi-ethnographic, entangled (Barad 2007) inquiry involving multiple others in unexpected relational encounters. I queried how I could possibly seek informed consent, ensure safety, and mitigate harm when the research itself follows what emerges in unexpected and moment-to-moment encounters. I explained the co-implicated, continually becoming presence of Others in my inquiry mattered, and my sensings along with those encounters matters. As Jonathan says: attending to “what we can touch, as they pass, of the pulses and flows of becoming’s speed and affects. What do we sense in these encounters? That’s where ‘real’ lies” (Wyatt 2019, 142).

The ethical review board were disinterested in my extensive arguments of these living, impactful, others. They re-categorised my research as ‘level 1’, as an autoethnography “that does not identify any living participants”.

How can I be sure I’ve treated the others in this adventure, ethically? I cannot, I am not sure. Like Sophie (2011b), I know there are stories in this thesis which may impact and hurt others. But I have chosen to write (some of them) anyway.

The arrival and extended-stay of the Stark Blank Page, as well as the palpitations of Heart-Felt Interruptions and the evocative affects in Becoming Gold Dust and Becoming Dandelions go some way towards communicating the risks of both following (and not following) stories. They grapple with the stories who both demand to be told and choose to remain untold (Wyatt 2019). They grapple, in the background, with how the others in these stories would feel, and what the naming (or not) of them risks and creates (Wyatt 2019, Tamas 2011b).

There is more to this story...

Parts of me dug their heels in – not always to be complicit in silence, but because they sensed putting pen to paper would move me from their place of experiencing to a place of reflexivity. These parts of me couldn’t bear the prospect of that loss (Bondi 2013); they didn’t want to remain “lost and speechless” in the shadows while other parts produced a tale which makes it sound like I “have it all worked out” (Tamas 2009, paragraph 10) – after all, “we both know that citing theory can sometimes be a way of hiding, when you’ve got nothing to say” (Tamas 2020, 1.19-1.24), or you’re afraid you’ve got nothing to say, or you’ve got something else to say but can’t find the words to say it...
These parts needed me to feel the desolate lifelessness of the stark blank page. They needed me (and you) to be affected by it, to feel along with them. To get a sense of what happens when you choose not to hide with theory, and instead you stay with the desolation of the stark blank page.

There is still more to this story...

Other parts of me didn’t want to make a movement towards. They needed to stay away from writing’s gestures and the liveliness it brings. Exhausted by the current intensity of change these parts wanted to hunker down and press pause. For these parts, the movement of this adventure was uncomfortable; it asked me to clap loudly into spaces which were keeping me stuck, silent, stifled. Sometimes stuckness, in its familiarity is more welcome than the mystery of where we might move to, and what, or who, we might lose along the way (Lemma-Wright 1995).

These parts of my were also depleted by the wider context of a pandemic-ravaged world, in the prologue of a war, edging closer to the point-of-no-return in a climate crisis. They felt like giving up my research process, my living process.

Perhaps the silences I’ve recently encountered weren’t as simple as glow worms going into hiding or fizzling out. Nor were they as simple as the stark blank page being seemingly external to me...

no, the bleakness was also within me, of me; I was also fizzling out,
white-ing out,
frozen in the mist of summer,
bleak, white, vacant.

Like a stark blank page,
Like a lifeless doll,
I had run out of words, of hope, of a desire to live.

~

Sophie (2020, 4.43) steps in: “if it’s too soon for writing to be any use, just stew in your own juice”

She gives me permission to fizzle out, to pause, to become the stark blank page.
December dissolved into January, as it so often does, and a new year presents itself.

I’ve still not found the words that became the storied fragment of *Stark Blank Page*, nor any glowing lights to follow.

I’m sat at my kitchen table with the blank page, a pencil which needs sharpening, some unopened post, a pair of scissors, and a wilting plant.

Sunlight streams in through the window to my right, I watch it make dappled patterns across the grey and white tablecloth. It lands on the silver edges of the scissors, lighting them up so they scatter glares of light onto the white walls surrounding me.

The silver edges gleam in the light, accentuating the sharp angle of the blade.

The scissors don’t shy away from the light.

The light doesn’t shy away from the scissors.

Neither seems afraid of showing the scissors’ sharper sides;

the sides of them that pierce, cut, cast glares, create.

I watch the light and scissors co-create a flicker of *something*, a little chink.

I make a fold in the paper. I reach for the scissors and make a cut. I try folding, then unfolding.

*Is this the way? I can’t quite remember.*


Turning.

Cutting.

Turning.

Piercing.

Cutting.

Piercing.

Cutting.
Turning.
Cutting.
Cutting.

Turning.

Unfolding.

Re-folding.

Cutting.

Unfolding.

Unfolding.

Unfolding.

Unfolding.

No longer a stark blank page, but a page with chinks, where scissors and light, pierce through.

No longer a stark blank page, but a snowflake.

A snowflake in the mist of sunshine.
Scissors, paper, light and me come together to create again.
The holes taking us somewhere new; towards snowflakes and spaciousness,
Offering shape and substance to something previously deadened, frozen, lifeless.
The story becomes the holes, and the spaces-between.

I’m transported to Grandpa; in a letter from 2005 he tells me:

“and that is the last thing I can remember. My mind must have shut down.
The next three weeks are just a blur, a dense fog with nothing clearly remembered.
I have no remembrance of where I spent D-Day night, nor do I recall how I got back
to England. I sometimes wonder about those lost three weeks. I thought perhaps
the memory would come back, but it never has”

He often wondered with his memory blanks; the gaps becoming a prominent feature of his story, tying
together the before and after of his D-Day. These rememberings transport me to Stacy Holman-Jones
and the “before and after the hyphen” (2020, 118) of creative-relational inquiry. With Stacy, I realise
Grandpa’s (and my) memory gaps, and the chinks I’ve made in the blanket of the stark blank page
represent a process of becoming; of “looking for what we don’t yet know” – like the hyphen, like the
cuts in the page, our memory gaps are a productive force of tension which can take us somewhere
(Holman-Jones 2020, 118).

Grandpa’s acknowledgement of the gaps, his wondering/wandering with the gaps recognises the
presence of something: something lost, in that it was inarticulable and yet still found, in the experience
of the gap, the experience of something felt even if not known – perhaps purposefully left unknown, un-languagable, so, like the Stark Blank Page, it can be felt without having to be known.

These gaps, cuts, and chinks, offer me a route in to wondering (and wandering) with the gaps and the space-between. They become productive routes for wonder(ing), places to play and create, to move and be moved, to “open things up and to ask questions” (Holman-Jones 2020, 116) – giving space, “giving voice to what was impermissible” (Wyatt 2019, 21), when the page was a stark white blanket.

Little Girl emerges quietly.

Sitting amongst the fragments of paper ‘leftover’ from the snowflake-creating, she begins to tear them into even smaller shards.

Twinkle shimmers excitedly onto the scene, joining Little Girl.

They shred together, and begin to sing:

“Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering,
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in”16

Gathering the shreds into their hands, they blow on them, creating snow showers.

Watching them play in the shreds of paper, creating snow, celebrating what gets produced and what gets left behind, I realise glow worms, as well as Twinkle and Little Girl aren’t powerless, but have multiplicitous agency.

I realise, the bleakness of the stark blank page, the loss of twinkling lights, was a glow worm too – allowing me to sit with uncertainty, frustration, lostness. Stacy Holman-Jones invites me to consider how that bleakness, the fizzling out depletion of the stark blank page, became part of making space, was a necessary precursor to this snowflake-creating. The precursor to creating, Stacy says, is “marked by waiting. By boredom and stillness. By space and silence” (2020, 116).

I can see, now, the silence and stillness of the blank page, eventually saw me reach for the scissors; moving with the tension of the blankness and the desolate absence of stories, and sensings, I made

16 Extract of lyrics from Leonard Cohen’s “Anthem”, which Little Girl and Twinkle came to know through comments offered by Fiona in earlier iterations of this fragment.
cuts. These cuts tear down the suffocating blanket of the page, creating chinks for the light to get in and travel somewhere new.

Perhaps the destruction in Scorched Earth holds echoes of this too: perhaps the stories in the woodland library weren’t only innocent passive subjects attacked by the combative energy between Trust and Critic, but perhaps those stories were, as Phillips and Bunda (2020) suggest – pushing back from the margins– refusing to be used by Trust and Critic. Holding space for this expanded ethical possibility, new wonderings emerge: what if the lights going out, and the fire in the woodland library were glow worm acts of resistance?

Phillips and Bunda (2020) explain how stories have agency of their own, and ‘push back’ against oppressive and exclusionary metanarratives. This re-claiming of story-agency places what constitutes ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ in a broader context – a context which values land and landscape, stories, sensation, and ancestral spirit. This work is formed through Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and Indigenous approaches, where knowledge is intrinsically linked to Country and co-produces the stories humans tell (Bird Rose 2002). I welcome this approach to knowledge. I, like Manning, “want to live at the interstices where black life and indigenous life and neurodiverse life and all ways of living that invent ways of encountering the force of what living can be are celebrated” (Manning 2019a, 15). I want this thesis-thing to celebrate these forces, in their complex multiplicity.

MacLure (2008), responding to my curiosity about glow worm agency when it comes to the silence of the stark blank page, tells me “voice always evades capture” (98). She acknowledges that voice and personal accounts are both “too much and never enough” (97). However, “rather than trying to repair or deny these necessary insufficiencies, we need methodologies that are capable of dwelling on, and in, those very properties of voice that make it such troublesome material for research” (97). Her advocacy for methodologies that dwell with inconsistencies and blank spaces encourages me to recognise the disjointed fragments of conflicted, lost writing as part of the research process; part of the story. Rather than seeking sincerity, authenticity, and integration she suggests I adopt “a poetics of insufficiency” (97), where I acknowledge the inherent complications with voice, storying, and testimony, and allow for different voices, narratives, glow worms to emerge, interrupt, exist, complicate and haunt the writing I produce.

MacLure acknowledges how difficult this can be. She says:

“Qualitative research still tends to prefer a ‘poetics of sincerity’ (MacLure, 2003:139) that produces innocent voices that speak a familiar script of revelation, redemption or triumph, in tones that lack idiom and surprise...” (98).
I would argue it isn’t only qualitative research that espouses the sincere and authentic when it comes to personal experiential stories, but also wider society. The #MeToo movement is characterised by the sharing of narratives of sexual assault and trauma (Nicholls 2021) which follow similar scripts of pain and redemption through courageous revelation. The emphasis behind the sharing of such stories seems to focus on reporting statistics of sexual and gendered violence; on holding the Other (and the systems enabling Others) accountable, taking them to justice. Personal stories of D-Day and World War Two tread similar lines; offering up tales of triumph, heroism, and victory over evil. In both scenes, villains and perpetrators are created and enshrined as the abject Other (Spivak 1998, Kristeva and Roudiez 1982), to be defeated.

I do not want to discredit the insight such personal stories have given into the lived experiences of war and sexual assault. These stories generate conversations, shift political realms, offer connection and community. That being said, I find the apparent thirst for such stories to be told and to be coherently narrated and neatly tied together in a satisfying bow at the end, troubling. Something gets lost in this, something MacLure describes as “the irreparably split nature of the self and the broken voices in which it speaks” (2008, 98).

Freya Johnson (2021) takes my understanding of this further. She advocates for making space for trauma to be “affectively labile” to “welcome sensations” which move beyond the “pathologized in clinical and therapeutic work”, to embrace “the inconsistencies and oddities” in our experiences (34)....she’s got me wondering - perhaps we, collectively - won’t symbolise experiences of trauma explicitly. Perhaps the expectation of a coherent explicit narrative is, in itself, traumatic. Perhaps the expectation of telling in order to capture villains, is, in itself, a repetition of violence...

I hope this adventure might offer something different: a space for trauma stories to be fragmented, affective, agents, containing often contradictory sensations, told with multiple voices, and places.

I hope I can hold space for selves and stories to be made up of cuts and blank spaces, glimmers and triggers, chinks where the lights floods in, and blankets of snow where silence resides.

I hope there is enough freedom for my selves and stories to shine and combust, fade and regenerate, so they can unfold from the blanket of a stark page, to become snowflakes, and then snow showers.

This hopeful approach doesn’t level the playing field of social and cultural permeations (both within and beyond this body-of-work), but it holds space for the power and agency of multiple voices, narratives, forces to interact, co-produce, and become. It allows for my selves and others to be “co-implicated and entangled” (Wyatt 2019, 143), and encourages me to take response-ability (Haraway 2016), “of the decisions, the ‘cuts’, [l] make in bringing them to the page” (Wyatt 2019, 143).
It also troubles the notion that there is an I somewhere in the midst of all this who directs, who is calling the shots and producing the show. An I, a self who Schwartz might describe as coherent and centred, calm, courageous, and in control – the conductor or the orchestra (Schwartz 1995). I feel compelled to trouble this idealised Self with a capital S. I’m troubled by its neatness and coherence, and what it represents in terms of recovery, wellness, integration, and individuation.

I no longer want to chase after this idealised I, or an idealised Story with a capital ‘S’, instead I want to open up spaces, little chinks, where the light gets in. Spaces which accept the messy incoherence of insufficiency, of paradox and contradiction, within selves and stories.

These spaces, I believe, make room, not only for the emergence of my multiple parts and of multiple stories, but also for glow worm agency: opening up the possibility that their lights may emerge and fade at their will or, more aptly, through a co-created entanglement between us.

In the natural world, scientists are unclear about what makes glow worm lights go out intermittently during their larval stage; there are hypotheses which suggest their glow responds to the vibrations and resonances around them (Tyler 1994). This extends the Baradian idea of entangled relationality (Barad 2007). I welcome this; the possibility that glow worms and me could ensnare, disorient, interrupt, excite, nurture, and produce one another in ways that, for me, resonate with the affective, emergent, sensings of creative-relational inquiry where relationships create something ample and expansive, shifting and unknown, affective and intensive (Holman-Jones 2020).

As I’ve been writing,

Twinkle and Little Girl have continued gathering together the shreds of their snow showers,
creating snowballs,
The snowballs gather traction and begin to roll off the table, out of the room, out of sight.
One Saturday morning, Twinkle pulls my weary body out of bed, begging me to take her to an arts and crafts shop. This academic year, overshadowed by Covid, has been a long slog, but I’ve ticked off the boxes expected of me, so I play along, taking Twinkle to the shop, where she takes flight:

*The bag of fluffy, multicoloured, pompoms? YES got to have those!*
*How about this bag of wooden shapes? NOPE, they’re bland and boooooring.*
*But these sheets of green felt are a MUST have. So soft and cosy, like moss.*

**GLITTER! GLITTER! GLITTER!**

*(she throws five different biodegradable glitter colours into the basket; I tell her she has to choose two. She ums and ahhs for what feels like an eternity, and settles on gold and pink)*

**PIPE CLEANERS she shouts with glee. AND STREAMERS.**

And then, just as we’re about to pay (having reached the budget limit we agreed beforehand) a bottle of bubbles catches her eye.

*She’s torn. She wants the bubbles, but who to lose from the basket?*

*She’s cutthroat this time, decisive, eager for her treasures:*

*She returns the pink glitter in exchange for a pink bottle of bubbles.*

*That afternoon, she gets to work: cutting, creating, sticking, folding, gluing, and glittering.*

*Her gestures are playful, unconstrained.*

*I don’t know where they’re leading. I don’t need to.*

*The material takes flight, coming together to form something meaningful.*

*I watch as a felt-green-sort-of-book emerges with the letters “GW” inscribed in gold glitter.*

*“It’s a Glow Worm Home” Twinkle says with glee. “A place, a space, for them”*
In the aftermath of an unexpected break-up and a series of fretful nights, writing pours out of me, and *Glow Worm Guide* stutters into being.

I realise this thesis-thing needs to be more than words on a screen in order to tend to my glow worms in their multitudes and complexities, their sensations and substance.

I want to offer up something that transports my research receivers beyond the type-strokes I have been battling to produce in their thousands, beyond the structure of traditional chapters, beyond the digitised tick-boxes demanded by the institutional machine.

I want to offer up the multi-divergent mattering of glow worms. Because they are matter that matters (Haraway 2016), because they’ve made this thesis-thing possible, because glow worms, and me, have ‘rendered each other capable’ (Haraway 2016).

“Language has been granted too much power” (2003, 801) says Barad, and I want to offer up something beyond language, something textual, something which shows how the world is felt across multiple registers of sensation (Manning 2020).

This expansion beyond coherent language and digital screens, towards complex multitudes and material matterings, emerges as flashing lights, before it forms into language, and then gathers traction to become an idea; a glowing force of wonder.

Some days later, Twinkle’s Glow Worm Home shimmers from its shelf, and I realise this desiring drive beyond words and screens was felt by Twinkle long before it formed as tangible thought.

Twinkle realised glow worms needed a place to bring and be themselves: A place where their spirits and stories could spill out in multi-sensory ways (Manning 2006).

“Build a glow worm home” Twinkle giggles, emerging with delight.

“a home where glow worms can both shimmer and take shelter”

“a home where glow worms can spill out, into the wild...”

She vanishes, leaving behind the pine-seed I found in the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.
It spins on its side, rotating, reaching towards .

I reach back, scooping it into the palm of my hand,

remembering how it came to matter through my daydreaming down a rabbit hole,

remembering Little Girl’s tunnel of lost things with its deep emerald moss and sandy curved walls.

I realise a home for glow worms has been with us for a long time, built in our childhood by Little Girl and Twinkle in the garden of Nobles Lane.

Today, Twinkle builds a glow worm home to share with you, my research receivers.
For many years, before and during, this thesis-creating process, I believed homes needed to be safe. The beginnings of my training in psychotherapy re-emphasised this; there was (still is) an almost obsessive focus on ensuring client safety (Holmes 2001, Knox and Cooper 2015), particularly when working with trauma (Herman 1997, Rothschild 2000, Van der Kolk 2014, Levine 1997).

Critic, and P-Emmy, whose responsibilities revolve around ensuring my safety, value this emphasis. They work hard to pre-empt potential risks, predict issues, and outline mitigation strategies. I am grateful for them and their work, but the emphasis on safety, particularly securing my emotional safety, has often left me at a loss, feeling like a failure in the moments and months where safety, perhaps inevitably in the aftermath of intimate relational trauma, feels out of grasp.

Nick Totton helped me to relate differently to safety. In his article ‘Not a Tame Lion’ (2011b) he explores how a preoccupation with safety in psychotherapy mirrors trends in wider society which centre around our human desires for power and control. He says “as the world becomes increasingly frightening, it becomes increasingly necessary to claim that security can be achieved, through monitoring, surveillance and censorship” (2011b, 234).

This emphasis on safety also reinforces dominant narratives around the illusion of recovery, particularly, I argue, in relation to trauma – where the sense of feeling unsafe and uncertain in the world is portrayed as a symptom of how trauma leaves us broken, a symptom which trauma literature would imply can be fixed. This implicitly produces a particular ‘shape’ of trauma and trauma stories, where feeling unsafe is seen as a dysfunctional regulatory system which survivors should be working towards healing (Van der Kolk 2014, Levine 2010).

The emergence of Glow Worm Homes is a pivotal shift where I purposefully reject this overwhelming insistence on safety and singularity. It’s a moment where I refused the demand to be critically distant in my reflexivity (in order to ensure safety) because such a demand diluted the multi-sensory sensations of the stories I was attempting to follow; stories whose experiences shake and shudder; stories who live in risky spaces; stories who don’t necessarily have words. It’s a moment where I expanded the boundaries of what this thesis could be and invited my research receivers to be moved by what they touch, as well as what they read, marking the way in which this body-of-work, like bodies-in-relation, reaches towards other bodies (Manning 2006) in messy, multisensory ways.

Sophie supports me in this. She knows that while “language is our primary medium for communicating experience, […] it runs into trouble with trauma” (Tamas 2014, 91). Exploring how scrapbooks can help
survivors of spousal abuse, she says they’re “potentially useful sites for expressing and managing loss because they turn us from the abstract and theoretical toward the material and sensory realm” (Tamas 2014, 93). With Sophie, I make further connections: the Glow Worm Home becomes a site of creation - of creating: moving us beyond only theory and sense-making, towards sensory play where the things I can’t bear to tell or witness in words, still have a space.

Relating to Glow Worm Homes as sites of creation, as places for creating and relating, reminds me of the productive capacity of wonder (MacLure 2013). I’m reminded of how, through following the movements of relational, affective wonder within and around this inquiry, I’m able to wander, relate and create with glow worms as they emerge. It is this wonder(ing) which carries this creative-relational adventure somewhere - towards spirit; towards an entangled, multi-sensory unfolding.

I’m playing here, with creative-relational inquiry, and creative-relational inquiry as activism (Rodríguez-Dorans, et al. 2021). I’m curious about whether my inclusion of Glow Worm Home as part of this body-of-work’s submission is a small act of activism (Madison 2010), in that it asks you to relate with the assemblage of stories Glow Worm Home holds; towards your own creating, relating, wondering. In this way, Glow Worm Home feels like a personal and institutional re-wilding which reterritorialises (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) what a doctoral thesis can be by expanding, beyond written language, beyond the traditional ‘shoulds’ of research, trauma stories, and recovery, into and with wild places and artefacts. This re-wilding, Totton (Totton 2011a, Totton 2011b) argues, is political as it embraces touch, intimacy, and the multi-sensory – all of which challenge notions of control, certainty, and security.

This re-wilding is present, too, in my practice, where I notice clients are often desperately seeking a sense of security and control, particularly during the lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic. I am not saying that helping a client to establish safety is not important. I recognise, particularly with trauma, how important finding shelter, and a sense of grounded-ness can be. Glow Worm Homes also holds space for this through a flexible form of containment (Bion 1962); the box becomes a place for haunted trauma lures and memories to exist, to live. Twinkle tells us how her home offers a space, a place, where glow worms can both shimmer and take shelter.

17 See footnote 23 in Becoming Dandelions.
It is this movement though, between shimmering and sheltering which I want to emphasise. I believe therapy is helpful when the client feels safe enough to journey into distressing waters, follow elusive, uncertain glows, and, in doing so, encounter the inevitable, and potentially enriching wildness within and beyond them. This celebration of the wild as something we can reach towards rather than shy away from suggests a different kind of relationship is possible with our selves, and with others, including the more-than-human (Haraway 2016).

Glow Worm Homes acknowledges this relationally entangled presence of the more-than-human, whose textures and sensations cannot be captured in writing, thinking, and theory alone, but whose bodies reach out towards mine in moments of creative-relational wonder(ing), co-creating the atmospheres and affects (Stewart 2011) I journey with, and the stories which emerge, later, through my writing tools. Their inclusion in the Glow Worm Home invites a recognition of this presence and a response-able (Haraway 2016) turning towards the possibility trauma (and trauma stories) are produced with and on land (Arel 2018, Till and Kuusisto-Arponen 2015, Petermann 2011), and with and through more-than-human objects and artefacts.

The slow but purposeful emergence of Glow Worm Homes didn’t come without its losses; relationships ruptured, previous hopes, writings, and ontologies needed letting go. These losses were part of my moving with the productive capacity of wonder (MacLure 2013); my leaving behind the stark blank page and scorched earth, and my risky moving towards that which had shimmered, in horror and intrigue, sometimes brightly, sometimes persistently, sometimes barely at all; letters about a gold beach, and, a persistent yellow smudge...
Gold Beach

Grandpa’s letters flicker from the bookshelf.
A golden glow surrounds them,
Reminding me of the Gold Beach I’d hoped to travel to with him.

I wonder about the stories he might have told me there.  
I wonder about the stories he might have remembered there.  
I wonder about the stories we might have created there, together.

As I wonder and weep,
my writing hands become his, and
an invitation from the man I loved most flutters into being.

.~.

Figure 6: Christmas 1991, Gael, and Grandpa 'reading'
My dearest Gael,

Take me to the sea; you know I always loved to be with the water.

Let us walk, for a while, beside the waves, we can let them lap against our feet.
Let’s enjoy the moment, watch the birds flying high and free above us.
And let us be.
Be with those places, and spaces, that have haunted our hearts and souls.

We’ve long been readers, writers, thinkers; you and I.
There’s that photo of us sitting together on the sofa...
I’m reading my book, and you’re pretending to read yours, but it’s upside down.
You didn’t have access to language at that age, you couldn’t articulate the words, but you’d mirror the sounds I’d make.

We connected long before that...
It seems only yesterday that you were in my arms as a very tiny baby.
We would take walks around the garden, I’d hum to you, the seeds and bees.
We didn’t need language to know there was love.

So let’s go back to being together.
Unconstrained by language, time, death.

Our reading; writing; thinking?
that can come later...
Take me to the sea.
the sun emerges

Plage de Ver-Sur-Mer - 49.345581599391934, -0.5280837739823868
Accompanied by: Amazing Grace, Celtic Woman

It’s been an overcast drive from Nantes, France, but driving down Herbage des Prés, the final stretch before the water, I notice the cloud blanket has started to splinter and the sky is now scattered with glow-worm-like clouds, which drift calmly overhead as if calling me home – echoing the lyrics of Grandpa’s favourite hymn Amazing Grace.

Parking along the sandy lane of Le Paisty Vert I catch a glimpse of turquoise green in the distance, and a wave of emotion washes over me; I hear it in the shakiness of my exhale and feel it in my heart which beats so forcefully it seems it is trying to burst out of my chest to reach the water.

I miss him. My dearest, beautiful Grandpa.

I slide cool spindly fingers over the top of my heart in a soothing backwards and forwards motion. My thumb caresses the base of my throat, soothing the knot of grief under my skin. I breathe deeply, gathering myself in the shelter of the car.

I have made it.
Despite many barriers, I have made it, here.
Back here.

Not that I’ve ever been here before, but still, it feels like a returning; “a little scene of recognition” (Stewart 2012, 519)18 with a place Grandpa spoke of feeling pulled back and entangled with – a place he never managed to return to, at least not in his living, breathing, body.

18 Kathleen Stewart, like Erin Manning, came later to this inquiry, after a change-in-supervisor. Her writings into atmospheres, recognition, affect and matterings accompanied me on this trip to both Gold Beach, and my trip to the Yellow Room. Kathleen
I wish we were taking these final steps over the tufty dune together, hand in hand, step by step. Instead, I take those first steps – in the opposite direction to the steps he would have taken onto this same beach all those years ago – alone.

There are locals on the beach enjoying their Sunday afternoon; walking their dogs, chatting with loved ones, speaking in a language I don’t understand. Their normality irks me, and I will them away – from me and this moment with this place. I struggle to reconcile the mundane, ordinary, everydayness of their presence with a place, a space, of such sentimentality and significance in my Grandpa’s life story – and mine too.

Perhaps theirs as well? Offers a different part of me as I walk towards the water. Their local, everyday entanglement (Page 2020) with this place is different to mine, but that doesn’t mean they don’t have meaningful connections of their own and stories, learnings, makings, matterings. Stewart (2011, 445) invites me to “pay attention to the matterings, [to] the complex emergent” and multiplicitous worlds happening here. Matterings and worlds (Stewart 2010) that belong to, and continually compose the everyday life of this place. Just as my returning here “composes place” so too do the “little scenes of recognition” (Stewart 2012, 519) of these strangers.

breathed new life into the adventure, I never felt like I had to ‘get things right’ with her, or pin down my understandings. She gave permission for me to make speculative gestures, “not toward the clarity of answers, but towards the texture of knowing” (2007, 129). Grandpa, like me, would have loved this invitation.
Grandpa would have welcomed the normality; the everyday mundaneness of ease and enjoyment mattering to him - more so than pomp and circumstance, ceremony, and ritual. He would have welcomed the ordinary-ness of the moment, perhaps sensing, like Stewart, that “ordinary things matter because they shimmer precariously” (2012, 519), and emerge, unexpectedly – particularly in a place like this; a place “that served as the site of the largest amphibious assault in military history [and] is still scarred by war” (Petermann 2011, 233).

![Mince Pie Sand at Plage de Ver-Sur-Mer](image)

The precarious emergence of the sun feels like his way of being here with me; changing what was previously an overcast blanket of clouds into a welcoming party of glow worms, turning the sand a rich, golden brown - reminding me of the crusts of his favourite mince pies.

I sense him when a shell calls to me from its burrow within the wet sand: white, yellow, and black tones tickle my attention. Small shells and shards of shell populate this beach, intermingling with shards of shrapnel from the man-made shells that once exploded here. This shell, with its petite curvature and strange hue, calls out to me, inviting me to pick it up and hold it in the palm of my hand; inviting me to come into relation with it and the shards of shell that lie here on this land.

I’m reminded of Jonathan’s (Wyatt 2019, 10) walk on a Cornwall beach, where “the notion of creative-relational inquiry emerged”, “like the rounded shape of a shell” under his bare foot. I’m reminded of the way creative-relational inquiry moves me towards something, and beyond something – how, as a
force (Massumi 2015), it moves me beyond the known and the certain, towards something that continually unfolds, towards the infinite layers of a moment: like a small universe “expanding, in tiny, tiny, exhales.” (Malee 2018, 84)

I run my fingers along the petite curvature of the shell. I wonder about the universe this shell carries, the stories it has witnessed and experienced. I wonder if, in this moment, this shell acts as a bridge; holding both Grandpa and me, holding stories of June 1944 and today, holding infinite layers of stories.

Inhaling deeply, my focus shifts from the shell’s infinite universe to the sheer vastness of this place.

I sense Grandpa’s story in the vastness that stretches backwards, across the waves, further than my eyes can see, towards the place Grandpa and I both call “home”, and outwards, towards fields and villages that are foreign to us both. Stretching left towards Omaha and the Americans, and right towards Juno and the Canadians – to those places that I ‘know’ exist but that feel, in the vastness of this place, so far.

![Figure 9: The vastness of Plage de Ver-Sur-Mer](image)

I turn so the water is behind me and I’m facing back towards the dune that shelters Le Paisty Vert. Even this space, the space-between my entry to the beach and the shoreline I am nearing, feels colossal – a vastness it would be easy to lose oneself in.

What a space to be faced with on that day almost 78 years ago. A space that was, according to Grandpa, filled with “landing craft upon landing craft, mine upon mine, explosion upon explosion, and bodies upon bodies”. Would it have felt smaller, I wonder, with the space crammed full of man-made
machinery, weaponry, bodies? Or might it have felt like an impossible, hopeless task to land on the shores of such a vast place?

I start walking again, and soon I meet the shoreline – the boundary between land and sea, between safety and the wild, between here and there; his journey and mine. The water makes rippled contact around the base of my boots creating a salty rim which remains, even now, as I type up this writing from notebook to screen a week later.

Throughout my life I’ve found myself drawn to water. After Grandpa’s death in May 2013 and my move to Australia that August, bodies of water became all the more meaningful. The movement of water, and its capacity to travel across boundaries moved me. I began to believe that the same bit of water I was relating with could have travelled all around the world, connecting me to spaces and places and people whom I missed – somehow facilitating a touching, sensing, tactile connection technology couldn’t replicate. More than this, I began to believe that in connecting-with-water I was also connecting-with-Grandpa. Perhaps this is why, from 2013, whenever I encountered a body of water – be it a beach, an ocean, a lake, or a river, I would submerge my bare feet into the water, close my eyes, feel its shifting movement, and allow myself to be carried, momentarily, to places, spaces, people, and relationships around and beyond my immediate world. Water, in this way, facilitated a connection beyond pre-established boundaries between life and death, or land-mass and land-mass.

Today though, on this beach, with this body of water, I feel both a familiar desire to dip my toes in and something else; the awareness that “Grandpa would have worn boots here too” trickles in. I begin to
wonder if the yearning to touch and connect with water, has been handed down (Frosh 2019), reflecting Grandpa’s complicated yearning to return to this body of water mixed with mince-pie sand. Perhaps the tug towards water, was always a tug towards this place. Perhaps this place, this water, is written into my cells, perhaps I have, through water, always been making-with, becoming-with this place (Haraway 2016). I watch as the water trickles around my boots; my body and its body meeting, *intra-acting* (Barad 2007), co-creating something new as we remember something old.

Tracking the water’s journey, I notice pools interspersed with pockets of dry land, creating gaps. Reminding me of the snowflake gaps. Reminding me of the gaps in Grandpa’s story, and my own.

![Figure 11: Water pockets at Plage de Ver-Sur-Mer](image)

I begin to make my way out of the interwoven maze of water and land. Seeking drier ground.

As I walk, I sense him on the wind that whips my hair. I listen to what the wind carries: it thuds against my eardrums with layers of booming yet distant crashes which sound like explosions. The surging inhales and exhales of the waves sound like high-pitched whistles. This cacophony of noise reminds me of Grandpa, of the “*bombs, shells and rockets screaming over our heads*”. A noise he said he would always remember. Perhaps this noise, like the water of this place, is also written into my cells.

I meander back towards the costal dunes - gathering more glowing shells along the way - carrying the shards of this land, and the infinite universes they carry within them, with me.
I cross between some wooden slats, their shape and colour formed by the forces of nature.

I take out his photo from the purple folder of treasured things I have carried with me throughout the journey here. He was so young then – “8th October 1943” the faded date stamp on the back tells me, making him just 18 when that photo was taken, over a decade younger than I am now. I settle him into a sheltered spot, against the wooden slats, with the shoreline behind him, and settle myself a few-feet back, on a large blackish-grey boulder.

![Figure 12: Grandpa reunited with Gold Beach](image)

A wave of peace-full-ness washes over me as I witness Grandpa reunite with Gold Beach.

It takes me by surprise; this steadying, soothing, peace-full-ness. Unexpected, unanticipated.

I catch hold of a whisper on the wind: “this place is okay. Little me is okay. You are okay.”

I listen closer to the waves and wind and shells and water. They tell me: “we’re okay”, “we remained”, “forever changed and forever changing”.

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the sun sets

Le Manoir des Equerres - 49.25807123258765, -0.6994444711033393

Accompanied by: We'll Meet Again, Vera Lynn

Figure 13: Sunset at Le Manoir des Equerres

Vera Lynn is playing softly as I curl up with a mug of Cidre de Normandie and my notebook in this quintessentially French manor house. The peaceful comfort of this place gently holds me as I sway with the memories of the day. My writing, and remembering, attunes with this place, with the way this place, and Gold Beach, “throws [themselves] together”, “in aesthetic sensibilities and affective charges” (Stewart 2012, 519). Remembering Gold Beach, a warm kernel of recognition swells: I’m grateful to be here, to walk and write here, with the sun, wisps of cloud, and Grandpa; with shells, strangers, and vast shores.

I watch the sun slowly slip behind the silhouetted trees. I remember Grandpa’s oft-repeated phrase from Robert Binyon’s (1914) poem: “at the going down of the sun and in the morning. We will remember them”. Remembering him, I re-read a letter he sent me in 2005:

“As we walk slowly towards our last sun-set, we remember another sun-set. A sun-set of over 60 years ago, with an angry un-settled evening sky. The sun-set of 5th June 1944.

But we were young then. I was young then.”
the wind whips

American Cemetery, Pointe du Hoc, British Normandy Memorial

I’m writing in bed, sheltered at last from the biting winds, though my skin still carries their sting.

Today was spent absorbing information from formal memorials – organised, structured places – that as Petermann (2011) points out commemorate a certain version of a historic event. Their versions, their confident, victorious narratives leave me feeling distanced from Grandpa and his story. His personal experience, with its gaps, uncertainties, and conflicted reflections fades into the background of the grander, more certain, historically-centred narrative of battalions, dates, numbers, and facts in the same way relational therapies can fade into the background of the medical model’s solution-based certainties (Bondi and Fewell 2016) and the way Indigenous ways of knowing through oral stories and sensing along with the land can fade into the background of articulate academic arguments (Phillips and Bunda 2020).

The fragmented fizzle of my trauma story resonates with this – how little (if at all) it contributes to the #MeToo cacophony; and my uncertainty about whether it even deserves to take up narrative space if it isn’t contributing to (or, worse still, might complicate) such a movement. Especially when the movement is helping to dismantle rape culture (Nicholls 2021).

I wonder, is there space for mine and Grandpa’s stories?

.~.~.~.

I visit the Normandy American Cemetery. Petermann (2011) writing about memorialisation, and the way spaces are created as politically commemorative places through ritual and remembrance says: “few areas have been marked by World War II as much as Normandy has” (2011, 239), it’s as if politics has seared its story into this land.

The site is a sea of headstones. The headstones, in their vast symmetry, go on and on, rising and falling in a soft arc, like the way I imagine a breath to travel; up over then down.
The regimented, soldier-like symmetry of the headstones are juxtaposed by the silhouetted trees; trees that aren’t part of the regimented pattern, but who *become-with* the pattern (Haraway 2016). Tree and graves becoming part of the landscape together, bearing witness to one another, in life and death. Trees continuing on growing, on being, offering an invitation to take this place of memorialisation further; beyond the politically defined dimensions (Petermann 2011) of this place, towards what Haraway (2016) might describe as a more *response-able* remembering.

I sit on a bench at the far side of the site, under a tree spewing needles and seedlings which fall on and around me, bringing minor movements (Manning 2016) to a place suspended in time.
Listening to Hymn to the Fallen from Saving Private Ryan, a film which also served to memorialise this place, I sit and watch with the tree.

I notice how the tree, and me, and the bench, and the wind, and the headstones, and the visitors wandering between them, co-create an atmosphere (Stewart 2011). Together, we produce something: a remembering, a reproducing of what and who was lost.

Here, there is a white western, memorial of a war and the dominant stories of power, violence, heroism, and history that accompany such a memorial (Petermann 2011).

Here, there is also more than this: the presence of the tree, watching and dropping needles alongside me, complicates this fixed, memorialised narrative. The tree, the wind, the waves of Omaha Beach in the distance are “an active participant in the world, shaping and creating it” (Bawaka-Country, et al. 2015, 270), re-shaping and re-creating the stories of this place in ways that journey beyond the rigid limits of the dominant narrative.

Later, as I walk the pre-defined route of rocky gravel at Pointe du Hoc, I sense the echoes of militarised memories vibrating angrily through the ground and through the bitter wind whipping my face. It’s not peaceful here, it’s exhausted – by the regurgitated narrative which doesn’t give it a beyond, an after. Instead, the land is locked in to performing a story of trauma, locked into the victor’s political and powerful narrative (Petermann 2011).

Till and Kuusisto-Arponen (2015) explore the complexities of our ethical relationships and our responsibilities to places marked by memory and violence. They recognise place and land as forgotten survivors of traumatic, violent events, and argue that “the focus on singular narratives of suffering, or stories about places that bracket the past so as not to appear continuous with the present, may unintentionally silence stories, rather that offer opportunities for visitors to engage in trying to understand the complexities of a place” (2015, 301).

Stephanie Arel (2018), exploring the relationship between trauma and place, recognises how human destruction is “etched into the landscape” (22) here, at Pointe du Hoc and along the Normandy Coast. I think of how much free-er Gold Beach felt yesterday; how the movement of the waves, the wildness of that scene, conveyed a sense of resilience, a sense of movement, of being able to change, of
changing in the aftermath of trauma. The places I have visited today don’t have that same sense of movement, it’s as if the land here, like Grandpa’s story, fades into the background of a fixed political narrative of victory and sacrifice.

And yet, it is this political narrative, and its situatedness, here on this land, which draws people here: people purposefully choose to visit here, despite the narrative being available away from this land – they want to experience it here. On this land. At these places and spaces where the narratives happened. In this way, this geographical, political, commemorative place holds abject wonder (Kristeva and Roudiez 1982, MacLure 2013); drawing visitors into witnessing the painful, traumatic stories who live here. I wanted to experience here, on this land. I was lured to these places and spaces, to the promise of stories that might be felt, heard, received, here.

Being here mattered. The land mattered. Place mattered. And being here, with the matter, with the matter, mattering (Stewart 2010, Stewart 2012), I realise this place has a story of its own that often goes unrecognised, unwitnessed.

No wonder this place has whipped me war raw.

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In the afternoon, I visit the British Normandy Memorial. Despite the thick layer of clouds, it’s a beautiful site. Quiet yet dignified.

![Figure 16: British Normandy Memorial](image)
I walk for a while, reading name after name etched into sandstone columns. Imagining the stories belonging to each name. Inscribing names in stone amplifies the service of those who died, who sacrificed themselves for the freedom of those who survived.

I’m conflicted; wanting to remember those who lost their lives, but aware, also, of those who survived, who carried on living, forever changed...

I search for the name Derek Brightman, knowing he won’t be acknowledged here given he did not lose his life here. Still, I seek him out.

I wonder if my desperation to see his name comes from my own desperate sorrow. I’m sad, that despite his survival into his late eighties, he didn’t receive the recognition the names here do. He is now dead, but there is no stone with his name etched into it. Who will remember him?

What are, I wonder, the ethics of his name not being inscribed here? Till and Kuusisto-Arponen tussle with these tensions too. They say:

> “Within the context of social and official forgetting, telling inclusive stories at places of past violence [...] is challenging. Those who experienced violence (including those who are no longer alive) may yet again be silenced, and again experience new forms of violence and exclusions” (2015, 302)

I realise, reading this, that I’m yearning for some-sort of recognition that he did lose a life, a part of his life, his self here. I’m yearning for some-sort of recognition of him, his story, within this story. Brison says: “survivors of trauma frequently remark that they are not the same people they were before they were traumatised” (2002, 38), and recognises that the remaking of a self in the aftermath of life-threatening trauma often includes searching for a self who feels annihilated.

Perhaps that’s what I’m doing here, for Grandpa. Perhaps that’s what I’m doing here, for me.

In the aftermath of my trauma, I didn’t die, though it felt like parts of me did. My name didn’t need to be tragically inscribed somewhere. Memorialised into abject permanence. Instead, I was told “don’t let this define you” and encouraged to let the story fade-into-the-background of my life, as if I had a choice in the story’s mattering and movement.
I don’t find Grandpa at this site of British memorialising. I don’t find his name, nor his story, but I feel a flutter of something when I see this sign towards Gold Beach:

![Figure 17: Sign to Gold Beach](image)

Perhaps we are too far from the water. After all Grandpa’s memories never made it out of the water:

“As we reached the beach we began to lower the door. I stood on the partly lowered door just as we were hit by a shell. This blew the Mulock Ramp back onto my wellington boot which was very painful. We were then hit again. The next thing I remember is being in the water, holding onto the remnants of boat… that’s the last thing I can remember. My mind must have shut down. The next three weeks are a blur, a dense fog, with nothing clearly remembered.”

(Extract from a letter written by Grandpa to me)
Following the water’s pull, I return to Gold Beach with nausea swelling in my stomach. Returning here feels loaded, because, what if Gold Beach now feels distant from Grandpa, too?

I glimpse the grey-white of the channel over the top of the dunes, and the heaviness which has plagued me since yesterday begins to lift, slipping off my shoulders like the wake of the waves. The beach looks different today; the mince-pie pockets of sand blanketed by lively high-tide waves.

I’m pleased the tide is in. I’m pleased to be with this place in a different way, at a different time, with thick clouds and angry waves colliding against the rocky boundary between land and sea. Nature reclaims and repairs something here, with its high tide and hungry waves.

I inhale deeply, my feet re-connecting with the edge of the water.

Ahhh, at last, I sense him again.
We walk together, spirit and spirit, Bateman and Brightman, Grandpa and Granddaughter, the spirit of this place intertwining with ours.

A sense of peacefulness returns.

For a moment, sun escapes through a crack in the thick blanket of cloud above us – and we smile – together again.

~ ~ ~

I walk back to the writing spot I made for myself two days ago; the water’s movement changes my outlook, but the sense of peace-full-ness remains.

I sit for a long time with that rock, noticing small sensory shifts within and around me.

~ ~ ~

As time ticks onwards, I wonder how I am supposed to leave here. With my flight back to Scotland tomorrow, I have no plans to return. How do I say goodbye to this place which gave me moments with Grandpa, and brought such unexpected peace?
My fingers falter over the shells which have sat in the depths of my pockets for the past few days. The shells who caught my eye, and my heart, as I took my first steps in this place. These shells, and their infinite universe’s invited me to pause, and to feel, to listen to stories behind the ones I’d heard and read. These shells shared a different story – the story of the mince-pie-crust land.

Golden mince-pie-crust granules of sand sit in my pockets, stick to my boots, burrow under my fingernails. I realise the beach has stuck to me, travelled with me in my walking and witnessing’s of the past few days. Becoming a part of me in physical and affective ways. Becoming Gold Dust that has scattered and shimmered itself further, into new places and spaces. I realise I am not so much leaving this place but rather I am leaving with this place, forever changed, and forever changing with it. Carrying traces of its Gold Dust with me as I travel onwards.

The deep layered thunder crack of waves against rock interrupts my thoughts. Then, I notice the firecracker-like-fizz of the waves pulling back over pebbles. Sounds reminiscent of explosions, shell-fire. It’s almost as if this beach collects humans sounds, and, like an orchestra, finds ways to replicate and reimagine them. Forever changed by and forever changing with them.

As I sit here, on this writing rock, Gold Dust around my boots, I realise that while this was the place Grandpa felt he lost Little Derek, Little Derek didn’t feel lost here. The beach became a place where Little Derek could gleefully play in the sea – where he could be both safe and free – where he could carry on being, beyond the limitations war. Till and Kuusisto-Arponen words come to me, they say:

“When survivors return to a place [...] that journey and being in a place offers individuals a possibility to step outside of existing social-spatial forms of silencing and instead create, also a space-time for the possibilities for grieving, mourning, and remembering...” (2015, 302)

I realise being here, in this place, has offered a grieving, a mourning, a remembering, as well as a moving, an expanding with sounds and silence, with incomplete as well as unspoken stories.

As I walk towards Le Paisty Vert, I scoop up a handful of Gold Dust. Uncomfortably aware how, in the act of taking, I am repeating a British ancestral pattern of taking more, I wonder what more of me I might leave behind...
I leave laughter, caught in the wind and carried into the waves – those sound making machines. I leave my tears, both grieving and joyful. I leave the part of me who longs to stay here, at this place, with Little Derek, and the beach.

She stays with her Grandpa and the sea spray.

The rest of me carries the *Gold Dust* of them and this place with us, as we depart.

~~~
Yellow Room

The yellow smudge re-emerges.

Reminding me of where I’m yet to return to...

As I sit with the yellow smudge, it becomes stickier, richer, deeper,

A smear of paint, taking me somewhere new...

In a grey, grey town,
There was a grey, grey street,
Down the grey, grey street,
There was a grey, grey house,
In the grey, grey house,
There were grey, grey stairs,
Up the grey, grey stairs,
There was a yellow, yellow room,
and in the yellow, yellow room... 19

yellow room.

it happened in that yellow room.

19 Inspired by the introduction to the Funnybones cartoon, based on the books by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, and originally shown on the BBC in 1992. ~
The yellow room is a haunted place, a traumatic site, a ‘thin place’\textsuperscript{20} which holds violent yet elusive stories from my early teens. Arel tells me how thin places of past trauma “create a potential space for working through trauma” (2018, 16) because by visiting such places “something changes. The shift is subtle but affective, precipitating sensations and feelings…” (2018, 19).

Encouraged by this, the peacefulness I found at Gold Beach, the Gold Dust in my pockets, and Till and Kuusisto-Arponen’s (2015) work around the possibility place holds for moving beyond silencing, towards remembering, glow worms flicker and spark once more...

I feel myself pulled towards the yellow room. Pulled towards that abject place of trauma. Pulled towards the possibility of recovery Arel (2018) speaks of, but also towards stories;

What stories might that place, and I, find and co-create together now, sixteen years later...

\textsuperscript{20} Arel introduced me to the Celtic concept of ‘thin places’ describing them as an “in-between place that merges the natural and sacred world” (2018,19), where the distance between earth and spirits is shorter, thinner. I learnt that thin places are often wild spaces, or places where there has been suffering and trauma; the implications of which have shaken the atmospheres, making it more porous; creating chinks for the lights, the spirits to travel between (Gomes 1996).
Faded Red Line

This definitely wasn’t supposed to be here.

Not just here, in this inquiry – but here, in our lives.

Despite avoiding it for two years, I believed it would get me at some point.

Though that belief – my certainty that something I don’t want will get me might be what Levine (2010) describes as trauma residue. Residue which re-emerges, time and again, no matter the therapeutic work I put in. The residue gives away my distrust.

Shows my sense of security in the world is smudged.

Forever shaken.

Still, I didn’t expect it here, now, disrupting well laid plans.

A faded red line emerged on a white plastic test the night before we planned to travel south.

It renders us captive; cancels my plans; locks me within the walls of this house.

All my preparations, my anticipations, the fizzing buzz of this day before, now seem futile.

I feel faint. faded. fading...in the face of that faded red line.

Which isn’t even mine.

(though mine comes later)

I remain unable to return to a place I am both drawn to and disturbed by,

a place both long-avoided and long-awaited.
My packed bags and my mostly ticked off to-do list needs unravelling now...

...and somehow I need to unravel this knot within me,

this knot of hopeful wonder, needs to unstick the tight grip it has on my gut, my heart, my soul.

I feel cold.

Am I freezing from the inside out?

All that pent up anticipation.

All that hope and fear; uncertainty and anxiety; excitement and dread.

Where does all that go when plans change at the eleventh hour?

Has it turned to ice in my veins – rendering me numb, incapacitated?

Is this also trauma residue; my body playing dead, like an impala (Levine 2010)?

Where does energy go when it’s been trundling along, moving onwards, moving toward...

and then,

unexpectedly,

the brakes get slammed on.

Other than whiplash, other than the bodily absorption of energy with no place to go,

What becomes of energy?

An image comes to mind of dancing, dispersing glow worms, fluttering above a train,

rising upwards, outwards, lingering in the air.

Their lingering energy, remaining, hovering.

Despite no ‘place’ to go.

Suspended, yet dancing, in mid-air.
My mind rewinds two years.

To those early weeks of lockdown.

In that strange ‘unprecedented’ time where life, energy, spirit felt suspended, as if everything surrounding me, safe as I was from the frontlines of Covid, ground to a halt.

One April morning, at the park I visited daily, I was shocked to see tree blossoms.

Somewhere amidst the lostness of the previous four weeks, spring had sprung.

I saw life, nature, emerging, dancing, unfolding, proliferating, despite it feeling as if all life had been locked up.

Suspended.

I came across the term “suspended animation”, came to understand it as “a state in which life, in a body, is temporarily slowed down or stopped” (Dictionary n.d).

In an effort to delay the onset of death and ensure survival, life processes are paused.

Do those red lines emerge to prevent death? To ensure survival?

Arguably these tests, with their red lines, and accompanying rules have saved lives, reduced hospital admissions, limited deaths...

Not only because of self-isolating, but wider behavioural changes too (Devlin 2022).

But could they also, prevent life, living, processing...
Today, two years on, the emergence of those red lines pauses my world on its axis turn.
I’m suspended just before taking flight.

My explorations with suspended animation transport me to the wild.
I recall how animals and plants can appear dead when they are, instead, lying dormant, surviving,

preserving limited energy sources, before they are ready, and able, to wake up,
emerge, live.

I think of glow worms in the wild.
Their pupation period of 8-15 days (Tyler 1994) echoes a similar dormancy.

I click around on my desktop favourites for that online book by John Tyler.
He says, “fireflies prepare for pupation by digging into the ground to create a small chamber, but the
glow worm does not bother with this and instead it just curls up and lies motionless, normally on its
back or its side, for a few days” (Tyler 1994, pt2).

I smile.
Those weird and wonderful glow worms.

They seem, to me, less concerned with the survival side of things,
And more absorbed by the pupating process where they transition from larvae to adult glow worm.

During this process, most of its organs are “completely broken down,
to be replaced by the adult versions” (Tyler 1994, pt2).

In this process of becoming glow worm,
one of the organs which remains, is the light organ.
This “remains visible through the pupa’s skin”, and during pupation, “will often glow”, sometimes in response to external rhythms and vibrations, sometimes “for no apparent reason” (Tyler 1994, pt2).

Curling up,
Freezing,
Breaking down,
Becoming,
Glowing.

*I follow suit...*
Curl up,
Freeze,
Break down.

*Perhaps I am pupating? Perhaps I am becoming? Perhaps I might glow.*

*12 days later my world begins to turn on its axis again.*
Becoming Dandelions

I’m antsy, nervous, highly-strung. I worry I should have told more people about my intention to travel, but I’ve resisted telling, I’ve kept my intentions quiet, repeating a familiar dynamic with this story.

I reminisce about the ‘me’ from sixteen nights ago. On that night, as I prepared for the tomorrow, which was supposed to lie ahead, I felt braver, steadier. Tonight, the distance from the beaches and the courage I found there, swells.

Sophie (Tamas 2012) in her reckonings with ghosts emphasises how trauma’s uncertain hauntings are never far - they lurk in the shadows, only needing a red line, sixteen nights, a crack in my sense of courage to seep back in and complicate my sense of trust, reminding me that “inexplicable things can happen” (448) as they did sixteen years ago. This night before, holds complex layers of uncertainty:

There’s the anxious apprehension I feel about returning to the geographical site of my trauma; believing with Arel (2018) that trauma lives in geographical sites and spaces. She tells me how the sites and spaces where trauma takes place can become “a potential space for working through trauma” (Arel 2018, 18). Reading Casey (1993), who writes about our relational entanglements with place, I begin to wonder whether by retracing my steps with the yellow room, I might remark (and as Page (2020) takes further, remake) my sense of place both there and with my selves. This is also supported by Arel who tells me how returning to sites of trauma can “encourage memory recall and mourning, and [help to] foster reconnection with others” (2018, 18). While I’m not necessarily seeking to integrate the fragments of my trauma story in the way Arel posits, I’m curious about the elusive memories, selves, and possible re-makings the yellow room may hold for me, and this story...

At the same time, there’s also the familial shame and heavy weight of silence Dagmar Alexander (2015) helped me notice had been unconsciously passed down, across generations, to me. I carry silent and obscure fragments of trauma stories from members of my family who cannot bear to sit
with their jagged edges. The heavy, haunting, presence of this silent familial avoidance produces panic on this night before; whispering at me not to go; to stay away from the abject memories.

Then there are the complicated uncertainties produced in the aftermath of trauma; my pushed-away tellings, and the refusals from others to receive or understand when I made attempts to tell, which as Spring (1997), Muller (2018), and Herman (1997) acknowledge, compounded my sense of isolation, shame, and uncertainty – further silencing an already reticent story. Why return? These hauntings query. What good has telling done in the past? They point out.

There are also the relational traumas I have survived since, as well as the collective traumas happening with and around me today; a global pandemic, a burning earth, a divided society, a violent war – the hauntings of which, I understand with Barad (2007), re-produce and re-entangle with past hauntings in complicated ways I am attempting to trace.

These entangled hauntings collectively whisper, telling me this trip is risky, unethical, doomed... convincing me something unexpected will thwart my journey tomorrow – break downs, car crashes, maimed limbs, seem more probable than arriving at the yellow room in one piece.

*Except, a different part of me intervenes, even if I do arrive there. I will not be arriving in one piece. I will be arriving with the messy, multiplicitous entangled pieces of me, their gaps, and these uncertainties. Perhaps that is also why I feel a sense of impossibility tonight; perhaps I know, deep down, there is no possibility of arriving at that long-awaited-avoided place as one coherent person or finding one coherent story despite the parts of me who (still) yearn for and continue to seek it out. This impossibility, as disappointing as it appears on first glance, also invites a chink into my angst, it opens me up to the possibilities that lie beyond neat integration and contained coherence. If “inexplicable things can happen” (Tamas 2012, 448), perhaps that inexplicability might go beyond the destruction trauma leaves in its wake...*

These hopeful parts resonate with Jonathan who, in response to Sophie, advocates for seeking connection and “making use of loss by storying it” (Tamas and Wyatt 2013, 8). Jonathan recognises the potential storying has to take us somewhere. Somewhere, he believes, might help. He reminds me that my attempting to tell, my seeking, my storying, is not futile and frozen; it has movement, it carries me somewhere (Wyatt 2019), from this highly-strung night before – towards tomorrow.
I wake, before my 4:40am alarm to birdsong. I’m grateful for the birds, their light-hearted chorus a
friendly accompaniment to today’s journey away from the northern wilderness I have come to call
home, over the border, into England.

08:30am. 130 miles down. I stretch my legs on the outskirts of a northern English town.
The next 170 miles are straightforward, uneventful.

With only 35 miles to go, a thick blanket of grey clouds settles. Like a silent shadow it slowly,
ominously, muffles out the light.

Of course. I roll my eyes with disgruntlement. The sky is so thick and grey around here.
It so rarely shifts.
It sticks, and sinks in.

Stewart (2013) writing about regionality, notices how affects, memories, histories, gestures, come
together to produce scenes of recognition, and a sense of being “from here” (279). Regionality here
is the suffocating blanket of the sky which muffles the possibility of undulation from the farms and
fens beneath it. Dorothy L Sayers (1934), who grew up here, recognises it too; describing the flat
terrain as being shrouded in the bleakness of a sinking lead sky. It sticks and sinks in – to the skin of
this region, and beneath the skins of those who live here, who are ‘from here’, like me.

Edging closer I see familiar places on road signs. They register; producing flickers of recognition within
me, like a re-awakening, a “flexing of regional muscle over the taut skin of tense possibilities” (Stewart
2013, 279). Wondering with Stewart (2014), I consider how the registering of these road signs
encourages me to adopt a “divergent form” of recognition (551) where I’m no longer only on this road,
with these road signs, but I’m also connecting with places and spaces, parts, and stories beyond this road but within this regionality; places I ‘grew up in’, places where parts of me emerged from and perhaps still reside. In this way, the road becomes an assemblage of elements which “flicker in and out of view” (551) like glow-worms.

*I’ll know where I am soon, I tell myself, I’ll be on the roads I used to travel daily: waiting in traffic jams, sitting in busses, taking junction turn offs into little villages.*

But the roads have changed.

This road is vast, broad, multi-laned, it traverses familiar, yet new, countryside jaunts and I can’t get my bearings. I’m not on the road I was anticipating. Despite its name being the same, it is a different road, a new road.

I start to see glimpses of the road I am seeking to my left, perhaps a ½-mile-or-so over. I clock from the signs of this interloper road, that my old road has a new name. It feels as if the road moved on in a way I haven’t; my old road’s asphalt “has out-survived its own [name]” (Stewart 2014, 555), just as I, like Brison (2002), feel like I outlived my ‘selves’ in the aftermath of what happened here.

I feel disorientated and unprepared, like a stranger in a place I’m supposed to know.

This loss of connection feels like what Casey (1993) describes as displacement, where my present experiencing of this road confuses the connections and meanings I believed I knew about this place. Casey understands displacement as originating from a process where we seek a sense of belonging to a place we feel intimately tied to but, upon returning, we no longer recognise or feel we belong. This seeking for a sense of belonging carries echoes of established trauma recovery narratives within which cultivating a sense of safe belonging is recognised as integral to recovery (Herman 1997, Levine 1997).

My disorientation with this road feels like the hauntings of yesterday - complex and multi-layered: I am returning to a place of violence. A place I don’t necessarily want to belong, yet I’m also drawn back to and feel disturbed by, because it has changed beyond my memories.

All of a sudden, the two roads - the old one I was anticipating, and this new one I’m on, collide, coming together at the turn off I need to take. Echoing what Stewart (2014) describes as the assemblage of impacts and potentialities, between my past and present experiences with this place.
Suddenly, without the anticipated preparation from familiar roads, I’m here.
Trundling along a country road, travelling into the village with a name that haunts me...

Swavesey.

sWave, Se(a).

WaveS, sea.

Waves (over) me.

Save me.

My breath rattles around my body in strangled gasps as I drive past old haunts.

The bus stop; the place I used to hope against history he’d meet me. The place where time and again I’d be met by his absence, and my heart would sink with heavy resignation.

The park; the place I spent too-many-Sundays standing in the rain, watching him play football. The place we were hanging out with friends before he violently erupted and then ran off. The place where – at the far end – we had our first fumbling.

The road he lived on; where I catch a glimpse of the house, and the window to the yellow room. A place of yearning and anguish, of shock and violence, of hope and longing.

My stomach swirls. My hands clam up.

I don’t turn the car down the road.

I need to take my feet off the pedals of this man-made machine and put my them on earthy ground.

I park on a street I’ve never walked before. Close to but separate from the hauntings of this place. Familiar but new. Like the road I just unexpectedly encountered.

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.~
.~.

My breath rattles around my shaky limbs.
I get out of the car, putting one foot in front of another.
My feet carry me back in time, to my ‘makings’ in this place, and also towards; towards the road he lived on; towards the house with the yellow room. Almost as if, by returning here, I have the opportunity to remember, and perhaps remark (Casey 1993), and remake (Page 2020) my relational understanding of this place and of me in, and with, this place.

I’m on high alert. Hypervigilance surging as my body triggers an adrenal response:

*Could that man in the distance be him?* I recoil.

*What if he’s in the car driving towards me?* I put my hood up.

*Perhaps I should go back to the car, get my sunglasses and a face mask, disguise myself, hide myself…I don’t want to be “caught out” here.*

But

But

But

(I take a deep breath)

*I also want to be here, I want to connect with the memories, stories, sensings, who dwell here.*

This paradoxical multiplicity with recognition and exposure makes me think, again, of trauma’s hauntings, and of Sophie who understands “how we are seen haunts us” (Tamas 2009a, 615), particularly when we internalise the gaze of others. Sophie invites me to consider the internal and external gazes I am attempting to avoid and invite here, she reminds me that “our exposures and representations have consequences that are not so readily undone” (2009a, 613), which contributes to the complexity I feel in both seeing and being seen as I return here.

I’m on the corner of his street. I remember being seen here, by his mum in the early spring of 2006 when we were beginning again. She invited me into the house. Her warm invitation leading our relationship to be more than fumbles in the far end of parks. Her seeing, and inviting leading us into a place, which would host further harm. Today, I want to shield myself from her gaze as well as his.

I turn and travel down the street, pausing in-front of his house.

Though I have no way of knowing if this house still belongs to him, to them.

Overgrown weeds are taking over the front lawn. Messy. Tangled. Uncared for.

Overgrowth obscures the window and meets grey and mottled blinds, the kitchen hiding behind.

Discarded furniture litters the space in front of the garage.

The peeling-white garage... my mind starts to -
white.
white tips.
the bright white of my strained fingertips,
clinging to the unstable edge of that garage roof.
him, sat safely atop its flat centre, just out of reach,
turned half-away from my hanging body as dirt dug into my white fingertips,
my tears creating puddles on the black speckled rubber my body, itself, could not reach.

yellow.
yellow room.
it happened in that yellow room.
not a sunshine or pastel yellow.
not a happy, joyful, celebratory yellow.
an ochre-like, yolk-like, stain-your-hands kind of a yellow.
a yellow that has smudged my soul, like the shadow of a bruise.
colour-less.

my body, drained of colour.

drained of no, drained of fight.

its flops, rag-doll like and glazed-over.

my colour-less breath is all that remains,

tying me to my body as he takes my virginity without my consent.

translucent tears trickle silently down my cheeks. It is done. It is gone.

milky.

colourless and white combine -

coo-creating a greyish, gloopy smear,

it sticks to my legs, my stomach, my fingers

as he unsticks himself, his weapons, from me.

my breath continues to rattle. my eyes continue to weep.

he rolls the grey-whites of his eyes, turns away, and pretends to sleep.
red.  
crimson red.  
soaking into the bed sheet.
I panic. I don’t want to leave a stain.
flustered, shameful, red, pricks my milky cheeks.
that’s my blood. my hymen. me. I don’t want it to be seen.
I want to hold onto it, carry it with me, it belongs belonged to me.

silver.  
shades of steely silver.  
sharp-edged, ice-cold, silver
shimmer in tear-stained light.
his silver wall of mounted blades,
which my body soon finds itself, inexplicably, pinned up against,
a blade’s edge presses against my throat, red seeps into silver, a threat without words.
Something glimmers. Something yellow. Catching at my attention. Bringing me back to the here and now. **Yellow dandelions** sprout up amongst the messy, tangled overgrowth. I feel a flicker of *something* within me, a sensing, a stirring.

My feet carry me away, putting distance between me and the yellow room.

My heart pounds beneath my chest, aching, breaking, with sorrow. I notice the pavement passing beneath my feet as I re-walk this familiar route; it’s cracked, dirty, broken. I think of the dirt and cracks that got into my heart from my experiences with this place. Those cracks remain; they travel with me into the spaces, places, and relationships I dwell with now.

*yellow-headed dandelions pop up in the pavement cracks.*

The flickering within me strengthens, a smile emerges, my pounding heart softens, warmed by the sight of golden petals. A part resonates with the dandelions’ resilience and their capacity to grow in the cracks, to persist, despite limitations, despite their “weedy” label, despite people’s best efforts to thwart them. *hello,* the part says,

> I’m here  
> – Survivor –  
> I’m from here; I grew here.

The moment is fleeting, my feet - belonging to other parts - are eager to keep walking.

I weave myself through a gateway that’s not quite a gate. It demarcates the end of his street and another road. He and I would often run into each other here, at these not-quite-gates. Me with my aching heart, him with his tip-toe stride. Sticky feelings swarm - producing sensations which lead me to love and then to longing; to disgust and then confusion; a shutting down, a momentary freezing.

Delicate blue blossoms adorning the borders of this in-between place distract me, bringing me back to life. I crouch down to gently caress their petals...

> PRICK *
I grab my hand back in shock. The delicate blooms concealed thorns which pierce my skin, drawing fresh blood. Their inviting presence was misleading, and the sudden shock of violence takes me back to the first blow he dealt...

We’re sitting cross-legged atop the blue sea of his bed, me with my back against the yellow wall, chatting about mutual friends, sharing a joke, laughing,

SLAM /

my head makes forceful, unexpected contact with the wall behind me, his hands powerfully clutching my shoulders, his eyes glinting into the shocked pools of my own.

.&.&.

days later, I sit with my back against another wall, in my brother’s second-year university room.

I feel a bubbling up within me.
I want to tell my bigger, older, brother.
I want my bigger, older, brother to react and respond.
I cast him in the role of protector.
Despite knowing it’s a role he tends to silently refuse.

The story bubbles up within me.
I tell him, in disjointed fragments, about the blow.

“No” “No”

My brother interrupts, shaking his head, narrowing his eyes, blood rushing to his ears and cheeks. Familiar familial tell-tale signs. Telling me my brother is uncomfortable, distressed, on the brink of overwhelm.

I feel a magnetic pull to take care of him, to soothe and settle him.
I take on the familiar role of his protector.
Learnt early; when I was 7 and he was 10.
Because of the bullies who hounded him then.

I stop telling.
An awkward silence settles between us.
It carries the sticky notes of shame.

I change topic.
Brush the blow under the carpet.
The atmosphere lightens, the tension between us disperses,
travelling, silent and unseen, into me,
tucking itself away into a pocket of my large intestine.

I re-learn from this, that when it comes to distressing experiences and emotions -
silence is preferable to story.

it is a lesson I will go on to repeat, time and again,
seeking a different refrain...

it is a lesson I (and my brother) already knew,
Learnt early: when he was 8 and I was 5.
and our mum nearly didn’t stay alive.

in the intervening years, between then and now,
he found safety in the language of logic, science and fact,
in strict boundaries, that resist obscurity and intensity.
    I cannot fault him for that.
even if I still hope against history,
he won’t leave me to carry the sticky weight of the abject alone.

on that day though, in his university room.
    I brush the blow under the carpet.
    over time, blow becomes blows.
    blows become locked rooms.
    locked rooms become garage roofs.
    garage roofs become white fingertips.
    white fingertips become the yellow room.

yellow becomes colour-less, becomes milky, becomes red,
becomes the silver edge of a knife beneath my head,
and still the telling cannot be said.

~~~
P,

We’ve long been different life-dwellers; you and I.
Our everyday existence belongs to different worlds, with different languages, beliefs, values.

Perhaps you think yours is better than mine, sometimes I think so too.
Your independence from implicit reverberations seems unobtainable to me.
As does your emotional safety, and self-certainty.
How precarious, uncertain, and complicated my selves and stories seem in comparison.

I’ve too-ed and fro-ed over removing the explicit traces of you from this writing.
Falling into my learnt role as protector; believing your safety, enjoyment, success, is more important
than my being-witnessed,
my relational-needs,
this story’s becomings...

I tried to talk about these complexities, to invite you into my too-ing, and fro-ing,
but you’ve repeated a familiar pattern: been busy, disinterested, avoidant.
and in turn, I repeated a familiar response...
Changing topics, rescuing us from the depths of somewhere misty, murky, muddled.

Still, you remain here, written to, and about, but not with.

You have the right not to journey into this world.
I also have the right to journey with(out) you, but about you, in this world.

If one day, you choose to risk journeying to the murky depths,
I’ll be here, willing to navigate the horrors and delights with you.

In the meantime, somewhere-between your world and mine,
We’ll find common ground in fun yet shallow waters,
knowing our shared love runs deep.

G

~ ~.

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22 This brief interlude, is an addition, written in both June and December 2022, as I grappled with the relational reverberations this chapter has on my relationship with my brother.
Shaking the stings out of my hand, I pick myself up and dust myself down. I spot the fluffy head of a seeded-dandelion sheltering beneath the long stems of the blue blossoms. I feel a twinge of connection to a much younger me – Little Girl – who spent hours playing alone in the garden, blowing on dandelion clocks, watching their seeds float away, travelling with them: down rabbit holes, up gum trees, through ocean waves, seeking fragments, finding glow worms.

The moment is fleeting, my feet are eager to keep walking. They carry me onwards; past the school, and the bus stop, onto the main street, and down towards the park. Birdsong reaccompanying me.

The air, full of spring warmth, carries notes of freshly-mown grass intermingled with hyacinth and wet bark. Sweet. Earthy. Pleasant. Strangers pass by with warm smiles and fluffy dogs. I cross into the park, passing through a border of tall broad trees with delicate candle-stick blossoms, keeping vigil.

Disorientation resurfaces. While I remember this park and the robustness of these trees, they had no blossoms. In my memory, this place didn’t have sweet scents or smiling strangers but haunted tropes: grey, bleak, and ghostly. How can it be, in returning here, I find beauty, kindness, calm?

I am taken by surprise...

...and surprise takes me to glow worms, with their unexpected emergence, and then to Jonathan, who describes surprise as “the springing of the familiar into different awareness” (Wyatt 2019, 64). Considering surprise through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari’s refrain – Jonathan invites me to consider where surprise is taking me; how it “interrupts the threshold[s]” (64) of this harrowed place; introducing doubt, opening up the possibility of something beyond haunted territories. Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari (1987) through my relationship with Jonathan, I encounter new flickers of possibility...perhaps surprise deterritorialises this park, this place, or at least my memories of this
park, this place. I wonder if I might take up Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) invitation and de-territorialise my trauma story, towards a different testimony.

Surprise also takes me back; to the surprise I felt in the car when the road I was anticipating wasn’t the road I was on. Remembering this, I find myself drawn back to Stewart - expanding on the notion of displacement in 2013, she argues that it tests the limits of place; suggesting that it is only through my disorientation and surprise that what is happening here, (with these streets, this park, the trees and their vigil-keeping blossom) comes to matter; comes to mean something materially, relationally, narratively. Stewart invites an emerging understanding of how displacement, and surprise, can re-invent my understanding of self (and selves) with this place (Stewart 2013).

Surprise also takes me further back: echoing the displacement of myself/selves, and our place in the world in the aftermath of what happened here (Brison 2002): the persistent, disorienting, fragmentary experience of displacement, of not-belonging, of being unable to tie my selves together into something coherent and sensical. The sense that each time I start to hold something of substance; a story, a sensation, a sense of understanding - it turns to dust in my hands…

Perhaps displacement may not be only destructive and fragmentary but also generative and expansive. I feel as though I’m teetering on the “edge of something” between regionality and recognition (Stewart 2013, 276), memory and moment, horror and harmony, desire and damage.

My feet take me by surprise (again), carrying me to the copse at the far end of the park. It’s a place he and I used to hide ourselves away from adult eyes in the late-summer of 2005, when we were first beginning. A place we tried to figure out how to make-out; which way to turn our heads, how not to bang our teeth together, when to slip in the tongue.
I’d panic and pull away at the crack of a twig, or the faint hum-drum of conversation, scared we were about to be ‘caught out’, shamed, scolded. The friction of our kiss still hissing on my lips, sure to give us away.

He’d roll his eyes at my panic. Pin me to the ground and nurse my mouth back to kissing. I’d give in, I’d always give in.

I wonder, today, if it was this giving in in the early days of our relationship, which led him to believe I wanted to give in, in the yellow room. The boundaries between us were never clear.

One afternoon a hand goes up my shirt.

ohmygod, ohmygod, someone’s touching my boobs. ohmygod, ohmygod, ohmygod.
Someone. is touching. my boobs.
I hate my boobs. They’re tiny. What if he realises how tiny they are?
Oh god, did I stuff my bra today? What if he feels the tissue?!
ARGH.
ARGH.
Oh no. Phew. I didn’t stuff today.
i wore my good bra.
Pink and red. With padding.

Maybe I wanted him to touch my boobs?
Get to second base. I’m 14 after all.

Hmm I guess it feels kinda nice.
His hands on my boobs.
I feel wanted. Maybe, even sexy?

But shit, they’re so tiny.
Now he’s touching them, he’ll know just how tiny they are.
Nothing like that girl’s - who I know he thinks is fit.
I hope he likes them.
I hope he still likes me.

His other hand begins to fumble with the button at the top my shorts.

Ah shit.

What’s happening now.

I shouldn’t let him.
I should stop him.

But what if he stops liking me?

no. No.
I don’t want him to touch THAT.
stop. STOP.

I shake my head away. Breaking the closed-eye, silent contract between us. Wiggling out of his grip, I smile awkwardly, apologetically. I say sorry, I say something about having to get my bus.

He sighs. He’s annoyed, sulky. He refuses to speak.

I carry the smell, the taste, the friction of him with me on my bus ride home, through flat fenlands.

His refusal continues throughout and beyond that afternoon,
beyond even that summer.
I’m cut out.
We don’t see each other for months.

SNAP!

Today, years later, my own foot breaks a twig as I enter the copse. Unfathomable to fourteen-year-old me in the summer of 2005, I arrive not with shame or a preoccupation with securing her safety but with care and compassion.
I walk the small circular area where my body once lay, brambles catch on my clothes, and I have to
dodge decaying dog poo and discarded tins of beer.

Sparks of anger catch within me. I stamp my foot and my cracked lips part, letting out an

_Eeeeuuuuooouuuoooghhhharrrrrrrrghhhhh—hhhhh—euuuhuh—uhuh—uhuh—uhuh_

It’s a messy, jarring, desperate sound. Part harrowed scream, part frustrated shout, part delayed sob.
It carries fragments of regret, frustration, pain, grief, anger, hurt. For and from teenage me.

Desperately lonely teenage me who yearned for and sought out love. Even, or perhaps especially if
that love carried an air of danger to it; forbidden, against the status quo, secret. Desperately stifled
teenage me, who, curious about experiencing her body and emerging arousals, followed flickers of
desire.

~ ~

Extracting myself from the overgrown copse, I walk its nettled border finding a spot with daisies and
dandelions to settle myself. Silent tears slither down my face, anger jitters in my jawline. I sit for a
long time, holding vigil for teenage-me, who, in the process of becoming here: becoming woman,
becoming sexual, becoming desirable and desiring, was hurt, harmed, abandoned here.

I fish out a sepia-toned photo of teenage-me from the purple folder of treasured things I’ve carried
with me. It’s a photo I’ve long refused to look at. I resented the glow worm niggles to find and bring it
as we ventured further afield, towards the beaches, and this place.

It shows a me I’ve struggled to remember, a me I’ve refused to treasure, even if I ‘know’
therapeutically, I _should_.

It’s a me I blame and shame, for seeking love, for following lust, for getting swept-up in the slippery
complexity of desire, and the tantalising rush of risk taking.

Holding her tenderly in the palms of my hand, in the way I wish she’d been held, I reconnect with her,
and the place and stories she’s been banished with. I connect with the desperation she felt,
desperation I have since disavowed, tucking it, and her, away into shameful, secret pockets. Believing
her desperation’s, and desiring’s, her flirting’s, and fancy’s, led us to trouble and trauma.

With her, I remember how _desperately_ I clung to him. I remember how willing I was to overlook his
lies, the ways he would dismiss and disrespect me. I remember how long I stayed, despite his threats
and violence. I remember the lies I told, so I could be with him, and manage my mother’s worry.
I remember how desperately I longed for a family of my own. How willing I was, once my virginity was gone, to take risks to produce the vibrant family unit I so desperately sought. Remembering this, I shudder; recognising with terror how close I may have come to having a family with him, and, with deep grief, how far away the possibility of a vibrant family feels now – sixteen years on.

I remember how desperately frustrated I was with feeling locked-into the suffocating silent blanket of the house at the bottom of Nobles Lane. I wanted to light fires, to extract myself from the thick cocoon of quiet numbness which haunted my upbringing so I could feel and follow passion, move, and be moved by another human.

Remembering takes me to sadness. I feel sad it’s taken me sixteen years (longer than her lifetime) for me to be able to come into relationship with her – to acknowledge the desperate driving forces she carried, and sit with the longing, sexual curiosity, and shame she felt.

Sadness takes me to anger. Anger that this is what she encountered just as the world she longed to be a part of, but felt so sheltered from, began to open up. Anger, too, at what came before; an obsessive yet implicit preoccupation with keeping me safe, so much so that it felt like I couldn’t live. As well as what came after; an avoidance of my story, a refusal to engage.

She deserved more.

More than books about puberty being quietly left on her bed, and first-bras bought alone.

More than being raised with the responsibility to protect herself against rape (Brison 2002), and then feeling like a failure once it happened.

More than not being taught, at home or in school, that she had a say when it came to her boundaries.

More than having to mop up her own blood from bedsheets, and off knife edges.

More than (some) of the men who came after who seemed to believe her story gave them permission to take similar liberties “once used goods, always used goods” one had whispered in her ear when she had woken, in the middle of the night, to his fingers digging around inside her. “You’re too weak. You won’t survive without me” another told her when she first tried to end their unbalanced relationship.

More than suppressing her desiring, flirtatious self in the aftermath, limiting her life and exposure so she’s only let out in secret or shame-filled pockets; like this story.

More than believing relational safety and sexual pleasure can’t coexist.

She deserved more.
Extracting myself from the overgrown entanglement of the copse, I walk its nettled border finding a spot beside a small patch of yellow dandelions to settle myself. One transforms into a fluffy head of seeds; I watch as some seeds take FLIGHT.

Survivor settles beside me, caressing the yellow-petals of the dandelions in her hand.

“Sometimes, I think the story of the yellow room, is like a dandelion”, she whispers.

“What do you mean?” I whisper back, confused.

“Dandelions are often seen as a problem, a weed which produces masses of windborne seeds (RHS n.d), and their tenacious growth irritates others” she explains.

“I think the yellow room story irritated others, producing uncomfortable affects they didn’t know how to receive or respond to. In 2007, I finally plucked up the courage to tell my parents the headline: “with him, I lost my virginity without my consent”, and I remember a sort-of-desperateness settling between us. A recognition that, despite their best attempts, it had happened; I’d been hurt. They said something like “don’t let this define you”, and we’ve never discussed it since.”

“Not even now” I acknowledge, thinking of how impossible it’s felt each time I’ve tried to speak about the content of this research with them, and Survivor quietly nods.

“Then there was the first counsellor I confided in” she continues, “they told me I had to report it, “what of other women who might have a relationship with him?” the counsellor said, and I was too scared to return after that, frightened she’d call the police on my behalf.”

She closes her eyes for a moment, pausing in pain.

“In those early aftermath years, my telling’s were met with rejection, dismissal, disbelief, and on one occasion further sexual violence. Like these fluffy dandelion heads, those ‘aftermath’ encounters produced further fragments of the story, shaping and re-creating it further. Together, we flew with the wind, seeking a place we could both safely land, and wildly flower”.

“Like the dandelion” I say, smiling gently.

“yes” she smiles too, “like the “long tap root of a dandelion” we’ve been able to grow in new places and spaces, “from a fragment” (RHS n.d).
I place the sepia-toned photo of teenage me between the yellow-petalled dandelion and the fluffy seeded head of its companions. It feels like I am settling teenage-me between the seeded dandelion of Little Girl and a yellow dandelion of Survivor. A reunion after sixteen years of separation. A wave of peace-full-ness washes over me as I witness them reunite in a place which previously divided them. It’s reminiscent of the peace-full-ness I felt on the Gold Beach.

Before leaving, I blow on the dandelion, sparking movement across the photograph. The tiny dandelion seeds bearing sensations and stories, are carried away with the wind.

REPRISE

In a grey, grey town,
There was a grey, grey street,
Down the grey, grey street,
There was a grey, grey house,
In the grey, grey house,
There were grey, grey stairs,
Up the grey, grey stairs,
There was a yellow, yellow room,
and in the yellow, yellow room
dandelions emerged,
and took flight.
restless aftermaths

In the unfurling days and weeks after yellow room became a dandelion, seeds continue to travel on the wind, sprouting whimsical story fronds.

I try to gather up the fronds and write them into a story bouquet. It wilts under my hopes of resolution.

Funny how, even now, I seek ways to tie threads and fronds together, to finish this fragment with an impressive flourish.

~~.

I tire but can’t sleep.

My restlessness with this fragment, the timid, fluttering, glowing heart of this body-of-work, persists.

~~.

I grapple with letting go, skirting the edges of ending this fragment as it is; a work in progress, with seeds on the wind, and story fronds sprouting elsewhere.

~~.

I talk to trusted peers, valued supervisors, allies, friends.

Perhaps I’m no longer craving something clear, something to tie the disparate seedlings together but a response, a whisper on the wind, who tells me:

it’s enough;

Leaving the seeds and fronds of this story to travel on the wind,

to find their own way,

is enough.

It’s enough.

~~.
(On)Glowing Wonder(ings)²⁴

“Tell me a story, Pew.

What kind of a story, child?

A story with a happy ending.

There’s no such thing in all the world.

As a happy ending?

As an ending”

(Winterson 2004, 49)

Wonder(ings): I am playing with my own (gulp!) concept of wonder(ing) here: bringing together MacLure’s (2013) wonder as an affective, productive experience; Jonathan’s creative-relational inquiry as movement, as a “radical creative opening-up-to-what-may-be” (Wyatt 2019, 45); and Indigenous advocations for wandering with spirits and stories as they shift and emerge.

I see these three ideas as connected because of the movement, openness, and curiosity produced within and between them which propelled this thesis away from the usual shape of “inquiring into” something, towards an entangled creating-and-relating-with unfurling senses, spirits, and stories. Wonder(ing) is present throughout this thesis, but I suppose this section - (On)Glowing Wonder(ings) - is a playful marker in the sand: a reflexive returning, remembering, and relating-with glow worms, and a recognition of the ways their potentialities are rippling outwards, beyond these pages.

On the shores of a cherished Australian beach, I consider how glow worms, persist and flicker into re-emergence, carrying with them a sense of infinite possibilities. I also reflect on how offering up a space for glow worms to land is as important as the glow worms’ capacity for persistent becoming.

²⁴ (On)Glowing is a play on Ongoing and Glowing and speaks to my ongoing wonderings with glow worms which this section plays with.
It’s August 2022.

There are fragments of stories, scattered shards of writing, meaningful affects, personal shifts, a sense of ambiguous loss.

“How do I communicate a horizon of meaning” (Tamas 2020, 4.20), I wonder.

“How do I “make it sit still long enough to go somewhere, do something, salvage some meaning from loss, without turning barbed wire into dental floss”” (Tamas 2020, 4.24-4.36)

I travel to Australia after four and a half years away.

Returning to a place I used to call home.

I seek out my happy place within my used-to-be home.

- Marcoola Beach, Sunshine Coast, Queensland –

Where the waves shimmer, folding in, over and beyond one another.

This is Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Land.

I pay my respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

---

25 The glow worm connected to this story is oceanwater from the waves I related-with on Kabi Kabi and Jinibara land, the droplets of which stuck to, and sunk into my skin. This small glass bottle doesn’t contain those waves, but I offer it up here, for you to collect droplets from a body-of-water which matters to you.
On the beach, I remember Grandpa, and our shared love of the sea,

I sense his spirit here with me, in this “far, distant, land”.

I look out to the horizon, far away in the distance, where earth meets sky, sea meets clouds.

Something sparkles, taking flight into the atmosphere (Stewart 2011).~.

I watch the waves curling and unfurling:

the surf swells in the distance, rolling itself into a wave,

propelling forward, high now, like the tipping point of an inhale,

and then downwards, onwards, over the waves who came before,

breaking outwards, like a steady exhale, spilling out across the land.

The waves I’m watching and relating-with remind me of Bruno²⁶

And the emergences of our adventure.

²⁶ During the summer, in response to questions about my thesis I struggle to answer, I say: My thesis is called Bruno, and “We Don’t Talk about Bruno” (a nod to a song written by Lin-Manuel Miranda for the film Encanto). The name sticks, and in its final months of crafting, this collective body-of-work becomes affectionately known as Bruno.
These emergent seas, with their evocative sighs and cries return me to creative-relational inquiry (CRI), and the way this adventure has, in following glow worms honoured a generative, dynamic, process of inquiring (Wyatt 2019), or, as I related-with it in the folds of this thesis; wonder(ing). Glow worms, in their unpredictable, take-me-by-surprise emergences push this adventure beyond the constraints of a traditional doctoral thesis format, and support a departure from rigid expectations of what a trauma story is, or should be, expanding the space for what trauma stories, in their multiplicity and ongoing liveliness, could be, and become.

These waves also return me to the institutional, organised Centre for Creative Relational Inquiry (CCRI) in Edinburgh, Scotland, which, as Dan Harris writing in Australia, recognises: carves out a space, a place for “embodied relationality”, with "relational at its heart” (2020, 17). Harris recognises how CCRI, as centre and concept, also travels beyond the traditional geographical limits of place (Harris 2020), becoming a space within and between bodies-of-land, water, human, and more-than-human. It travels to me here, on Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Land, becoming a space, a place where I can think-with sea cries, relate-with thistles and a stark blank page, and remember-with mince-pie sand and dandelion seeds. Like my glow worm home, which also pushes against traditional limits, CCRI, is also ‘Sea-Cry’, an affective, poetic, undulating space, which, like the shimmering, emergent nature of glow worms, folds and unfolds within and beyond itself; creating matterings and meanings from affective movements and resonances (Stewart 2011). Creating a spirited, multi-dimensional community I have been able to both shelter in, and venture from.

These sea cries take me to Fiona Murray’s tilde (~) (2020). Fiona affectionately reimagines the creative-relational hyphen as tilde; as springboard; the “sea of sea~cry. The sea that is open for the lightning to strike, right here on the wave” (2020, 37). She sees the wave as bringing together a valuing of both sides; the creative~relational, and, as the sea cries whisper to me here, the horizon~shore.

I venture into the water,

Submerging my feet, I feel the waves, in the mist-of-movement,

travelling onwards, towards the shore, and then,

drawing backwards, towards the horizon.

I trace the movements of the waves, the sea’s cries;

the surf swelling, rolling itself into movement, like the start of a tilde ~
the transition downwards, spilling outwards onto the sand, like the end of a tilde ~

the waves continue...

drawing back from the shore with a roar,

disrupting my balance as they draw inward, towards the horizon,

a reverse sea-cry, a tilde in reverse...

is there a distinct point where a sea-cry, a wave, a tilde ends, and the reverse begins?

What if the tilde, like a “line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 293)

What if the tilde folded in, on and through itself reflecting its own entanglement (Manning 2009)?

What if creative-relational inquiry becomes,

like the rise of a wave, creative~relational inquiry

and, on its movement back from the shore,

becomes creative~relational wonder(ing)?

Fiona’s27 tilde works, as a wave offering movement, “an easier coexistence” (Murray 2020, 36) of the creative~relational. My water~born shape works too: its curved continuation reflects the way waves, movements, Sea~Cries, glow worms, and trauma stories continually evolve; folding in on and re-creating themselves, reminding me of Manning’s (2009) relationally~folded view of the world. Manning says: “Relation folds experience into it such that what emerges is always more than the sum of its parts” (2009, 34), and the water~born shape offers generative space to this: folding in the creative with the relational, glow worms with trauma stories, so together they become more than one, more than two, more than three (Manning 2013).

27 Fiona-as-supervisor emerged, like a glow worm, unexpectedly - offering a safe haven in a storm. With non-possessive warmth and unwavering trust, she repeatedly offered what I didn’t even know I needed. Here, she invites me to take the reimagined hyphen-tilde~water~born shape further.
The water-born shape emerges through and with the affective power of the waves I’m with on Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Land, who produce, with me, another glow worm as I grapple to string together articulated meaning. The waves shape this shape into my awareness, and my thinking-with, making-with (Haraway 2016) the water-born shape is thus produced in, and through the waves – and our collective, creative, relating.

Its emergence reminds me of persistence, like the way waves persist and continue, even at night, even when I am away from the sea.

Like the way glow worms persist and continue in their generative expansions, like when:

a stark blank page became a snowflake;

glowing letters became gold dust;

    a yellow smudge became a yellow room,
    and, later, a yellow-petaled dandelion,
    became seeds with story-fronds.

\[With\ \textit{the water-born shape, the glow worms of this adventure come together.}\]

\begin{quote}
\textit{Shimmering in their continual, infinite movements,}

\textit{reminding me of their re-emergences and repetitions,}

\textit{Together, they become a sea of collective shimmers.}\end{quote}

Seas and shimmers, like trauma’s affects, are difficult to grasp. They are always expanding beyond a sum of what I can speak, write, conceptualise, reflect on, feel, know. Attempting to capture, in words and language, the collective meaning of a sea of shimmers is like attempting to capture a glow worm in its entirety, or tell a coherent, tied-neatly-together, trauma story: there is always more, there will always be things missed: things that may have emerged but cannot twist themselves into language; things that were only ever meant to be felt, fleetingly; things that are “not-yet-ready” (Murray 2020, 28) to emerge; things that are ready, but not yet received. The water-born shape reminds me these “missing”, unacknowledged, not-yet-articulated elements are still part of the sea; they contribute to the collective shimmers and the energetic spirit behind the waves’ movements.
This is important to hold in mind in practice with clients. The emphasis in traditional person-centred and psychodynamic practices centres around experiencing and containing disparate parts of ourselves (Bion 1962, Bohart 1993), symbolising them in awareness through reflective processes (Rogers 1959, Britton 1993), and integrating them into a sense of congruent cohesion (Rogers 1959), and a neatly-tied together Self (Schwartz 1995). Behind this emphasis is the belief that if we can fit the fragmented pieces of ourselves together neatly, then we can lock into place, and feel “better”.

There are other practitioners, like Daniel Stern (1985, 2004) Susan Fairfield (2001) Philip Bromberg (2004, 2018) and Gail Boldt (2020) who recognise the limitations of working towards neat integration, and instead advocate for working affectively, rhythmically, with the complexities, uncertainties, and paradoxes which are part of living. This shifts what psychotherapy as a practice is working towards; away from attempting to know and congruently represent multiple parts, stories, and experiences as a coherent whole, towards a creative relational openness of moving with stories, sensations, and affects as we (and they) evolve. Turning to Haraway (2016) I can see how this shifts us away from auto-poesies (self-making) towards sym-poiesis; making-with, which includes the more-than-human. This moves us beyond a static sense of “recovered” or “healed” towards Staying with the Trouble (Haraway 2016), and delights, our makings-with produce, and carry on producing.

This thesis-thing, with my relationship to my trauma story as its ‘presenting issue’ offers an example of the possibilities such an approach to practice might hold: I related-with my trauma story as a haunted thing, a smudge I believed required articulation and then witnessing for me to recover. I saw the sensations I sometimes felt in my body as broken, as alarm bells that were inappropriately stuck. These, combined with the way my story got stuck behind gritted teeth left me feeling like a failure, as if ‘recovery’ was out of my grasp. As I loosened my grip on certainty and coherence, as I allowed myself to be moved by affect, senses, and sensations, I found, and started to follow the elusive, twinkling lure of glow worms.

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28 Following feedback from Karen, I learn that Haraway’s understanding of autopoiēsis is a misreading of Maturana and Varela’s (1980) work, who are the original creators of the concept. They don’t see autopoiēsis as simply “self-making”, rather they consider it as a process of self-reproduction. Haraway’s emphasis with sympoiēsis in Staying with the Trouble (2016) is focused on a form of collaborative, expansive, more-than-human making-with, because, Haraway believes, “nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoiētic.” (2016, 58).
I don’t edge towards the ending of this thesis-thing with a coherent story, a sense of feeling ‘recovered’, or a belief that the shape of this trauma story will remain as dandelions - but rather with multiple, interwoven stories who have lives and glows of their own; who carry on becoming beyond me, beyond Bruno and the sum of our parts. I edge towards ending with an expanded capacity to respond-ably (Haraway 2016) relate-with, make-with the continually emerging waves as they buffet me, and others, about in unexpected and productive ways.

In her explorations with the tilde, Fiona (Murray 2020), explores how the existence of something may not be in its creation, but rather its being received; the receiving creating its coexistence. Like the way a strange, niggling sensation, a glow worm, only really lands, if we acknowledge it, become curious about its strange emergence, attempt to follow where it leads.

Fiona tells me, something “may need to strike more than once before it can be realised and coexist” (Murray 2020, 31). Looking back now, I notice how some glow worms flickered into scenes long before I realised the meanings and matterings they carried; like Twinkle’s Glow Worm Home, the patch of dandelions beside Writer in Finding Glow Worms, Grandpa’s letters in Daffodils, and the Yellow Smudge. Their coexistence into my experience and storied presence on these pages only came later - as Bruno’s folds and type-strokes gathered an energetic spirit of their own.

This continued re-emergence speaks to the persistence of glow worms, and, in the situated context of this thesis, the living glow of trauma stories. The water-born shape carries this sense of possibility and persistence too; while a wave, like a glow worm, can’t be caught, captured, held onto in its infinite movement, the shape suggests they will, eventually, return, perhaps in a different entanglement.

There will be parts of this collective shimmering who I’m not (yet) coexisting with, but you might be. Shimmers may have tugged at you, come into coexistence, into mattering through their glowing and your following and receiving. This possibility is exciting. It takes this adventure beyond these pages; propelling the fragments forward - beyond the ending we are edging towards. I’d welcome hearing where you’ve been propelled to, what has glowed for you, where those glows have taken you.

The findings of this thesis-thing are not ‘mine’, alone, to claim. Instead, dear Bruno, “is the force that gave me life, the springboard through which I could begin to speak” (Manning 2019a, 12), and in my writing, speaking, making-and-relating-with Bruno, I hope spaces have been opened for this wonder(ing) to continue with you.

This possibility reminds me of a conversation between Pew and Silver in the book ‘Lighthousekeeping’ (Winterson 2004):
“‘I’ve never lived on land, and I can’t say what’s this or that. I can only say what’s ebbing and what’s becoming.’

(I struggle to explicitly tell what this thesis-thing is, or what we found together)

‘What’s ebbing?’

‘My life’

(This thesis-thing, that is to say, the writing-and-researching-life of this thesis thing, because Bruno lives on in your-reading and our-coexisting)

‘What’s becoming?’

‘Your life.’

(by this I mean the insights that your reading-with, relating-with, making-with Bruno produces for you. As well as the lives of glow worms and trauma stories, who carry on becoming beyond the submission of this thesis-thing)

(Winterson 2004, 48, words in blue are my own additions)
Glow Worm Shores

I walk along the edge of the waves.

The soles of my feet make imprints where sea meets land.

This in-between meeting place of the shoreline, tugs at my attention.

At the shoreline, there is movement

~~~~

Then a glistening stillness

.

A momentary pause.

In the stillness the water leaves behind,

Pebbles emerge. Bubbles too.

Little frothy white clumps pop up.

Complicating the surface of the shoreline.

A glistening moment of kaleidoscopic promise.

And then,

waves return, disrupting,

Carrying the shoreline onwards
Relating with the shoreline shifts something: splits the water\(\infty\)born shape of infinite, re-emerging process, and expands, towards a shape which has followed me, in writing, as emoji, through pipe-cleaners and pieces of thread, throughout this adventure:

![Image of waves](image.png)

_\textit{glow worm? Is that you?}_

_The arrival of glow worm in their multifaceted materiality splinters the scene, here on this beach._

Critic, P-Emmy, Practitioner.~.Researcher, Trust, and me - Writer, gather together, at the shoreline, like pebbles.

**Critic:** (rubbing her head) Hmmmm. I’m so confused,

(taking some driftwood from the shoreline, she begins drawing shapes in damp sand)

Are glow worms \(\bigcirc\bigcirc\) or .~. ? If glow worms are .~. and not \(\bigcirc\bigcirc\), does the tilde (\(^\sim\)) in .~. still mean a wave, or does it change? And what of the full stop (.)? What’s that? Should we delete Emergent Seas? Pretend we never went down the route of \(\bigcirc\bigcirc\)?

**Practitioner.~.Researcher:** Ah Critic. We’ve missed you, and it is confusing. To be honest, we don’t (yet) have answers to your questions. Except to say please don’t delete; we don’t want to pretend our explorations with the water\(\infty\)born shape never happened.

**Critic:** But, standing here, along the shoreline - at this meeting place between bodies – the body of water, the body of sand, our body – we can see the waves land here. They make contact; offer up pebbles. They don’t go on, and on, and on, like we said they did with the water\(\infty\)born shape.

**Trust:** (pointing back to the waves) except they do; through our sensings-along with the waves, we traced the water\(\infty\)born shape. Their movement continues, this beach where we are isn’t their stopping place. We watch them travel back towards the horizon, and then back again, to us. A continual, infinite movement.
Practitioner.~.Researcher: it seems both shapes are important; both do something. As do your questions, Critic, they take us somewhere; opening up a productive space, helping us continue wondering and wandering, shaping, and reshaping.

(Critic looks surprised, but touched)

Practitioner.~.Researcher: Let’s see if we can take up Haraway’s (2016) invitation to stay with the trouble of dilemmas in the present; let’s see what following these troubles and tensions, between ∞∞ and .~. stirs up.

Perhaps we can follow what gets created with .~. without closing down where the ∞∞ of emergent seas transported us. Particularly because the water∞born shape communicates something important around continual becoming, reflecting how glow worms, and creative∞relational inquiry, and trauma stories, and the work we do in practice with clients, with sensing, feeling, following affects is continuous, and as Erin Manning in an interview with Halbe Kuipers says “always already underway” (2019b, para 1). In that same interview, Manning also says:

“Living always means living with dissonance. If there is a true engagement with dissonance, there will be a stronger commitment to how the dissonance takes shape. The aim is not to give all crossings of the threshold the same shape. The aim is to multiply the ways in which a collective shaping of the world can occur. The aim is to develop sensitivities to shapes we have not yet encountered.” (2019b, final para)

We’d like to tease out three things from what Manning is saying here:

a) dissonance is a part of living;

With glow worms, we’ve moved away from an insistence on a coherent self or story, towards a compassionate acceptance that dissonance is a part of living, being, becoming, relating. Rather than something that needs to be resolved, recovered from, or cured, glow worms have opened spaces and places which accommodate this, and invite new possibilities.

b) how dissonance takes shape;

Perhaps though, the water∞born shape doesn’t reflect this dissonance. Its unbreakable continuity potentially implies cohesiveness and glosses over the pain and presence of fragments and gaps. In finding that stark blank pages become snowflakes, haunted letters become gold dust,
and yellow smudges becomes a yellow room and eventually dandelions, the risk from these recognitions is that the aftermaths of trauma and loss become diluted and glossed over. The water-born shape risks supporting ingrained beliefs like *everything happens for a reason* and trauma can be related to as a *gift*. It risks expanding into an infinite space where cracks do not break us because there is no held-together coherence to “break” in the first place.

We want to be clear here. Our understanding of the potentialities with glow worms - and specifically in relation to the glow worms explored in our collective wonder(ing) with trauma stories *does not* take away from the devastation of a traumatic encounter.

But rather than asking - how do I/we fix the crack, the break, the desolation? We are advocating that we ask: where might the crack, the break, the desolation take us; where do we travel to with it – even, and especially, if we travel to haunted spaces and ‘thin places’29 (Arel 2018, Gomes 1996), we might, upon first look, want to shield our senses from.

In its staccato like being, .~. offers a shape closer to the dissonance of living, to the haunted encounters, the moments that break us (*.), BAM. like a full stop, or a slammed head against a wall, in our everyday movement. It reminds me of the way *a Faded Red Line* came in and pressed pause on my movement with glow worms; suspending, for twelve days, the sense of expansion *Becoming Gold Dust* had invited; but eventually, my world span on its axis again (~), and I realised that interruption, that pause, was a suspended moment for pupation, preparing me for the movement ahead.

The dissonant shape of .~.: reminds me of how the trauma stories here, within the folds of Bruno don’t fit the ‘usual shape of trauma’ (Johnson 2021). They don’t have clear, articulated narratives but have spluttered their way into being, with heart-splinters, memory slips, blank pages, colours, objects and sounds, expanding and re-producing themselves through small shifts.

29 See footnote 20 in *Yellow Room.*
c) **multiply the shaping:**

In saying that though and continuing in our advocation for both .~. and ⋯, the dissonance between these shapes feels important. Rather than “placing value on one mode of existence over another” (Murray, 2020, 35) – choosing between the continual infinite process of becoming or the staccato like tempo between flows and pauses - we instead advocate for holding space for the multiple shapes (and shaping’s) of glow worms. Just like we advocate, within the folds of this thesis, for the multiple shapes (and shaping’s) of trauma stories.

With both .~. and ⋯, space is created and sensitively held for other shapes to be encountered, generated, followed – like we found in *Becoming Snowflake*. This echoes both Manning’s comments from the interview extract above, and Haraway (2016) who, in exploring what it means to stay with the trouble tells us that this may require “unexpected collaborations and combinations” (2016, 4), where glow worms can be both .~. and ⋯ (and more).  

**Writer:** So, rather than deleting ⋯, what it seems we are attempting to do here, with .~. echoes what we have attempted to do throughout our wonder(ing)s on this adventure: offer a place for glowing possibilities to land, follow where those emergences lead, and reimagine possibilities and potentialities along the way. Which reminds me of the point Critic was making earlier, about this shoreline being a place for the waves to land...

**Practitioner.~.Researcher:** Ah yes, that caught our interest too - would you like to say more, Critic?

**Critic:** *(looking surprised, and a little uneasy)* I’m not sure. I’m just noticing how here, at this in-between place, where sea meets land, where wave meets pebbled edge, the tilde (~) reaches out towards the sandy grains; the full-stop (.) of this land.

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30 The .~.~. then, is not better or worse than ⋯ or Fiona’s (Murray 2020) tilde (~), or Jonathan’s (Wyatt 2019) (-hyphen but rather a shaping and re-shaping; a multiplicity of shaping’s. Reflecting the multiple shapes of creative-relational inquiry, how creative-relational inquiry can also be, creative~relational inquiry, creative⋯relational inquiry, creative.~. relational wonder(ing), and, as rumour has it, creativehydration relational inquiry (Gillott 2022).
P-Emmy: We were considering how things come to exist before, does that help?

Critic: Well, from what I understood, a concept comes into existence not in its creation but in its being received and “admitted into feeling” (Murray 2020, 33), its coexistence. Then, Fiona writes, “two actions must happen. The mode must propose existence and then receive an invitation to land” (33). Whatever the waves carry then, in their continuous movement, for them to matter, for them to exist beyond infinite loops, they need to make contact, be encountered and received by the land.

*Critic, carrying the driftwood in her hand, gestures to the shoreline as she talks,*

*Showing us the moments where wave meets sand;*

*Encouraging us to notice the blurry overlap of arriving and departing.*

P-Emmy: Maybe this shoreline, this in-between place of wave (~) and sand (.) offers up such a space. Here, the sand of Kabi Kabi and Jinibara land offers a response to the waves’ call, a place for the pebbles the waves have carried within their collective shimmers, to settle.

Writer: I’m reminded of the way water met sand at Gold Beach – facilitating moments of meeting between Grandpa and me – and how the sand became gold dust, sticking to me, carrying the stories of the waves beyond the beach. The sand becoming a continuation of the story-fronds I felt there, becoming a continuation of the waves of possibility (~) through my movements beyond that place where I carried them with me. That movement though, was only possible following our pause (.), our meeting of one another in a moment of relational encounter...

Practitioner~.Researcher: ... this reminds us of the pauses and movements present in attempting to follow glow worms, in both research and practice. Throughout this adventure, movement unfurled like waves (~). Amidst movement though, there has also been stillness and pauses, sometimes for extended periods - like with *Stark Blank Page*. It took us a long time to acknowledge these moments of stillness were glow worms too; places of relational encounter where affective knowledge can be sensed, experienced, received into storied existence.

Psychotherapy is also a place for movement and pausing; for stilling the noise, and suspending, momentarily, the routine cycles of everyday life. These pauses aren’t necessarily static – though they can sometimes feel that way. Pauses may be opportunities for client’s to sit with something tugging at the edge-of-awareness (Gendlin 1981) that hasn’t yet made itself known through cognition, or speech, but perhaps could through rhythm, sensation, affect (Boldt 2020). We hope to offer a therapeutic space similar to the in-between space of a shoreline; where clients can follow what glows for them; pausing and encountering (.) and moving with and from these encounters (~).
P-Emmy, Critic, Trust, Researcher. “Practitioner, and me, sit quietly together at the grainy edge of the shoreline, playing with the pebbles which emerge as the waves draw back in their rhythmic motion.

Trust: Oh good (she sighs with relief, pointing along the beach) they’re here too!

Along the shore, far into the distance, under fluffy pink and purple clouds, we see Little Girl and Twinkle splashing together in shallow waves.

We watch as they pick up and play with twinkling pebbles along the shoreline.

Twinkle: (looking up and bellowing along the shore) Writerrrrr! What cha doing? Stop talking, thinking, telling, and come and playyyy (beckons excitedly with her sparkly fishing rod).

Trust, P-Emmy, Critic, and Researcher. “Practitioner, nod encouragingly.

“It’s time” says Trust.

I wander along the beach, the waves lapping at my feet. I notice sparkly objects shimmering at the shoreline; yellow smudges, daffodils, leaves and seeds, blue thistles, blank pages, snowflakes, shells, covid tests.

Visible, then hidden, as the waves rhythmically roll against the sand.

Twinkle, in a pink-and-purple-puff of glitter sparkles into the space beside me, “Look at all these glow worms we followed” she says, excitedly.

I smile, remembering the shoreline in Little Girl’s tunnel of lost things.

Writer: (tentatively) Twinkle, you named these glow worms long before I – or the rest of us - had words, theories, or conceptualisations to help establish them within academic contexts. I wonder, why did you name them glow worms?
Twinkle: hahahaha *(tapping Writer playfully on her nose with her wand)*, you know better than to ask me something like that, Writer *(she winks)*. But I will say this: you, and them *(waves her hand casually towards the parts gathered behind me)*, can spend your time theorising why, and why not, the hyphen, tilde, the water-born shape, the pauses and waves (*~*), and, while you do, glow worms are off becoming something new. *(She does a clumsy pirouette, and laughs, joyfully)* Glow worms are elusive, playful. And neither they, nor me, can be captured in symbol, words, or academic explanations.

Twinkle notices I look disappointed, forlorn, maybe a little lost.

Twinkle: Ah Writer, don’t fret. It’s okay, you don’t need to capture it so clearly, tie it all up in writing. We’ve done enough. Here...

Twinkle reaches her hand out towards me; a gesture of movement, an offering.

I return the gesture, cupping my hand tenderly below hers.

*Sparks flicker in the space between our palms,*

*A glowing pebble with the word PLAY*31 *etched into it in glitter lands in the palm of my hand.*

*I look up, to thank Twinkle,*

*only to find a cloud of dancing, dispersing seeds in the place where she stood.*

*~*

*I see Little Girl wandering along the shoreline towards me,*

*I stoop down to welcome her in my arms.*

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31 Glow worms, like creative-relational inquiry, are “playful, experimental, a game” (Murray 2020, 36). Like a treasure hunt or a game of hide and seek, their glows hold the delightful and dangerous promise of wonder; of something to explore, to adventure with and towards. I feel conflicted, I’m tempted to write more about play in research, and therapy, about the playful potentialities of glow worms, but as Twinkle has hinted at, now is not the time. There will be future places, spaces.
We hug quietly, feeling along with the shimmers around and between us.

I feel the flickers of her heart, matching rhythm with mine, fluttering like the wings of a moth.

Eventually, Little Girl stirs in my arms.

Fishing into the pockets of her woollen dress, she pulls out a pebble of her own.

It glows in the palm of her hand.

I hold Twinkle’s pebble to Little Girl’s,

sparks flicker in the space between the pebbles, etching glittering makings onto hers:

magic spirits

“What would you like to do with these pebbles Little Girl?” I ask, tenderly.

“They’re for you” she whispers, placing her pebble in the palm of my hand,

“build a story that floats” she says, lifting her hand to her ear.

I follow the gesture she makes and catch hold of a familiar melody

It’s the tune Little Girl and Twinkle sang together in Finding Glow Worms.

Remembering the tunnel, its ceiling of ocean waves, sandy walls, and glowing shoreline,

I walk deeper into the shimmering sea,

A sparkling wave emerges softly and slowly,

32 Glow worms have magical shapeshifting capacities. They are, like Indigenous knowledge and stories, more than a concept, a theory for (only) thinking with. Their lights don’t always lead to joyful spaces, in fact, their magic can only be felt if we dare to journey with them, into the shadows of the often-disregarded spaces and places, of wonder and the spirit.

33 I want to acknowledge, while the words here, belong to Little Girl, they were first offered to Little Girl (and Writer) by Sophie in her keynote speech: “Salvage, reclamation, writing” (Tamas 2020).
Like an old friend, it encircles my outstretched hands, lifting the glowing pebbles from within them.

The wave moves, like an exhale, back into the shimmering sea,

creating ripples on the surface of the waves.

I watch, as the ripple expands, stretching outwards,

Creating circles between horizon~shore.

One of the pebbles travels, on the curve of the ripple towards the sand,

nestling itself into the shoreline, alongside other glow worms.

The other pebble travels outwards, on the curve of the ripple towards the horizon,

Little Girl travels with it, adventuring onwards,

to a far, distant land.
Farewells

You are coming to the end of the reading process. I am coming to the end of the writing process. The box which emerged in *Greetings* has shared its contents; where are they now, I wonder. What spaces have they taken up with, and beyond, you? Has the glitter and sand strewn itself around places you have read in and wandered with? Remnants, reminders, ongoing openings from this adventure.

The multicoloured and messy woman you met in *Greetings* re-emerges to join you in your reading scene. Her mismatched clothes have transformed into a tapestry of glowing objects; woven together dandelion seeds, daffodil petals, snowflakes, shells, letters, yellow smudges, blue thistles, scorched pieces, covid tests, waves, sand, pebbles, pinecones, glitter and so much more.

She begins to speak, her voice gentle but strong: “*This adventure sprouted glowing fronds rather than findings, these fronds give me, and I hope you, too, “a way to move, a way to find a rhythm that could pull [us] into new directions*” (Manning 2019, 13).”

You watch as the mounds of books surrounding her transform into shimmering stories. They emit an ethereal light; like a glow worm in the wild, the first glimpse of dawn, or indeed of love itself.

“How do we end this - you, and I - how do we say goodbye to something which continues beyond these final pages?” she sighs, her brown-doe-eyes, searching yours, are wet with tears.

A different question emerges in the golden light between you: *where do you and I depart from, and to, as Bruno ebbs towards an ending?*

You bridge the distance between you, taking her hand gently in yours.

Sparks flicker once more, in the space between your palms, and this moment of relational parting produces *something*...

...a glowing gesture of recognition, of thanks, a farewell, a closing.
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