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Shadows and Silences: A Creative-Relational Self-Inquiry

into the Liminal Space between What Is Seen and Not Seen, What Is Said and Not Said

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a journey that took off from Laurel Richardson’s (2000b) assertion that writing is a method of inquiry. Inspired by her work, I wrote and wrote and wrote, hoping to produce knowledge along the way. Eventually, however, No showed up to protest. What followed was a series of refusals, experiences of embodied no-ing that resulted in my repeated rejection of research methods. I lost my way and my grounding, grappling with stuckness and failure, not knowing what to do and how to proceed. Left with no choice, I decided to file a “fictional” ethics complaint against myself, troubling the conceptualisation of lostness, harm, consent, and vulnerability, a process that thankfully ended with a truce, a compromise that has given me permission to write about my shadows and silences, to explore the liminal space between what is seen and not seen, what is said and not said.

This exploration is an enactment of what I have come to call creative-relational self-inquiry, following the footsteps of those who believe in “the ‘creative-relational’ as a dynamic conceptual frame for vibrant, incisive research” (Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry 2023). Using performative accounts (Jackson and Mazzei 2023) which are a curation of texts, images, and audio recordings gathered from my almost four years of self re-search, I engage with my shadows and silences not simply as concepts, but as embodied realities, using an approach that is experience-near (Bondi and Fewell 2016). These performative accounts seek to bring to life British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s (2016, 439) claim that in life’s “sophisticated game of hide-and-seek...it is joy to be hidden but disaster not to be found.” In this thesis, I show and hide myself through my shadows and silences, allowing you to take a peek into the spaces between and within them.
DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where it is stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Joel Liwanag
15 August 2023
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Introduction:

Welcome!
Research

Re-search

Search again

Researching myself

Re-searching myself

Searching myself again
Hi!

Welcome!

Welcome to my text.

I do not know how you will feel when you read this text. Where will it bring you? What will emerge? What will happen to you as you turn each and every page? Let me introduce you to unknown possibilities that may or may not show themselves to you – the possible-smile, the possible-boredom, the possible-empathy, the possible-judgment-of-me, the possible-panic-attack-that-is-triggered, the possible-I-do-not-want-to-read-this-anymore.

When I began this work, I did not know where it will bring me. At times I would force it into spaces it did not want to go to, but it always found its way to go where it wanted. I ask myself now: where will it bring me? I am back to not knowing. Will there be regret? Will there be joy? Will there be shame? I do not know. And I want to introduce you to this not-knowing too.

While I call this work text, let me clarify that this is not just about what is written. In fact, a lot of what it wants to say will be couched not in words, but in shadows and silences, non-texts that are trying to show themselves and speak. This body of work seeks to give them a space to be seen and heard even in their hiddenness, a respectful space that allows them to simply be. In the field of counselling and psychotherapy, such spaces are important, spaces where shadows and silences are not violently forced out into their annihilation, spaces where they are welcome to dance as they are, hiding and showing, humming and singing, as they please.

As you read this work, I invite you to pay special attention to them. I know that that’s an unusual request because we are so accustomed to reading what is written, seeing what is shown, hearing what is spoken. But it is for this very reason that we ought to be extra attentive to shadows and silences, and to what they are trying to show and say, even as they continue to hide.
I just couldn’t write, I just couldn’t speak
Yes, I know. I am bothered by the comma between those two statements
Uggghhhh… this is speaking to me, at this very moment…
How I get bothered by ingrained conventions that have power over me
I guess I am at that space-in-between, trying to break free, but couldn’t
The conventions are pulling me back
Preventing me from writing, from speaking
Don’t get me wrong. It’s not some entity from the outside that’s preventing me.
It’s inside.
I’m noticing it now, in my writing… and my use of punctuation marks
A part that’s trying to break free
And a part that wants to do things the proper way.
What is the proper way?
The proper has shackled me. Or perhaps it has protected me.
But to an extent, it has killed me.
I am trying to recuscitate myself… Oh goodness… what is the spelling of resucitate?
I keep seeing the red lines – alerting me to the spelling mistake
resuscitate? Oh there… that made me smile :) Gotcha!
Hey, that’s playful. That’s good! We need to play…
Go, write while it lasts…
(Pause)
Pathetic, isn’t it? Having to struggle† these two worlds?
The proper and the improper?
Right and wrong
Can’t I just be? But what does it really mean – to be?
I have been searching for myself, trying to find me
But where am I? Who am I?
This inquiry has become an existential inquiry
Enough. I feel the need to stop now.

† I just noticed that it should be “straddle” rather than “struggle,” but I’m not changing it.
Believe me, I really wanted to do a proper thesis introduction, but the *im* keeps pushing itself in. Let me enclose it in parentheses, to keep it at bay, even for just a moment. I’m recognising its presence, and its desire to make a disturbance. I talk to it and say, “I know you’re there, and it’s okay, but I hope you will allow me to write a little.” “I will try,” it says. And so let me begin to write this proper introduction, not knowing if in my writing, the *im* will suddenly reappear. Following its lead, let me try.

This thesis is a thesis that is written differently (Honan and Bright 2016), having found itself producing knowledge differently (Lather 2013). As such, it is unconventional, but not unconventional enough. It says no, but not too loudly, just loud enough to be heard. Too much loudness is dangerous, and the body does not like that (I know this from experience).

The chapter that follows this explains what I did, what I’m doing actually, my methodological journey, my journey to/of no-ing, how I jumped from one method to the next, jumps I was pushed into by my nos. Following the emerging traditions of research that is nomadic (St. Pierre 1997b; Gale and Wyatt 2008), rhizomatic (Sermijn, Devlieger, and Loots 2008; Foster 2014), mad (Gale 2018), dangerous (Badley 2021), and lost (Lather 2007), I take lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that lead me to my recurring rejection of methods. I analyse this journey, and in so doing treat my (no) methodology as data, the somewhat-beginning of my re-search entanglements. This No Methodatanalysis chapter thus sets the stage for the other entanglements in the succeeding chapters, each and every one of them a sustained performance of no, an act of no-ing.

In Chapter 3, the entanglement gets messy. I find myself filing a “fictional” ethics complaint against myself. This reflexive account is an embodied performance. As I try to defend myself and the (un)ethical choices I have made in my re-search, the yes and no (and everything in between) dance together to the beating of my heart, the ebb and flow of my breathing, and the shaking of my body. In so doing, it troubles the conceptualisation of concepts such as lostness, harm, consent, and vulnerability.

In Chapter 4, I pay attention to my silence. Guided by Winnicott’s (2016) assertion that the right not to communicate must be respected, I listen to the voice within me that does not want to, cannot, and will not speak. Reflecting upon this embodied refusal using various theories of silence, I explore the liminal space between what I say and don’t say.
In Chapter 5, I begin by presenting my shadows, self-portraits I’ve taken of myself these past three years when the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic. I re-search and try to find myself in the spaces where I am absent-present, trying to learn from these seemingly empty spaces that are actually full. In this “sophisticated game of hide-and-seek in which it is joy to be hidden but disaster not to be found” (Winnicott 2016, 439), I play with my shadows and discover that there is a lot to be learned.

In Chapter 6, I argue for the value of attending to shadows and silences in counselling and psychotherapy. Using my own experiences both as a client and as a therapist, I engage with the key insights of this research and relate them to practice.

In Chapter 7, I reflect upon my journey of re-searching myself and share with you the fruits of my reflection. And then I say goodbye and I say thank you. With gratitude, I send myself off, I send you off, and the text sends us off. Towards the end, I also say “I’m sorry” and “You're welcome.”

There. The end of the introduction. We can finally begin, even if we’ve already begun.
II

No Method analysis: My Embodied No-ing
I'm not sure if I can call him a friend. Maybe not yet. I'm still getting to know him. It’s not easy. I guess my whole life I've been with Yes. And Yes is easier to be with. Yes is happier. Yes smiles. Try it. Say it: yes. There’s a certain openness, right? An openness that makes one smile. I'm looking at myself in the mirror now, saying yes multiple times, fascinated by how the saying of the word shapes my face, shapes it into a smile. Is it a forced smile? Does saying yes force me to smile? I never thought of that before. Just now, as I look at myself in the mirror, saying yes again and again and again. Try it. Look at yourself. Are you being forced to smile? Yes, yes, yes... I continue to look at myself in the mirror saying yes. Fascinating, isn’t it, how the words we say shape us? Yes, yes, yes... but this is not about Yes. This is about No, who I have gotten to know more and more in my re-search journey.

No seems sadder. Is it because it sounds so close to low? I say no now and once again look at myself in the mirror. I try to say no and smile, but I can’t. Try it. You can smile and say no while smiling, but you cannot say no and smile while saying no. No, no, no. I pause and experiment. I try to challenge what I’m saying. No, nooo, noooaaaohhh. But no. The smiling Nos all look forced. Perhaps it is really not in the nature of No to smile. Perhaps that's why throughout my life, I’ve distanced myself from No. Yes is friendlier. Yes smiles more. No is more difficult to know.

But No is deep, and powerful. Once you get to know him, you'll be amazed by his wisdom. It's just that he's often misunderstood. Some say he's angry, too forceful, with him there’s no room for compromise, boundaries are drawn and you cannot go beyond. All these have made him feel isolated. This has taken a toll on him. It has made him hide, difficult to find. But if you give him time, and space, as I have these past three years, he will probably show himself to you, as he has to me. It’s hard work. Really hard work. I

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2 In speaking of my relationship with No, I follow in the footsteps of researchers who have made similar moves in the past (Tamas 2016; Fang 2016). Throughout this body of work, I will be enacting such moves, believing in the potential for “the imaginal relationship [to become] the very locus of knowledge creation” (Fang 2020, 1).

3 In The Migration of a Smile, Devika Chawla (2017) speaks of how "affected bodies generate smiles and in turn smiles generate affected bodies" (7). One of her female students refer to gendered smiling as “the tax women have to pay for walking down the street” (Chawla 2017, 12). As I reflect upon my smiles, I ask myself where my smiles come from. How about you, where do your smiles come from?
didn’t think I will ever say this, and even now as I try to, I wonder if at some point I would need to take it back: but it is worth it.

No in My Research

It’s interesting how No kept showing himself in my research, very subtly at first, and then, increasingly, becoming more and more bold. I’ve just been reading the first few entries of my research journal, and I’m fascinated to find that No has actually been there all along. My guess is that No found courage to gradually show himself as he saw me meeting kindred spirits in the authors I was reading. Among them, Laurel Richardson holds a special place. Her texts, most especially *Writing: A Method of Inquiry*,4 gave me permission5 to say no.

But not just her. There were many others. You’ll meet them later in this text. The common thread that runs through them is that they all seem to say no somehow, disturbing the status quo, challenging ways of thinking, proposing new ways of doing research. They are, in their own way, part of the revolution.6

Wait. Let’s see. Perhaps you can briefly meet some of them now, just to say hi. Take a look at the various ways that they say no:

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4 Writing as a method of inquiry troubles the way writing has traditionally been thought of in research (Richardson 2000b; Richardson and St. Pierre 2005). Richardson (2000b) explains, “Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable” (923).

5 A collection of texts put together to pay tribute to Laurel Richardson and her writings has been aptly titled *Permission: the International Interdisciplinary Impact of Laurel Richardson’s Work* (White 2016). Reading this compilation has, in many ways, given me permission to write (and not write) this thesis.

6 “This is a revolution,” I remember telling Nandini who was seated beside me in our Between Counselling and Research Class. Fiona, who was teaching the course, managed to hear us. I still remember the words she uttered in response (and even the way she said it) – “a battle that has been fought and won.” I smile as I now read these same words in a book (Murray 2023). I wonder where these words have travelled, what the itinerary was. I’m glad they’ve found their way into this thesis.
No. We must not allow the rules of the natural sciences to rule the social sciences. The social sciences are in a different game! Even Aristotle knew this. Have you not heard of *phronesis*? (Flyvbjerg 2001)

No. Research need not be boring. We must welcome research that makes us laugh, that makes us cry, that makes us angry. We must welcome research that is experience-near (Bondi and Fewell 2016).

No. We must do away with thinking that the “I” is bad for research. Wake up! The “I” can never be taken out of research. Attempts to do so, by using a substitute like “the researcher,” for instance, are not only annoying; they are delusional. Bring in the “I” to research (Bochner 2016).

No. Research in counselling and psychotherapy must challenge “the dominance of empiricism as the only ‘scientific’ method, such that ‘evidence-based practice’ becomes an assumed and largely unquestioned code for ‘empirically supported practice and treatments’” (Tudor and Wyatt 2023, 211). There are many other ways of doing research in this field.

No. Research does not need to have a method (Manning 2016). Foucault “made it up as he went,” Deleuze believed “that method will, in fact, shut down thought,” and Derrida asserted that “a thinker with a method has already decided how to proceed and is simply a functionary of that method, not a thinker” (St. Pierre 2021a, 4).

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* Whereas *episteme* concerns theoretical *know why* and *techne* denotes technical *know how, phronesis* emphasizes practical knowledge and practical ethics” (Flyvbjerg 2001).
From Writing to Recording to Experiencing

So, using writing as a method of inquiry, was your way of saying no?

That’s one way of putting it. Another is to say that it was No’s first playground.

*What did you write about? Or, if you wish, what did No play?*

All sorts. Here, take a look at some of our first few creations:

---

**28 January 2020**

Today is my writing birthday, my birthday as a writer. I have always believed that I was more of a speaker than a writer. This morning, however, I felt that this has come to be simply because I felt silenced, unfree. I felt that I had to follow rules and this inhibited my writing. Today, I am making a decision to break free. I will just write. No rules. Just write and write and write. I am of course kidding. Rules will always be there, but I will try my best to be less constrained by them. I will write primarily for myself, not for anyone else. My writing, at least in this context, will be for exploration. While I cannot promise to write everyday, I will make an effort to at least write something, even just a word, even just a dot, or even just a blank page. Yes, a blank page. For even in emptiness, something is being said, and there may be days when I’ll want to say something by not writing anything. Oh well, let’s see. Let’s just be free!

---

**31 January 2020**

What is the purpose of writing? Is it simply to record? To chronicle? Or is it to free? To free something that has been trapped in me somewhere, somehow? Like the anger that I let out, like the energy that oozed out of me as I spoke so eloquently in my rage, the sensation leaving the surface of my skin, throbbing, shaking, exhilarating. I am tired of writing to report. I want to write to set free, to be free, free from holding back, from keeping things inside, unexpressed, un-lived, hidden from the world, hidden from myself. Let me out! Let writing bring me out! I’m tired of hiding! I want to escape! I want to be free! Freedom at last! Free from my own self! Free from whatever is keeping me! I will be free!

---

8 The British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott has emphasised the value of playing. He claims that “playing facilitates growth and therefore health” (Winnicott 2005, 56) and that it “is itself a therapy” (Winnicott 2005, 67).
1 February 2020

Writing makes me feel what otherwise I would not have felt. Now, as I write, I am feeling something in my heart. I don’t know what it is, but it is making me write fast. I guess this is why writing in shorthand is better than writing, actually typing, on the computer. Here, as I write, something takes possession of my hand – just making me write and write and write.

3 February 2020

I just realized now that I did not write anything yesterday. I had actually thought about writing, but somehow was not able to. I guess that happens – we think about doing something but we don’t get to do it. Why? There can be many reasons. Procrastination? Laziness? Forgetfulness? Or is there something deeper? Is there something deep within us that prevent us from doing what we’re supposed to do? Fear. That’s what I preached on earlier at mass today. Fear can paralyze us. Fear can hinder us, can hamper our growth. Fear can in fact control us, make us do things that we wouldn’t have done if we were free, make us do things that we would have done if we were free. For most of my life, I have lived in fear. My fear has actually controlled me a great deal. It has prevented me from doing certain things. It has prevented me from being true to who I am. It has made me hide my true self. Who wouldn’t when you are so afraid? Fear protects us. That’s true. But often in an exaggerated way. To live in fear is to live in exaggeration and to do so is to miss out on what life has to offer. I have missed out on a lot because I was afraid. I continue to be afraid, in fact. And I continue to miss out. It is only now that I am beginning to be familiar with my fear. Befriending it. Paying attention to it. Attending to it. Why am I afraid? Oh, it will take a lifetime to answer that question. The truth is, I don’t really know. There are many theories, but I am not sure if these are enough. Something in me senses that there is something more. What is behind my fear?

4 February 2020

My sense is that when you just allow the pen to flow, thoughts that otherwise would have been kept, will actually find their way into the page. I think that’s why I’ve decided to engage in this practice, hoping that something will emerge. It’s not planned. It’s not certain. But I trust that it will emerge. The unconscious is a powerful force and it will find its way into the page. Somehow, if it manages to get into the hand without being hindered by what is conscious, it will lead the pen unto itself. I wonder, though, if I am just fooling myself, or if I am daydreaming. Is this wishful thinking? Or is this wisdom whispering to me from within? Honestly, I don’t really know. But maybe my hand knows, even now as I write. Oh hand, am I correct? Is there truth to what I am saying? Answer me. Lead then, pen. Write what cannot be written. Oh, I pause, and stop, and wonder. The pen is not yet ready to speak. Perhaps next time. I continue to wait.
Writing is dangerous. One morning, in a writing class, our teacher asked us to take a sheet of paper and just write what comes to mind. She gave words to prompt us. And so, I wrote, with much honesty and recklessness. I wrote things which I will not dare write now. I wrote from the depths of my being, raw as it was, freeing myself from whatever prevented me from doing so at other times. It was a way of unleashing creativity. That was what our teacher said. And then, she told us to stop and submit our papers. I did not want to submit mine, but I submitted it anyway, holding on to the fantasy that she’ll probably destroy our papers, burn them – I don’t really know. But then, she started reading them out loud. I was shocked, and became afraid – very afraid. My written work is not for the consumption of others. That was not what I thought of when I allowed myself to write, naively as it turned out. I got up from my chair, mustering enough courage, and angry I suppose (although it did not show). I told the teacher that I wanted my paper back. “Oh, I wonder what’s in there,” she said. She gave it back, adding, “now we will all wonder what you had written.” I was so angry – angry at her, angry at my classmates who seemed to have known that our writing would be read, angry at myself for being so naive. At the end of class, I protested to a friend who was also in that class, asked him what he thought about what had happened. He seemed to not understand why I would write things that I would not want others to read. Was I naive? Does writing always have to be read? The writer in me died that day.

Yes, writing is dangerous. There’s some finality to it. Once something has been written, then it has been written, and nothing can take that away – not a correction fluid, not an eraser, not a delete button. What has been written has been written. It has been unleashed, set free, beyond one’s control. That makes it dangerous. It’s out in the open, out of the unconscious. It has come to life.

There are things I have written which I now hope I had not written. Some of them forever etched on a sheet of paper. Some of them within my control, somehow. Some of them, totally out of my control – totally out of control. I am afraid. Writing makes me afraid. But I am starting to face my fear. I am starting to write again. I am starting to trust that not all people are like that teacher who betrayed my trust, that I am not like her, that I can trust myself to take care of what comes out, to measure the right amount of openness without curtailing my freedom. I am stopping now. This is enough.

Wow, that’s a lot.

Yeah, I guess.

---

9 “What I have written, I have written,” Pontius Pilate said, refusing to rewrite what he had already written: Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum (Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews). Writing (and non-writing) is political. Pilate’s refusal reveals the complexity of the power dynamics at play surrounding the trial of Jesus, a complexity that is similarly revealed in Pilate’s washing of his hands.
So, you were just writing freely?

Ummm, yes (and no).\(^{10}\)

What happened next?

Well, No kept moving around, kept turning up in all sorts of places. Did you notice some of the words he blurted out above?

“Today, I am making a decision to break free. I will just write. No rules.”\(^{11}\)

“I will make an effort to at least write something, even just a word, even just a dot, or even just a blank page. Yes, a blank page.”

“Let me out! Let writing bring me out! I’m tired of hiding! I want to escape! I want to be free!”

---

\(^{10}\) (and no) acknowledges the complexity of what we say (and don’t say). Even as I acknowledged how I felt free in my writing, I am aware that I wasn’t really free. My research journal continues to be a curated collection; this thesis continues to be a text that in some way lives in fear.

\(^{11}\) When I wrote this, I was referring to the absence of rules – no rules. Now that I take a second look, the words have taken on new meaning. It is No speaking, telling me/us: I rule. It’s fascinating how words grow, always shape-shifting as they find themselves in different contexts. As I reflect upon this new era in my life, the somewhat beginning of No’s rule, I wonder whether there is something subversive in what I’m doing. Bochner (1997) writes, “If we collectively stop complying, we stand a chance of exposing and breaking the rules against seeing the rules. We can begin thinking thoughts we’re not supposed to think. Then, who can say what new shape our institution may take” (425)?
There were many more, but these were the ones on top of the pile, the first ones I found as I rummaged through my research journal.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{No really made his presence felt.}

At first I didn’t notice, but yeah, not long after, he was making too much of a disturbance.\textsuperscript{13} Eventually, he found himself in direct confrontation with the very

\textsuperscript{12} As I continued searching for more instances of No blurtting out in my research journal, I found one that fascinated me. I didn’t realise that very early in my research journey, I have actually already articulated the beginnings of my ontoepistemological position: “I think that’s why I’ve decided to engage in this practice, hoping that something will emerge. It’s not planned. It’s not certain. But I trust that it will emerge” (4 February 2020). Even as I point out my ontoepistemological position, however, I am aware of how throughout this body of work, this position shifts, many times unwittingly, especially as the text navigates different terrains that are enmeshed with each other – the academic thesis, my research journal, my personal diary, transcripts of my voice recordings, my random reflections. This is consistent with Serra Undurraga’s (2022) argument “that regardless of our theoretical ascriptions and best intentions we find ourselves relating to ourselves, others, texts and the world in different, unexpected and/or contradictory ways as part of different assemblages” (3). For instance, even as I articulate an emergent ontoepistemology that sees my self as constantly being produced in my multiple entanglements with human and non-human others, vestiges of essentialist conceptualisations, such as the belief in a true self deep within me that is waiting to be set free, remain.

\textsuperscript{13} This is a thesis that welcomes disturbance, disruption. (Are you disturbed by the disruptions that these footnotes are making?) I am reminded of the keynote presentation at the European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry 2023 entitled Un-key-noting. The presentation began with a speaker reading from a prepared text, and then being continually disrupted – the malfunctioning microphone, a phone ringing, noises from outside the room, co-presenters butting in. These disruptions, arguably, were integral to what the presenters wanted to say. Similarly, these footnotes here, disruptive as they are, help produce this thesis through their disruptions. In playing with/in the liminal space between what is said and not said, they enact what the thesis seeks to communicate. Interestingly, throughout the course of my writing-editing-finalising, I have repeatedly received feedback from my supervisors suggesting that I move what I’ve written in these footnotes to the main text above. “The back-and-forth makes it difficult to read,” one said. For some reason, though, I’ve resisted. Is it because this thesis is a thesis of resistance? I don’t know, but there seems to be a part of me that wants to say, “The purpose of this thesis is not for it to be an easy-read. You can, as the reader, choose to embark on that path. You can skip all the footnotes if you wish (believe me, it will still make sense, somehow). Not just the footnotes, in fact, but all the other parts that you find ‘difficult’ (including the boring bits that for some may be the most difficult to tolerate). I guess my resistance is really an offer for you to share a bit in the difficulty I experienced, the struggle I faced in the writing of this thesis, a struggle
method he was using. He was fighting against writing! Look at what he made me submit to my supervisor one day:

28 May 2020

For 1 June 2020 Supervision

I find it difficult to write now, which is weird because these past few days I’ve actually been writing and writing and writing so beautifully, so effortlessly, so quickly, so freely. In all of these cases, it was as if the words were jumping straight out from my heart. Minimal or no editing. Truthful. Powerful.

These are personal emails which I am willing to speak about, but for some reason, I don’t want to write about them now. Is it because it’s so fresh? Is it because it’s so intense? Is it because it’s so full?

The difficulty, I guess, comes from the fact that writing has a lot of structure that prevents me from communicating the truth of what I am experiencing. Writing is so organised, and what I have now is not yet as organised. Speaking gives me that freedom. Last night, this morning, and this evening, I was in very long conversations with friends (about 2 to 3 hours each), just speaking about what’s going on in me. I call it an “explosion of congruence.” I’m feeling it now! My heart is just so full! Writing cannot cope with my experience. I find myself close to bursting, wanting to speak, and explode... and writing does not allow me to do so. If I let myself explode, my writing will...
not be understandable. That’s why I hate writing! It’s so limiting!!! I prefer speaking, because speaking allows me to shout. It allows me to explode. My heart is now so full, and I am breathing heavily as I type. My writing cannot contain me. It cannot contain my experience.

What is happening to me? Imagine hundreds of archers shooting arrows into the air nonstop. Imagine the different directions these arrows are moving to. Imagine the chaos. If I were speaking now, I would be using sounds. I would be using gestures! I hate writing! Writing does not allow me to do what I want to do!!!

Can’t I just speak? With speaking, messiness is okay. In writing, there seems to be an expectation that what is written should be organised. Structured, linear, logical. That’s just not where I am right now. I find myself in the chaos of my experience, and I marvel at its beauty. I hate it that I cannot show this chaotic beauty when I write. I know I can do so when I speak. I feel incapacitated. Writing makes me freeze. I am frozen now... ... ... ... ... Paralyzed even. There’s just so much in me, and writing does not allow me to get them out. They’re stuck in my heart right now. I can feel it even as I type. Dug dug, dug dug, dug dug... AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHGRGGRGGRG!!!!!!! I hate it! I hate writing! Writing is too slow!!! It can’t keep up with me!!! I want to talk and talk and talk and talk!!! And writing is sooooooooooo slow!!!

I guess that was why the pieces I’ve written these past few days surprised me. Because they were written so quickly, and so freely. I am actually writing so quickly and so freely now. But my heart is still too full. For some reason, speaking has a way of making me breathe, allowing some of what’s inside to come out. Writing does that too, I know, but not so much. That’s why I prefer to speak than to write. Speaking allows me to be true. Okay, okay, writing does too. I guess it’s really a matter of listening, listening to where you are, to what you are experiencing, to what you feel you are called to do. At this point, I really think I should speak, more than write. And I will listen to that truth. Writing will have its time. It did have its time in fact, many times these past few days. But not now. Now, I want to speak. I want to be free.

No is right. Writing does seem too organised at times.

But it’s not just organisation that he was against. He also didn’t like the fact that you had to write in a particular way... like writing in English for instance.¹⁴ Look at this snippet that I found from my research journal:

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¹⁴ This reminds me of Truman et al. (2020) whose work “highlights the importance of no as a way of tracing language prescriptivism practices that deny literacy to those who refuse to spell correctly, write correctly, or speak correctly” (227). As I reflect upon my disdain for writing, I take to heart the point they make: “No is an affective moment. It can signal a pushback, an absence, or a silence” (Truman et al. 2020, 227).
Writing in English – vestiges of a colonial past
But you could write in your own language, you might say. But that’s the sad reality. I can no longer write in my own language. How do I protest?

Being forced to write in English because I have somehow lost the capacity to write in my own language makes me feel "a specific homelessness familiar to those who do not have the option of working (living) in their own language" (Hohti and Truman 2021, 9).

Kakali Bhattacharya (2016) poses this question to herself: "What non-English words would I keep in my writing without feeling the need to translate them into English" (317)? Sadly, I cannot even ask myself that question. So how do I protest? How do you protest against language, when protest is couched in language?

Well, you can use silence.

That’s true.

And you can make a mess.

Ah, that I’m not so sure. We often overestimate our capacity to make a mess. Take a look at what I wrote about rules:

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15 The complaint I make about my colonial past’s continuing colonisation, embodied in the loss of confidence to write in my own language, reveals the complexity that Hohti and Truman (2021) speak of when they say “that language is never just language” (2). They point out how colonisation is continually at play for non-native English speakers: “For Riikka, who otherwise is multiply privileged as a white European, the colonizing dimension manifests in the moments she needs to bend and force Finnish words into a research framework based on English concepts, knowing they do not fit. Or in the moments when she, lecturing or talking to students, notices that English words have invaded her vocabulary and she gets lost when trying to express herself in Finnish” (Hohti and Truman 2021, 15).

16 In the course of the writing of this thesis, the white paper protest movement erupted in China. People held up blank sheets of paper to make their voices heard. Sadly, many have been arrested, and the whereabouts of some are still unknown (Human Rights Watch 2023). Silence is dangerous.
Rules control us more than we know, perhaps even more than we can ever imagine. Language is always ruled, just like the maroon notebook I used to write on. Rules make our writing straight. They guide us, making us understandable to others. But they also constrain us, making us feel less free – less free to explore, less free to be ourselves, less free to be messy.

Writing on a blank sheet of pristine white A4 is scary! How do I even make sure I’m writing straight? Thank God for ruled paper! We can write in peace!

But is this true? Do we write in peace when we write according to rules? Well, yes, to an extent. There is less likelihood of being criticised, of being called out, of being disturbed. But is that the peace we really want? For a time, I really thought that was enough for me. To live in peace, I simply follow rules. I have reached a point in my life, though, when I feel like I am ready for the next level. The “peace” brought about by pleasing others and going by the book no longer gives me the joy that it used to give. I find it boring, unexciting, dead!

I think I’m ready for a blank sheet of paper, where I can be free to move, and dance, and paint, where I can say what I want to say, even if others raise their eyebrows! This is the peace I am looking for, the peace that can only come from being true to oneself.

So, did you succeed? Did you make a mess?

17 Laurel Richardson (2000a) shares this memory from her childhood: ‘Father told my kindergarten teacher that I was to write with my right hand... ‘Teach Laurel to do things the right way,’ father told the kindergarten teacher. The homophones—right-write-righto—were conflated in my mind. Only now, as I write, do I acknowledge the emotional overload of left (hand) and left (out) and left (wing). But I was a kindergartener, testing my limits. I’d cheat when the teacher wasn’t looking and color with my left hand. Coloring wasn’t, after all, exactly the same as writing. Crayons were not pencils” (470). As I navigate this tension between getting and not getting my writing right, I am reminded of my own kindergarten years, how I was taught to write straight on ruled paper. “Don’t go beyond the lines,” my mother used to tell me, words that to this day I continue to carry.

18 As I read this now, I am drawn to the words of Laurel Richardson, who writes, “I had been taught, as perhaps you were as well, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, that is, until my points were organized and outlined. But I did not like writing that way. I felt constrained and bored” (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, 960).

19 Speaking of Donald Winnicott, Nussbaum (2006) writes, “Winnicott knew how messy and complex people are when they were allowed to be themselves. He also knew how endangered human complexity always is, in the face of society’s constant demand for conformity and order. In Winnicott’s view, such demands typically stifle creativity, forcing people to hide rather than unfolding themselves” (376). This thesis is my attempt to make a mess, spark creativity, embrace complexity, and be myself, uttering Winnicott’s own prayer, “Oh God, may I be alive when I die” (Nussbaum 2006, 381).
Yes, but it eventually cleaned up itself. Sometimes it can't be helped – this tendency to be organised.20

Well, since we’re talking about organisation, let’s try to be more organised here. Let’s go back to what you submitted to your supervisor. How did he react to that?

Thankfully, with kindness. He allowed me to submit audio recordings for our future supervision sessions!

And you did?!!

Yes, why not? It’s easy nowadays. I use an iPhone and there’s a built-in Voice Memos app that allows me to record my thoughts whenever and wherever I am.

So, you rejected writing and turned to voice recording.

Yeah, No won the fight, in a way. But this didn’t mean that he and Writing never got to reconcile. Their relationship is quite difficult to explain, actually. At times they’ll be like best buddies, and at times they’ll have fights that last for a loooooooooooonggggggg time. The good thing is that No and Writing always found a way to be friends again, somehow.

How?

Well, I guess after some time Writing listened to No and allowed himself to flow. No wasn’t really against Writing per se. No was more against writing that was rigid, proper. So when Writing allowed for some impropriety, No danced with him. Their dance showed up as unfinished sentences, as garbled words, as raw poetry, as random lists. No liked that.

20 I am aware that it is happening now as I try to put together these texts from all sorts of places, from all sorts of times and seasons, trying to make sense of the chaos that this project was/is.
But that came a little later. There was a time when Writing was really completely ignored by No. At that time, No found solace in his new friend, Recording. They were together ALL THE TIME! And this happened at around the same time that COVID came, so No and Recording became lockdown buddies. They would go on long walks and have fun together. Listen to some of the music they produced:

Sounds like they had so much fun.

Yes, indeed. But sadly, it didn't end happily ever after.

Why? What happened?

Recording, I guess, became too intrusive, wanted to be too intimate. And No didn't like that. Perhaps he felt it was a bit too much. So he had to put his foot down.

I still remember when it first happened. I was walking down from the Royal Mile to the Castle Terrace Car Park. I was quite emotional at that time, dealing with some shit stuff. In fact, I was just about to cry. At that point, Recording appeared, wanting to capture what I had to offer. But No protested. Wouldn’t allow Recording’s intrusion. Got in the way of my crying. Recording waited and waited and waited, but No wouldn’t let the crying pass. No pushed back the tears into my eyes, and started covering my heart that was on the brink of opening up. Even my voice that was getting ready to make an appearance was prevented from speaking. Recording waited and waited and waited, but No wouldn’t budge, and so he had no choice; he simply walked away.

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21 Research Journal 19 April 2020: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etbl-6vdFJl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etbl-6vdFJl)
22 Research Journal 22 April 2020: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ntKFc6t0Og](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ntKFc6t0Og)
23 Research Journal 14 May 2020: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS7Mkd1dI-c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zS7Mkd1dI-c)
If I’m not mistaken, that was their first confrontation. Well, it was definitely not the last. You see, Recording could really be intrusive. He wanted to be there ALL THE TIME. He was there every morning, waiting for me to wake up from my dream, wanting to capture my recounting. At times, he would succeed, but No would often be there ahead of him, getting in the way, jumbling my thoughts and garbling my speech, sometimes even putting me back to sleep! 

Yeah, Recording was like that. He had FOMO. He wanted to be there ALL THE TIME. Gosh, he was even there in my psychotherapy sessions! Can you imagine that? I don’t know why I agreed, or why my therapist agreed, but that was what happened. It became part of the routine. I was okay with it at first, but later, I noticed that Recording was really getting in the way. No started to come in (to protect me?), policing my very self in my own therapy!

And then at some point, No just said, “enough.”

*Oh my! So, what happened to your research then?*

Well, it had to find a way to move forward, so from Recording as a Method of Inquiry, I went to Experiencing as a Method of Inquiry.

*Experiencing as a method of inquiry? What do you mean by that?*

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24 Dream Journal 30 March 2020: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtOqw00nypE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtOqw00nypE)
25 Dream Journal 18 Sept. 2020: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYtTOQSxnbw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYtTOQSxnbw)
26 Fear of missing out (just in case you didn’t know).
27 Reading Michel Foucault’s (1997, 2007) ideas regarding the *panopticon* helped me reflect upon my self-policing, the internalised surveillance that undoubtedly shaped what I can and cannot say even in my own therapy long after I had stopped recording. Rolfe and Gardner (2006) explain, “The Panopticon was a design by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham for a prison with a central observation tower from which every cell and every prisoner were potentially viewable at all times. The key design aspect of the Panopticon was that the observers or guards should not themselves be visible to the prisoners. In this way, no one would ever know if or when they were being observed” (596). Without doubt, societal forces determine what we can and cannot say, policing us through our very selves.
Basically, I was no longer too concerned about capturing what was happening to me. I guess I became tired, or perhaps I was just learning my lesson, that I couldn’t really capture a moment anyway. And so, I just attended to my experiencing, heightening my awareness of what was happening in the moment. It was at that point that I became quite familiar with Eugene Gendlin’s ideas, having read a number of his writings (Gendlin 1996, 1997, 2003, 2004, 2018).28

I did this for quite some time, but No eventually showed up once again. He felt that Experiencing was still intruding into my life too much. And he wouldn’t allow excessive intrusion.

*But didn’t No know that you were doing a research on yourself?*

He did, and he was part of the decision-making. The thing though is that we were dancing with Yes when we decided. No was there but he was enjoying the dance so much that he didn’t realise what we were getting into. Well, he actually had a few drinks, too.

*So, Yes and No were there.*

Both were there. It can be confusing. Throughout my research process, my supervisor kept on asking me if I wanted to continue in this path. My answers to him were all danced by Yes and No.

*Oh yeah, that must be confusing.*

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28 My engagement with Eugene Gendlin’s philosophy, both in theory and in practice, has influenced my research process. Paying attention to my “experiencing,” a word he uses to refer to “the flow of feeling, concretely, to which you can attend inwardly, if you wish” (Gendlin 1997, 3), helped me notice the inner movements in my body described in several research journal entries which are now part of this thesis.
Finding a Home for No

To help me understand, what then has become of your research? I am aware that it is a research on the self, but what kind?

Well, at some point I thought of this as an autoethnography, and to an extent, it can still be argued that it is. But for some reason, No kept on protesting. I remember No telling me, “You aren’t even narrating your story! People see glimpses of it, but you don’t say enough. And you’re not really saying much about culture either.” I tried to fight back using Ellingson and Sotirin’s (2020) words: “The power of autoethnographic and performance narratives may well be in what cannot be communicated rather than in the reassurances of comprehensibility and transparency” (117). I argued by telling No that that is the story – that I cannot narrate my story in the way that I am expected to narrate it. And this says so much about what is happening in the world, how we have cradled silenced voices that cannot speak, forcing them to speak in a particular way.

To tell you frankly, this is an argument that continues to this day. I am actually still open to using an earlier title – Shadows and Silences: An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Liminal Space Between What is Seen and Not Seen, What is Said and Not Said.

Why don’t you use it, then?

29 Autoethnography is a term that “invokes the self (auto), culture (ethno), and writing (graphy)” (Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis 2015, 46). As a qualitative research method (Chang 2008), it “seeks to connect the personal to the social, the cultural, and the political, and locates self/selves, however shifting, transient and fragmentary, and others within a social context” (Allen-Collinson 2016, 297). Carolyn Ellis (2016) however, clarifies that it is more than just a method and says, “For most of us, autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively... And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living” (10).

30 Exploring my incapacity to narrate my story reminds me of what Tuck and Yang (2014a) say: “Refusal, and stances of refusal in research, are attempts to place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred, and what can’t be known” (225). Clearly, by preventing me from saying more, No was trying to draw the line, telling me, “that’s enough.”
Gut feel, I guess.\textsuperscript{31}

But I’m serious about what I said. I could really still change the title. Believe it or not, I’ve been doing that thirty times already.

What?!!

Take a look at some of them:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Attending to Experiencing: Autotheoretical Explorations of Identity, Truth, and Voice Using the Bodily Felt Sense}
\item \textit{Becoming a Priest-Psychotherapist: An Autoethnographic Exploration of My Personal Development Journey Using Experiencing as a Method of Inquiry}
\item \textit{Hidden but Authentic: Confessions of a Priest-Psychotherapist}
\item \textit{An Autoethnography of a Priest-Psychotherapist: Navigating the Relationship between the Private and the Public}
\item \textit{A Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry on Researching the Self}
\item \textit{Writing as Inquiry? What If I’m Not Writing?}
\item \textit{An Autoethnography Against Autoethnography?}
\item \textit{Reclaiming My Voice by Refusing to Speak: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Listening to the Voice that Does Not Want to / Cannot / Will Not Speak}
\item \textit{An Autoethnography of Attempting Autoethnography (and Failing?)}
\item \textit{ Chronicle of a Psychotherapeutic Journey}
\item \textit{Writing the Self that Does Not Want to Write}
\item \textit{Writing an Autoethnography that Refuses to be Written: An Ethics Complaint Against Myself}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{31} Drawing from my self-proclaimed expertise on embodied no-ing/knowing, I decide to listen to what my body is saying, textually represented here by my gut. This decision is founded on the belief that our body knows more than we think it knows (Gendlin 2003; van der Kolk 2014).
An Anti-Confessional Tale

An Autoethnography That Says No to Itself

Yeah, I know, it’s crazy! But that’s just the way this thesis has unfolded. Ever-erratic.

So, aside from autoethnography, you’ve considered other methods?

For a time, I looked into Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas 1990),\(^{32}\) and later, also Heuristic Self-Search Inquiry, which was Sela-Smith’s (2002) way of saying yes and no to Moustakas’ method.\(^{33}\)

What happened with that then?

Well, No felt that it was still too organised, and he didn’t like that. Even if Sela-Smith had already emphasised that the steps didn’t need to be done in a sequential order, No still felt repelled by it. I guess he really just didn’t like the idea of “steps.” He hated it. According to him, it felt untrue to how the thesis was unfolding.

Not long after, I came across “a relatively new genre that puts together the autobiographical, the theoretical, and the philosophical” (Clare 2020), “an encounter

\(^{32}\) “Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives” (Moustakas 1990, 15). In this process, Moustakas (1990) explains that one goes through six phases: “the initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (27).

\(^{33}\) In Sela-Smith’s (2002) critique of Moustakas’ Heuristic Inquiry, she argues “that he explicated a method that contains two processes instead of one. The first... is the path of surrender to an internal question that flows from the internal experience of the I-who-feels. It reflects a leap into the unknown, a letting go, a falling into the river that flows into a new stream of consciousness... The second process... is connected with his second question, one that... is not a heuristic self-search question. It focuses on the phenomena of the objective, observed experience, not the self who feels” (75). In her revision, she says yes to the first and no to the second, explaining that it is “an intuitive process... [with] one simple requirement, which is a willingness to surrender to feelings... something that humans seem to be so very good at resisting” (Sela-Smith 2001, 155).
between first person narration and theory as an established body of contemporary academic thought” (Wiegman 2020, 1), a writing genre called autotheory.34

Until now, I don’t really know why No rejected this. He just told me it still didn’t feel like home. We did visit and met a few people there. We read their work, browsed through their chapters, and in the end, No said that he will find it difficult to live there.

I guess he didn’t like the word “theory” even if it played with the “auto.” For some reason, he still found it too daunting.

This daunting feeling was also there when we tried to get into Postqualitative Inquiry. On our way in, we already had a sense that we were not welcome, especially because of the historical baggage we were carrying.35 In fact, eyes rolled when we arrived, making us feel that we were poorly dressed. And the truth is, Elizabeth St. Pierre, who came up with the word and who seems to be guarding the gate 36 really scared No. No kept telling me, “Let’s get out of here! We didn’t read enough!”37 This time, No succeeded in convincing me that this wasn’t our home and so we quietly walked away. On our way out, we noticed that we were actually following Kakali Bhattacharya who also didn’t feel

34 Valeria Radchenko’s definition, which is cited by Fournier (2018), resonated with what I was doing: autotheory is “a method of using the body’s experience to develop knowledge” (647). Fournier (2018) expounds on this by saying, “In autotheory, one’s embodied experiences become the material through which one theorizes and, in a similar way, theory becomes the discourse through which one’s lived experience is refracted” (658). She also points out how autotheory says no: “autotheory has the capacity to trouble dominant epistemologies and approaches to philosophizing and theorizing, exposing the problematic of maintaining conceptual separations between self and theory” (Fournier 2018, 659).

35 St. Pierre (2021a) points out that “a study that begins as a qualitative study cannot be made post-qualitative after the fact” (5).

36 “What they cannot do if they want to use post qualitative inquiry is to drop down into a preexisting research methodology because they’re impatient or haven’t read enough or are just lost. If they do, they’re not doing post qualitative inquiry, which is fine with me, but they can’t make claims that they are” (St. Pierre 2021a, 6).

37 St. Pierre (2018) advises those who wish to do post qualitative inquiry to “read and reread as many primary and secondary sources about the theory(ies) and/or theorist(s) as possible until one becomes Foucauldian, becomes Deleuzian, becomes Derridean...” (604). She warns, “Remember that no one can read for you, and people who read a lot can always tell when others don’t” (St. Pierre 2021a, 6). Upon reading this, No stood up and left.
at home there. Before she ran off, she told us, “I refuse a post-qualitative label because it still categorizes me, placing me among methodological movements, locations, or moments with which I do not identify” (Bhattacharya 2021, 182).

So, where is home?

Ah, I remember No and I having a discussion about this, how sad we felt that we were homeless. And then one day, as we were walking, we saw this big multi-coloured sign: CCRI. We couldn’t take our eyes off it and so we decided to look closer. At the door, we found this:

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The Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry (CCRI) is a research centre based at the University of Edinburgh. Launched in October 2017, it “fosters innovative qualitative research that places the relational at its heart” and aims to “develop the ‘creative-relational’ as a dynamic conceptual frame for vibrant, incisive research” (Centre for Creative Relational Inquiry 2023).

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We became intrigued and so we entered. The room was huge and the spaciousness appealed to us.\textsuperscript{39} And there were all sorts of people, all sorts of groups – dancers, nurses, teachers, activists, poets, counsellors, academics, filmmakers – and they were doing all sorts of things. No told me, “this feels like home.” We really liked it so we settled in and found our little nook inside. Fortunately, although the people there were friendly and welcoming, they didn’t mind that we wanted to keep to ourselves. In other words, they just allowed us to be. Day in and day out we went to this little nook, and then at some point, we decided to name it: Creative-Relational Self-Inquiry.

\textit{And what did you do there?}

We just sat together – chatting, laughing, playing, sometimes fighting. And then, without us even noticing, from our being together, new friends started to emerge. We met them, and in those meetings, in those relatings, the creating just continued. It’s difficult to say now which relationship created what because we were all just there – me and my thesis, Yes and No, my shadows and my silences; all of us found a space for our relating-creating.

\textit{I am intrigued, though, by that name you gave to your little nook, Creative-Relational Self-Inquiry. Is that even possible?}

Well, yes and no. Let me begin with no. I guess it is impossible because no inquiry is ever a self-inquiry, even an inquiry into the self. Jonathan Wyatt (2019) writes, “Desire is the creative-relational gesture that means we can’t not go beyond ourselves, can’t not spill out, can’t not become caught up in the im/possibility of life’s excess” (42). There

\footnote{39 The hugeness and spaciousness of the room I speak of here does not refer to something physical. CCRI, while based at the University of Edinburgh, currently does not have a room it can call its own. Thus, the door with the multi-coloured sign, like the room, does not exist physically. But both the spacious room and the door with the sign are real. In one of the CCRI events I attended, I mentioned how fascinated I was by the variety of projects CCRI nurtured – a spacious room indeed! And it really is a door that opens to countless possibilities. This thesis is happy to be one of them.}
are always others – welcome and unwelcome, imagined and real,\textsuperscript{40} human and non-human. As Erin Manning (2013) puts it, we are always more than one. And so, when I use the term “self-inquiry,” I am aware that I am contradicting myself. But it’s a happy compromise, just like this thesis is. My reason for using the term “self-inquiry” is simply to emphasise that this is a self-focused research, or as I have mentioned earlier, a self re-search. This research came at a time when I felt lost, hoping to be found. And somehow, yes, I think I have been found.

\textit{So, is this finally home?}

It feels like it, and I do hope it is. But the truth is, I don’t really know. I guess it is home until No tells me it’s time to go.

\textbf{Postscript: Back to the Title}

\textit{Before we end, let's go back to the title you've given to this chapter. First, why No Methodatanalysis?}

In putting the words together, I am making the same argument that Laurel Richardson (2000b) makes about writing – how writing is method, is data, is analysis, all put together. In my research, this continuing dance of method, data, and analysis (to the beating of No), came as a belated surprise. With each and every method that I tried to use, I noticed the continuing disturbance that No made, and felt his desire to speak. There were times when I couldn’t hear him, but eventually, he made sure I could not not hear him. As I told you early on, No is powerful. And through this research, he has made his power felt.

\textit{And why My Embodied No-ing?}

\textsuperscript{40} As if the imagined is not real.
Well, very clearly, this is a play on the phrase “embodied knowing.” But I am not just being playful here. You know how doctoral research is expected to make a contribution to knowledge. One of the arguments I’m making is that such contribution need not be primarily cognitive or discursive; it can also be embodied. Embodied knowing, or in my case, embodied no-ing, is a legitimate form of knowing, and expertise in this field ought to be recognised more in the academe. As St. Pierre (1997a) points out, “there is much work to be done on the physicality of theorizing” (184). I hope this does not sound too arrogant, but having spent almost four years doing this research (and having gone through the best and worst times of my life in the process), I have, in my own way, really become an expert in this kind of knowing and I hope that this work I have produced helps unsettle the status quo. This is me pushing back and fighting against exclusionary practices of knowledge production wherein “raw knowledge, street knowledge, and knowledge from other non-traditional sources are dismissed as ‘unscholarly’ in academia” (Bhattacharya 2016, 317). The truth is, a part of me still

41 Not that being playful is unimportant. As Lisa Mazzei (2007) points out, “play is a serious business and one that can produce previously unthought thoughts” (22). This is also what Winnicott (2005) asserts when he says, “It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative…” (72-73). Lenormand (2018) explains, “In the analytic context of Winnicott, creativity is not associated with fabricating an object outside the subject (Greek techne or poiesis), but with the transformation of the subject himself. The creation of a work of art, even if it is itself successful, is no guarantee, according to him, that the subject has been creative in the sense that he has in mind” (87). Now that I look back, I cannot but agree. Without doubt, playfulness was what allowed this thesis to be created; playfulness was what allowed the deep transformation that took place in me. But not just an ordinary type of playfulness. It was a playfulness that, as Jonathan Wyatt puts it, “accompanies and enhances the seriousness, a playful seriousness, a serious play” (Tudor and Wyatt 2023, 213). Romanyszyn (2021) makes a similar point when he says, “Research is serious business, but if one is to do re-search that keeps soul in mind, one cannot be deadly serious. A spirit of play that invites the as-yet-unimagined possibilities in the work to speak has to hover over the field between the researcher and his or her work. Only when the researcher is able to play with the work can the unfinished business of the work find a place in the work” (138).

42 I am not alone in advocating this. St. Pierre (1997a), for instance, invites us to recognise the value of what she calls “transgressive data – emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data that are out-of-category and not usually accounted for in qualitative research methodology” (175). Likewise, Hohti and Truman (2021) suggest that “we attended more care-fully to the atmospheres of particular situations – tensions, silences, sounds, lights, body movements and sensations – thus resisting the notion of academic work as mere ‘brain work’” (7).
mourns having to account for this knowledge in this way (writing about it\textsuperscript{43}). I guess that’s one of the reasons why I have written this thesis in a quite unconventional manner, allowing No to be present even as I continue to operate within a system that privileges particular forms of knowing.

\textsuperscript{43} Douglas and Carless (2013) speak of a similar experience in their own research when they say, “We see ourselves as having inhabited this paradoxical place, of feeling we have done good work, but also conscious that some of what we have learned refuses to be packaged, refuses a textual representation and therefore, we also feel we have failed to adequately represent our findings” (54). The written word, indeed, can only go so far. This is why social science researchers like them have made the call not just for the conduct of more performative research (Douglas and Carless 2013), but also for the nurturing of performative selves in the academe (Douglas and Carless 2008).
III

Writing a Thesis that Refuses to be Written: A “Fictional” Ethics Complaint Against Myself
The thesis I really wanted to write is not what you will get. It's not yet ready to be written. It wants to take its time swirling in the space it's now in, the liminal space between what is said and unsaid. How long will it stay there? I don't know. Forever? Perhaps. Or probably not. Who knows? And so, this thesis is a thesis about writing a thesis that refuses to be written. Writing this, I'm noticing the agency I have implicitly (or forcefully?) given to the text (or more correctly, non-text – a text that is not, or a text that is not-yet, or a text-that-will-never-be, or even more correctly perhaps, a text-that-already-is, a text-in-hiding, a text swirling (I don’t know how and why I thought of that... but I like that word... swirling... with no goal in sight... just going with the flow of the flow...) in the liminal space between what is said and unsaid, a text that is there waiting to be read even as it is covered, or even more correctly perhaps (oh goodness... how many times do I have to say this?) a text that is on-the-way, a text-that-is-becoming, as we always are.

And so, this thesis is really a thesis of refusal. I have put the blame on the thesis itself, perhaps because the I that writes cannot make up its mind (...I just noticed how I referred to the I as an it... but that is really how it feels at times... the I becoming an object...). The I is not stable enough to know what it really wants. Perhaps, I should really say, the I's. The I's are fighting. They cannot make up their mind. And this thesis has been hijacked by their fight.

And so, what you'll get, instead, is an account of this fight, a backstage pass to what has been going on in my mind (actually, that's not right... my body too... and my psyche... okay, enough, I think you get my point... – but I'm sorry if you didn't, and I'm assuming too much). This is a limited pass, though. It's a cordoned area where you're allowed to take a peek. Don't feel too bad, though, because I myself don't get a full-access pass! Only one does – God. You are not God and I am not God, so let's just be content with the access we've been given – lest we be like Adam and Eve, banished from the Garden of Eden, confronted by our nakedness because of our hunger for more knowledge (...wait, haven't we already been? Of course, we have, but there is always something more... more banishment from the garden... more shame from our nakedness... because we want to know more).

Okay, enough of that. The show is about to begin.
Research Ethics Committee
School of Health in Social Science
The University of Edinburgh

Dear Committee Members,

Through this letter, I wish to formally file an ethics complaint against myself. The grounds for my complaint are as follows:

1) The person conducting this research does not know what he is doing. His research has no direction and he is clearly lost.

2) This research goes against one of the central tenets of ethics which is to do no harm. Unequivocally, let me state that this research has harmed me.

3) There were several occasions when I signified my desire to withdraw consent from this research. None of these were respected.

4) This research exposes my vulnerability. With this comes the risk of irreparable reputational damage.

I am hoping that you will take the appropriate action at the soonest possible time. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Joel Liwanag
Dear Joel,

Thank you for your letter. We are pleased to inform you that we have scheduled a hearing for your case. You and Mr. Liwanag will soon receive an email containing the details of the hearing. We look forward to seeing you there.

Joel Liwanag
Chair, Research Ethics Committee
Dear Joel,

This is to inform you that a formal ethics complaint has been filed against you by Mr. Joel Liwanag. We have scheduled a hearing where you will get an opportunity to defend yourself against his allegations. To help you prepare for this, we are attaching the formal letter of complaint we received from him. Soon you will get an email containing the details of the hearing. We look forward to seeing you there.

Joel Liwanag
Chair, Research Ethics Committee
You must have noticed what I did there. With the names, I mean. Or actually, the name, my name, Joel Liwanag. It’s just me. But of course, I am plural (Rowan and Cooper 1999), always more than one (Manning 2013), just like you are. It’s interesting how we have become accustomed to think of ourselves as one when you and I know that we are in fact many – many selves (Glass 1993), many parts (Schwartz 2001), many personalities (Rowan 1990). In the scenes that follow, where my complaint against myself is heard, there are many voices that speak (and don’t speak), all belonging to me (but always more than me). For the sake of simplification, even if I know that this betrays the complexity of these voices, three have been allowed to speak: the Researcher, the Researched, and the Research Ethics Committee (REC) Chair – all me, always more than me.44

What I am trying to do here is what Pelias (2019) calls “a performance on the page” (45). He explains:

Performative writing is not a staged performance where actors move about a designed set speaking and singing to each other… [nor is it] performance in everyday life… [or] writing for performance as playwrights, comedians, improvisational companies, documentarians of various forms, puppeteers, ceremonial speakers, and others do. [It is writing that]… resists the predictable, the anticipated, the prescriptive. Instead of the predetermined steps, it weaves unexpectedly in and out of its subject, always opening new possibilities, always searching for new ways to give and take away. With performative writing, no one-two-three steps exist, no final proof given, no determined style required, no indisputable logic or truth, only the writer’s and the reader’s generative constructions, constantly and continuously unfolding… a material enactment, a doing, constructed through language as an ongoing speculation offered for readers’ consideration… an evocative act, generated by means of linguistic playfulness and designed to provoke thought. (Pelias 2019, 47-49)

Following his assertion that “[p]erformative writing…takes as its goal to dwell within multiple perspectives, to celebrate an interplay of voices, to privilege dialogue

44 Moriarty (2013), who wrote an autoethnographic doctoral thesis, explains the importance of acknowledging the many voices within oneself: “By giving voice to these multiple voices instead of presenting my research as one sure, certain and expert voice, I began to think it might be possible to maintain some sort of authenticity that better reflected the fragments of my experience and offered some kind of mirror on what the process of the research had really been like” (69). This is really what I am doing here, acknowledging the multiplicity within me as I engage in the production of my doctoral thesis.
over monologue” (Pelias 2014, 13), I allow my different voices to speak. Through these scenes, I seek “to write from the heart” and be “a researcher who, instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, brings himself forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice” has something valuable to offer (Pelias 2004, 1). Believing in “the body as a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy” (Spry 2001, 706), through this text, I seek to enact “a practiced vulnerability, a methodology of moving out of one’s comfort zone of familiarity, a strategic surrendering into a space of risk, of uncomfortability, of uncertainty... into the liminality—the betwixt and betweenness—of the critical creative process of moving from person to persona” (Spry 2016, 167), a “strategic surrender to an inbetweeness of self and other, to a relation, to a letting go of a single story for the purpose of ‘keep[ing] my hands on the performance and my eyes on the theory’” (168).

Hearing 1: Lost

REC Chair: So, here we are. Let me remind you that we’re here to hear each other. Let’s begin this hearing then with the first accusation: The person conducting this research does not know what he is doing. His research has no direction and he is clearly lost. What makes you say this about yourself?

Researched: I will let the evidence speak for itself. Hear me in my research journal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 23 January 2022 | Confession 1: I do not know what I am doing. I do not know where this is going. I am confused.  
Confession 2: This past year has been the most difficult year of my life. This process has been too painful. |

Confession 3: I cannot tell you everything.

Confession 4:

09 March 2022

Why does this research process feel like a trap? I gave myself to it, but it seems to be betraying me. I am left with writings that I do not want to read (and much more so, publish), and recordings that I do not want to listen to. What is happening here? The resistance is so strong, I feel like I have really set myself up for failure.

What is it that I’m finding hard to confront? I guess it’s the messiness of everything. Forcing coherence makes it too simplistic. But the opposite, incoherence, seems unbearable. Here I am again, stuck, not knowing what to do, how to move forward. The rhizome is making me dizzy.

19 July 2022

This is the part where I tell you what I’m doing. But what do I tell you? How do I tell you? When I don’t really know what I’m doing. What am I doing? I thought I knew. But I don’t. The truth is, I don’t. That’s probably one of the key “findings” (probably even the most important finding) of this research. I do not know what I’m doing.

Researched: Need I say more? But to hammer my point further, let me continue my presentation of evidence with a couple of chaotic poems written in distress:

45 The rhizome is a key concept used by Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) and they describe it as follows: “unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills” (21). While I find myself continually drawn to the rhizomatic, I also find myself constantly resisting it. This seems to be happening not only in my writing, but also in my life – the tension between the rebelliousness/freedom of free-flowing flow and the desire to conform/go back to what I’m used to. This trying to break free (and many times failing/falling) seems to characterise what is happening to me and my research.
Nowhere to go
I find myself running and running and running
Here, there, nowhere
I have nowhere to go
I am trapped
Even as I run, and run, and run
I am trapped
In a maze that has no exit
And the space is getting smaller and smaller
More and more
I feel it
That I have nowhere to go
No escape
No way out
I have nowhere to go, but in

Inside
I look inside
But it is scary
I am shaking
Little by little, I go in
And I find myself lost
I find myself unable to move
I'm stuck
Inside, I continue running
But there is no way out
I am stuck inside
I can't breathe
Let me out
Let me out
I want to go out
Please, let me out
I'm begging you
Let me out

I sit and I wait
But there is no way out
There is no way, but in
In
Inside
Inside myself
I am trapped inside
I am trapped inside myself
Let me out
Let me out
Please, let me out
You cannot go out
There is no way out
There is no way out, but in

I am moving
Moving inside now
Walking around, slowly
Exploring what is inside
Darkness
I am lost
I can’t see
I don’t know where I am
I know I am inside
But it’s dark, so I cannot see
What’s here?
Who’s here?
Show yourself to me, please.

You cannot see me
You cannot see you
You have to close your eyes
Only then, will you see me
Only then, will you see you

My eyes are closed
I am still alive
I am moving left and right
No
Left right
Left right
No
My chest is heavy
I’m finding it difficult to breathe

No more
Enough
I’m tired
Please, let me out

24 February 2022

Lost capacity
Cannot write
Can’t move
Cannot
No way
Can't find the way
My way
Is lost
Paralysed
Can't move
At all
No energy
Eoijingnhygghrrtyyht
Guggfrtghjft
Hdfghhyyrfbji
Hfgytght
None
No

Researched: Is this someone you will allow to continue? He has clearly gone mad. And he is crying for help. Do your job. Stop this madness!

REC Chair: I’m sorry but I’m afraid I can’t. I am the chair of the Research Ethics Committee, and I am a psychotherapist, but I have no power to stop madness. That’s a mistaken assumption people make about us, that we can stop madness. All we can do is hear. That’s the reason why we’re here in this hearing.

Researched: Have you not heard me then?

REC Chair: I have, but I also want to hear your defence.

Researcher: Let me make it easy for all of us. On this point, I admit, I am guilty as charged. I will not dispute this accusation against me. I really didn’t know

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46 Many people come to psychotherapy with the fervent hope that the therapist can heal them of their “madness,” an expectation that speaks of one’s helplessness, but is sadly founded on shaky ground. When I see my clients for the first time, I tell them the truth that all I can offer is a space. I do not make promises because I know that what will happen in that space is unknown. As Jonathan Wyatt (2022) puts it, “helping (if it happens, which it may not) is not something someone ‘gives’ or ‘does’ to someone else but something that arises within the relational process, in the encounter between therapist and client… in the flow and space between them” (84).
what I was doing. Yes, I was lost and my thesis did not have a fixed direction.

REC Chair: What is your defence then?

Researcher: That uncertainty and lack of direction, not knowing and getting lost, are integral to the kind of research that I have chosen to undertake.

REC Chair: What do you mean by this?

Researcher: Allow me to present my own evidence, from the same research journal:

6 February 2021

This is not how I imagined my thesis journey would be. I imagined that it would flow more smoothly. As it turns out, I was wrong. It’s now a mess, and I hate it. Things are not turning out as I had planned. While I do admit that I do not like the place I am in right now, I am slowly becoming convinced that this is what research is all about. It’s about being open to whatever there is to discover. So, what have I discovered, thus far? My preference for what is presentable. My bias towards what is clean. My desire to stick to storylines that are easy to understand. And how not getting these unsettles me and makes me panic.

As you have heard, my research is focused on myself, and the ontoepistemological position that I have taken presupposes that this self is ever-emergent, constantly-in-flux, always-becoming, a being-knowing that cannot but be open to surprise. My doctoral work, therefore, is me “thesisising,” a term I borrow from Mary Garland (2022) who uses this to refer to “experiment[ing] freely without having a plan... seeing what emerges” (25).

REC Chair: Don’t you think this is dangerous?

Researcher: Very much so. But that’s life. We must not fool ourselves into believing that we have a choice. Life will surprise us whether we like it or not.
REC Chair: The question of the Committee, though, is whether a research like this must be allowed to proceed. You can hurt yourself, you know.

Researcher: I appreciate the Committee’s concern for me, but I’m afraid you cannot really protect me from the pains of living a life. The point I’m making is that this is what life is. We all live in uncertainty. We all get lost. Why must you stop me from doing my re-search, from inquiring into my own life?

REC Chair: Because we have received a complaint. From you. Against you.

Researcher: Tell me to accept life for what it is.

REC Chair: Only you can do that.

Don’t treat us as your adversaries. We’re here to guide you. We don’t want you to get lost.

Researcher: But getting lost is part of the journey. It is part of living. And it can be part of research too (Lather 2007). If we seek to undertake research that seeks new knowledge, and not just reproduce what we already know, we must be willing to see “getting lost as a way to move out of commanding, controlling, mastery discourses and into a knowledge that recognizes the inevitable blind spots of our knowing” (Lather 2017, 170). In other words, we must be willing to write our thesis differently (Honan and Bright 2016).

REC Chair: But research must have direction. Which is why a research question is important. Its role is to give direction.

Researcher: But I have no research question. I had one, ummm... many in fact, but they kept running away.
REC Chair: And why did you not run after them?

Researcher: Because my heart would not allow me to.

REC Chair: Is that why you kept getting lost?

Researcher: To you it may appear that I was getting lost (I don’t blame you because it did feel that way many times), but perhaps I was just searching again and again for that which I am really looking for. As Jonathan Wyatt (2019) points out:

...the act of writing-to-inquire may perhaps be better understood as being attuned to what might be emerging. Rather than dropping a rope into the nethermost reaches of an unfathomable pit, it is an act of being still on the surface of the ocean, waiting to sense where the waves carry us. (69)

REC Chair: But you don’t know what it is that you’re looking for! How will you find it?

Researcher: What you find is what you find, and they are your findings. That’s a misnomer, though, because it makes the false assumption that there is something out there waiting to be found.

REC Chair: Isn’t there?

Researcher: Well, there is, but the findings cannot be found outside the -ing.

REC Chair: We’re getting too philosophical here. Let’s get back to the ground. Do you know of any research exemplars that have done something like this?

Researcher: My research is unique so it is its own exemplar, but if what you’re looking for are researches that also got lost somewhere along the way, there are many. Jago’s (2002) Chronicling an Academic Depression, Strom’s (2021) Learning from a ‘Lost Year’: An Autotheoretical Journey through Anxiety and Panic, and Barnes’ (2014) Writing from the Margins of Myself, all
speak about the loss of control in research (and in life). But you don’t need to look far. In your university, in your department in fact, doctoral students have written about the messiness of research (and of life). Fejer Almajed (2017), Ying Liu (2019), and Gael Bateman (2023), for instance, all argue for the place of incoherence in doctoral thesis work (just as it has its place in life). Let me remind you, though, that what I have cited are only those that have somehow managed to get published. Surely, there are many more that have found themselves either as unfinished works, stored in hard drives and filing cabinets, or discarded work, shredded into pieces (Richardson 2016).

REC Chair: So, you are one of the few who have chosen to carry on.

Researcher: One of the crazy few who have taken to heart the words of Helene Cixous (1993, 32), that “the only book that is worth writing is the one we don’t have the courage or strength to write.”

REC Chair: But don’t you remember what David Carless said about this?

29 September 2021

“This is inspiring and certainly a challenge. There is truth in it! But we also have to be able to survive it and, hopefully, complete it! This depends on personal and social circumstances.” (David Carless, comment on author’s paper, September 29, 2021)

Researcher: Fortunately, I think I’ve found my way to survive.

REC Chair: So, you’re no longer lost?

Researcher: When will we ever not be? Thankfully, though, no longer as I was in the past. Even lostness moves, dances, and my lostness now is no longer as lost as it used to be.
REC Chair: You have found your way.

Researcher: No. My way has found me. It’s magical, actually, how true it is, what Rumi (2020) says: “As you start to walk out on the way, the way appears.”

Hearing 2: Harm

REC Chair: Let us continue then with the second accusation: *This research goes against one of the central tenets of ethics which is to do no harm.* Tell us then, how has this research harmed you?

Researched: Ummmm... I don’t know where to begin. I know I’ve been harmed, but I cannot explain how. In fact, now that I look back, I am puzzled still by how it happened, like, how can this research harm me? I was the researcher! How can my research harm me? But of course, I was not just the researcher, I was also the researched; it was probably the researched me who was harmed. But no, wait, the researcher was also harmed. Harm went all around, I guess. Harm sneaked in, cunningly.

REC Chair: Maybe you can do what you did earlier. Present to us your evidence so that we can understand you better.

Researched: Here, take them. I don’t even want to read them.

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47 John Freeman (2015) tells us “that no clean line exists between who we are and what we write and that no clear boundary separates the researcher from the researched” (925). These words describe well the complexity of this research.

48 In speaking of harm this way, I recognise how my work has been influenced by affect theory (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Examining the inventory of shimmers (Seigworth and Gregg 2010), marveling at the passing around of happy objects (Ahmed 2010), enjoying the capaciousness of no (Truman et al. 2020), tracing the migration of a smile (Chawla 2017), and reading the writing of shame (Probyn 2010) have all helped me in displaying the productivity of harm, seen concretely in the production of this thesis.
6 Sept 2020

I didn’t cry, but I wanted to cry. I was mourning, silently. The tears did not fall, and I wondered why. They were being kept in. The experience is like being in a threshold, at the tipping point, but it does not continue. It remains suspended in its place, waiting, waiting, waiting. It does not come. Something continues to be kept inside. I am in a threshold, a tipping point, but I remain suspended in place, waiting, waiting, waiting, still keeping something inside. It just wouldn’t flow.

18 November 2020

The unproductive self
The self that refuses to be written
The self that wants to be forgotten
The self that wants to remain hidden
The self that does not want to be remembered
In my research, what happens to this self?
Will it just remain that way, hidden? Voiceless? It does not want to speak.
While it refuses to be recorded in words, my experiences of it persist – enough to make my breathing difficult, even painful, enough to make me want to go to bed at night so I can escape into dreamland, enough to conjure images in my mind that are violent yet tempting (me holding my neck, lifting my body from the head like a stuffed doll that is hit again and again on the wall)
What happens to these experiences? Do they have a place in my research?

24 November 2020

The truth is that the past few weeks have been really difficult for me emotionally. Because of some personal issues I’m dealing with, I have found myself quite desolate. Attending to my bodily experiencing has now made me familiar with what it is like. I’m actually feeling it now as I write. There is shortness of breath. Heaviness in the chest. Strong pulsations of the heart, reverberating in different parts of my body. It is a rhythm I have kind of gotten used to, especially in the evenings just when I am about to sleep.

Throughout the day, I manage to survive by distracting myself. There are all sorts of distractions available to me – Facebook, a conversation with my mom, watching movies, and even some academically productive ones like reading journals and writing essays. Sometimes, however, the body just takes over. And there is very little I can do when the body takes over. It will not allow me to work. Walking helps, so at times, I do go out for a walk when things become too difficult. Outside, I am able to breathe more easily so this is helpful, but all walks have to come to an end. In the evenings, I am left with myself and my body reminds me that it is not over. My only recourse is to escape in my sleep.
Earlier today, I was in a workshop on focusing and in one of our exercises, I got in touch with the heaviness in my chest. It was as if there was a foot stepping on it. It was not pushing hard, but I still found myself unable to move. I could breathe, but with some difficulty. At some point in the exercise, I noticed that the foot was no longer there. But it still felt heavy. I found myself able to move a little, and my breathing was freer. Somehow, however, there was still something heavy on my chest.

This is a familiar feeling I've been carrying for weeks now. Even as I type these words, the heaviness is there. I feel it now. It's almost making me cry. But I cannot cry. I'm holding back. The tears won't flow, and I continue writing.

This is a place I'd rather not be, but the more I think about it, the more I become convinced that experiences like these must find their way into my research. Even if I do not want to talk about them. A research into the self that does not make room for what one does not want to talk about will be blatantly insufficient. And so here I am, trying to muster what I can to just write, even if a part of me is resisting.

10 January 2021

Reading more and more about self-research and the many risks involved in it (Adams 2008; Ellis 2007; Etherington 2004; Gilmore 2001), I actually started to question myself whether I have made the right decision. I became really scared when I once again came across what Helene Cixous (1993, 32) had written – that “the only book that is worth writing is the one we don't have the courage or strength to write.” I acknowledge my fears, and I am aware that they are particularly strong at this point because of where I find myself in.

07 February 2021

I really do not get what is happening to me. I cannot understand. The bodily reaction I'm getting is telling me something but I do not know what it is. I cannot even write in a sustained way. All I can manage are these short bursts, almost like stolen moments whenever I can muster enough will/energy/determination to just write. More and more, it’s also happening to my audio recordings. I find myself resisting, and I do not know why. I am slowly feeling it now even as I type this on my phone. I wouldn't be surprised if this just ends quite suddenly. Is this an inner protest to what is polished? Is this seeming self-sabotage really a cry to be noticed? I really do not know. All I know is

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49 Focusing is a process of attending to one’s bodily felt experiencing, what Gendlin (2003) refers to as the *felt sense*. From May 2020 to February 2021, alongside the work I was doing for my research, I completed a Certificate on Focusing Skills. Its influence on my work is evident in many of my research journal entries.
that the inner part of my body is starting to shake. Is it just the cold weather? I honestly do not think so. My body is trying to tell me something. I just do not know yet what.

5 March 2021

Two nights ago, I decided to listen to some of my recordings from last year. I didn’t like the experience. I actually began to listen hoping that reminding myself of what had happened before would help me realise that life is constantly changing, that whatever difficulties I’m experiencing now will eventually shift. But I really didn’t need reminding. I, of course, knew that. Having gone through several shifts in my life, I know that life is ever-changing. But that’s not what I needed. I didn’t need reminding. And so, as I lay in bed, going through recording after recording, I couldn’t take what I was hearing. I couldn’t take hearing myself so excited, so alive, so energetic, when at this point, I find myself having an extremely difficult time. And so, I stopped listening. In fact, there was a point when I imagined myself throwing the phone I used for my recordings, knowing of course that I wouldn’t do that. But that’s how I felt. The desire was an expression of my hatred of what was happening to me. At the core of my inner struggle, however, was a genuine question: How can this be happening? How can I be in a high at one point, and not long after, come crashing down? How can life be so erratic? How can change be so cruelly sudden?

15 April 2021

I am stuck. Still stuck. I thought I had gotten out of the stuckness, but apparently not. Why does experience keep on shifting? Yesterday, it felt like I have found my way out. Freedom from a month-long stuckness. Today, it all came crashing down.

Is there a way out? The only way out is through. That’s what I was saying. But the doubting has returned. And my excitement has turned into despair.

4 June 2021

I am forcing myself to write. The truth, though, is that having nothing is more truthful (at least it seems to me) than to have something. A blank sheet would communicate best what I am going through. No, I take that back. Not a blank sheet, but a sheet with messed up scribblings that characterise what is going on in me. I feel it now inside me, a mess. I have hesitated to put it into writing for so many reasons. Shame. Fear. Dread. It has just become somewhat impossible for me to put things into writing. Everything just wants to be bottled up inside. To stay hidden. Although that’s not true. Not entirely. I actually want to communicate what’s going on in me, and I have, with people I trust. I am thus in the space in between – of wanting to talk and not talk, of wanting to write
and not write. It's confusing. I am confused. I really don't know what is happening to me. The truth, though, is that I probably do, at least partly. I know that I do not want this anymore. I want to escape, but escape is not an option. The pressure is too strong.

It’s 2:25 in the morning, I’m tired. I will take a break.

14 June 2021

Fields of Play is the title of Laurel Richardson’s book, if I’m not mistaken. I used to be able to play. Now, no longer. I’m currently in fields of despair, of hopelessness, of dread. And it doesn’t feel like play at all. The opposite, in fact. The antithesis of play. It is punishment. It is torture. It is holding back. It is the inability to move. I am paralysed, and I cannot play. I am like that kid on a wheelchair, wanting to play, but unable to. For some reason, though, as I began writing this, I feel as though I have entered into a playground. Hmmm... I’m not sure why, but as I type, I feel as though there is some freedom in just writing, and writing, and writing whatever comes to mind. And to heart. Right now, I am paying attention to my heart, and it is crying inside. Interestingly, a few minutes ago, I was finally able to cry. It was a weird cry. Tears were flowing down my cheeks, but I was not feeling anything. It happened when I was in the process of tapping, a technique I learned from my therapist. I have often wondered why I have not been able to cry for so long, despite the pain and anguish I’m going through. Today, I finally did. But as I said, there were no feelings. Just tears flowing. Perhaps because my eyes were closed for some time? Naaahhh. My eyes have been closed like that before. I guess my body was crying for me, even if I couldn't feel it. Ahhh... I’m feeling some tightness in my chest again. It is as if it’s crying, sobbing. Why are all these so disjointed? Earlier there were tears, but no emotions. Now, there are emotions, somewhat, but just limited to that part of my body, that inner part where the chest is. My mind is not there, but I have a sense that that part is crying. I’m really very sad at what has happened to me. I feel so powerless, so hopeless, so defeated. I feel trapped.

26 June 2021

I begin my writing as I notice, once again, the fast beating of my heart. It’s been like this for some days. No, weeks even. And I am worried. I know my life cannot go on this way. My research is slowly killing me.

You chose that, Joel.

I know, and I’m regretting it.

As I engaged in this research process, I saw a psychotherapist once a week. I only stopped when it was clear to both of us that our work together has come to an end.
I haven’t had a good sleep for some time now. I would wake up three or four times, with the same fast heartbeat that I have now. I’m just too worried about my thesis. I don’t know where I’m going. And I don’t even know what it is exactly that I’m really researching!!!

What have I gotten myself into? A few nights ago, I had a dream. I was driving a huge truck, what you would call a lorry here in the UK. I’m not sure how many wheels there were, but it was huge. And I was driving it in a small neighbourhood, where cars were parked along the streets. For some reason, the truck had no breaks! It wouldn’t stop. I was so angry! Luckily, I got to manoeuvre it without hitting any of the cars. It eventually stopped when I used two rods that crisscrossed. I still do not understand how it stopped, but it did. And I continued to be angry. I was fuming mad!

What have I gotten myself into? This self-research is out of control. I’m trying my best to manoeuvre it, but it is tiring me, and making me so angry and afraid and sad. Why am I doing this to myself?

It wasn’t always this way. There was a time when research was fun, when I enjoyed writing and audio recording myself. That was a year ago when I had what I call an “explosion of congruence,” when I felt so free, able to play.

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**27 June 2021**

Do you want data? Here’s your data! Paralysis! Shortness of breath. The boundary has been broken. No, it was never there! This is the problem with researching the self! What have you gotten yourself into?

Grappling with boundaries. Another theme for you to work on, Joel. Another key idea for your thesis. Are you happy now?

How can I be happy when I am suffering?

You have not been keeping your boundaries. You take things too personally.

How can I not? When the self is involved!

Shortness of breath. Heaviness in the chest. This cannot go on this way!!!

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51 Tuck and Yang (2014b) speak of the frequent pressure faced by researchers in the academe “to mine their families, communities, and personal stories to become recast as academic data” (813). This was a pressure I faced, resisted, and gave into in the writing of this thesis.
7 July 2021
Dear Seamus,\textsuperscript{52}

I’ve gone deeper into the darkness. Really

12 July 2021

The truth is that there is a lot happening in my mind, thoughts that never get spoken or written, thoughts that I cannot run away from. They’re drowning me, but I struggle to let the thoughts out. They remain in my mind, and my heart – my body, which absorbs all the negativity, slowly killing me.

26 July 2021

What is happening to me? I don’t really like what is happening to me. I am slowly falling apart. Have I not already? To an extent I have. And I am. In the process. Of falling apart. It’s painful. And that makes it difficult to write, or record. And even pray.

I have been trying to pray since I woke up. But it’s been really difficult. The truth is, just before I picked up my phone to scribble these thoughts, I was trying to pray. And then I shifted to this. Maybe I am praying. Maybe I can pray using this.

Dear Lord, you know what is happening to me. I do not want this anymore. Please take it away. Help me. I don’t know where to begin. It’s just too overwhelming.

You know that I’ve been escaping. But this can’t go on forever. I have to face this somehow. Help! Please!

I am running out of time. Please help me now. Please.

8 August 2021

Torture. This is how it feels. I find myself confronted by the truth that I do not know where I am going. Still. It has been like this for so long. When will the shift take place? Will there ever be a shift?

The shift that brought me here was gentle, but also brutal. I was actually noticing it as it

\textsuperscript{52} Seamus is my research supervisor.
happened, early on. Not wanting to post on social media. Wanting to hide myself. Experiencing the palpitations every now and then. And then it went into turbo mode. The freefall that seemed to follow the laws of gravity. Becoming faster and faster with the falling. Wait? Am I correct? Somehow, I have a memory of that from high school. Let me check. Oh yeah, I am correct. That’s what’s happening to me at the moment. Free falling, faster and faster.

18 August 2021

I mourn for the words I cannot share, words that must remain unsaid (or perhaps even unthought). And this mourning is something I cannot escape from, no matter how hard I try. I used to know how to escape, but now that I’ve been found, there seems to be no escape. It’s in my chest. How do I escape from that which is inside my chest? There is no way. For now. I hope. Only for now, I hope. I cannot go on this way.

20 August 2021

Is this the end of the line? Every day is a struggle. Torture. Is this how research should be? Shouldn’t research be exciting?

24 August 2021

Why do I have to lie to you? The truth is: my project is falling apart. No, actually, the truth is: I am falling apart. But my project is so tied to me. And so let me say: we are falling apart – the project and me.

This was not how it began. It began with excitement, with energy, with life. It almost feels like a traitor. I feel betrayed. Looking at it from the other side: I was too naïve.

This project began with a rebellious methodology.53 But I am not a rebel. And now I’m realising that that’s what’s going on in me right now, a rebellion.

The birth of a rebel. Is this what’s happening now?

53 In the book Doing Rebellious Research: In and beyond the Academy (Burnard et al. 2021), various authors come together, “taking pleasure in performing the gestures that jam the system, dislocating and disrupting things and values” (x), saying, “we are exhausted, tired and bored by the academic system of abstraction, opposition and objectification which works hard, very hard, to contain us” (2). In my fantasy, this thesis is part of that collection.
I grew up as a conformist, and in a very real sense, I very much still am.

1 September 2021

(7:48) I cannot write. I have almost completely shut down.

(10:32) The rebel has taken over. What do I do?

20 September 2021

Sorry for these random thoughts that I can’t even properly put together. For some reason this is all I can do at the moment.

I cannot write. And it is very painful – being unable to write, not knowing what to write. I just find myself so so stuck. I am paralysed. I cannot move. I just want to cry, but I cannot cry. I am shaking inside.

And so here I am, on the brink of giving up, wondering whether this project has a future (whether I have a future).

1 October 2021

What did I get myself into? It seems there’s no escape. I feel trapped. Shackled.

Of course I know I am not trapped. I can always get out. But that’s not how it feels. It feels to me that there is no other way but to stay, to stick with this, even if it is painful.

Why did I choose to research something live? I did not expect it will turn out this way! Did I make a mistake? Even if many times I say it feels like it, it seems that there is a reason why I decided to do this. What is that reason? I do not know.

What is happening to me? I am being shaken. Am I losing myself? Or am I in the painful journey of really trying to find myself? My fear in abandoning this process is that I am already in the midst of it. That’s why it feels there’s no escape. I’m already here, and I cannot just switch off this way of being. It has emerged, and I have to wait for where it will bring me. But wait, do I really just have to wait? Or is there something I must do? I guess I have to wait to find out.

Oh waiting. It’s too painful. The tightness of my chest is becoming more and more unbearable. Am I waiting, or am I simply allowing myself to be dragged by the passing of time? I am afraid.
19 November 2021

Let me try this out. My first written piece after a long long time. Just to get things moving. But wait. It’s still not moving. I’m typing words and I continue to wonder, “Is it moving? Am I moving?” Let me just type and type and type, and notice my eyes welling up. Perhaps something is moving. Slowly, I’m noticing myself, preparing to cry. Why have I been stuck for so long? Why do I continue to be stuck? How do I move on from here? I have just allowed my fingers to type and type and type. And ask and ask and ask. Inquire, inquire, inquire. Why??? There seems to be no answer. And I continue to be teary eyed. Did I move? Maybe I did. A bit. Or maybe not.

6 December 2021

I cannot move. Paralysed. Stuck. No more power. Stunned. Confused. I can’t believe what is happening to me.

I cannot write.

Is it time to quit? Is it time to go home?

But I cannot quit. I cannot go home.

I have no home to go home to, because I can never be home if I am like this.

I can’t even move. How will I even pack?

18 December 2021

Too messy
I can’t take this
I’m going crazy!!!

27 December 2021

I’ve really lost my capacity to write, to think, to speak, to live…
Why can’t you write?
I don’t know. I don’t want to. I’m scared.
Scared? Scared of what?
Of what people will say. Of what people will think. Of what people will do.
Better to be safe.
But you are suffering. We are suffering.
And people will say, and think, and do things as well if you do not write, if you fail.
That’s why I cannot move. That’s why I’m stuck.
You're already attracting attention, you know. People are starting to worry.
I know. Is my silence actually a cry for help?
Yes, your silence is like a loud cry! Haven’t you noticed people reaching out to you?
I know. And I am afraid, and tired, and angry... at myself.
I'm just sad. For you. For us. We've been suffering for so long. Life can't go on this way.
I know. But there seems to be no way out. We're stuck.
I can't breathe. I'm suffocating.

10 January 2022

Enough!!! This is too much!!! It has gone on for too long!!! This is the end!!! Be free!!!

How? You speak as if it were that easy.

26 January 2022

My stuckness is just getting deeper and deeper. I am staring at my computer, not really knowing what to do. This will not move. I will not move. I cannot move. No more.

I am trying to sense what I am feeling. Anger? Frustration?

19 February 2022

Dear Seamus,

I am writing this to share with you (or possibly my future readers, in case this ever makes it to my thesis) that I am unable to write. I say that with a lot of pain. With humiliation even. I am crying, unable to contain the truth of this paralysis I am experiencing. I decided to just write, hoping that doing so will be of benefit somehow, now or in the future. It’s just too overwhelming. There are so many things in my mind and I just couldn’t cope. My writing couldn’t cope. I read and read and read, and think and think and think, but I could not manage to move forward in my writing. When I say writing, I mean, “academic” writing. I have been reading, and I get affected by my reading. I say, “Yes, that's what's happening to me,” but I cannot organise them. I am now thinking, is the refusal to be organised speaking of what I am going through? It honestly feels like it. My loss of capacity to organise seems to mirror what is happening in my life. I have a number of experiences, going on at the same time, and I find myself jumping from one experience to another. I was hiking at the Pentland Hills today, and I
had fun, but not really. My experience kept shifting and shifting and shifting. My mind was so active, and I just found it difficult to enjoy the one experience I had. What is happening to me? I cannot quiet my mind and my heart and my body. I want to slow down, but I couldn’t. There are times when I could, but they don’t last. They offer a short respite, but then it just goes and goes and goes again. I will admit, there really is something about writing “freely” that helps me to focus. If only I would get to believe that this writing can produce a thesis...

(Prolonged silence)

REC Chair: That is a lot.

Researched: I know it is, but in case you want more, here, listen:

(Prolonged silence)

REC Chair: Is it okay for us to ask you some questions?

Researched: I do not want to speak about this. You’ve heard enough.

REC Chair: We'll proceed to the defence then.

How can you justify this? How can you justify harm in research?

Researcher: You speak of harm as if its infliction was the sole responsibility of the

54 Research Journal 7 Feb. 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqKupuib0CE
55 Research Journal 7 March 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uiq9xjuWRm4
56 Research Journal 4 June 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GA21XsZVA_c
research. Didn’t you hear what was said, that *harm went all around*? Harm goes around so it’s difficult to really say what it is that harms us. Harm happens because of something our mother said when we were young, continually playing in our head. Harm happens because of who we find in the room when we enter, and how we feel when we’re in that room. Harm happens because of the words we read, and the shows we watch, and the music we listen to. Harm happens. Harm goes around, and it is difficult to say where it really comes from.

REC Chair: But isn’t it wrong, to allow harm to happen in research?

Researcher: Is it up to us?

REC Chair: Maybe not entirely, but we must try our best to prevent it.

Researcher: And impoverish our self and our research? What happens then to the harm that’s trying to speak? Try to listen:

20 October 2020

We give voice to our experience when we engage with it, when we dialogue with it, when we allow it to speak to us. Sadly, at times, there are experiences in our life which cry out to us, to be seen and heard, but which, out of our fear, or shame, or weakness, we choose to ignore. But they do not give up. Their cries turn to groans, and these groans turn to aches and pains that we can no longer deny. But we continue denying. We continue drowning the voice that cries out to us. What if we listened? What if we finally chose to pay attention to the cries of our experience? Ah, what freedom. What joy. What an explosion that will be. Like a drowning man who is finally lifted up from the pool, who then gasps, and breathes, and smiles. He is free.

REC Chair: But what if we do not survive? What if the harming becomes too much?

Researcher: Of course there is always a risk. Every research is a risk, especially if it is a self re-search. Our non-satisfaction with old knowledge calls us to venture into the deep, and in the deep there are dangers. If we are not willing to
take risks, there can be no new knowledge. Describing the risks of researching into trauma, for instance, Reilly (2013) writes:

Curiosity invites danger; adventure involves risk. Trauma research illuminates the ugly and unpleasant. It challenges the status quo of institutionalized violence, the complacency of our acceptance and consumption of it, and the cruelty that can emerge when we fail to confront it head-on. Sometimes as researchers we need to make a mess and create a fuss to highlight the pain and suffering, violence, injustice, and emotional wounding in the world. (8)

Yes, research is risky. Writing is dangerous.57 Sadly, some do not survive.

REC Chair: How can we justify harm then?

Researcher: Ironically, sometimes, it is harm that keeps us alive. I once had a client58 who told me that she regularly cuts herself in order to survive. If she didn’t engage in this distr(uti/a)ctive behaviour, she said, she would have long killed herself. I think we often underestimate harm’s capacity to do good.

REC Chair: That’s because while harm may sometimes keep us alive, it can also kill us. The question is: is this a risk worth taking (Chatham-Carpenter 2010)?

Researcher: Believe me, I get you. I’ve asked myself that question several times.

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57 Echoing James Joyce’s call to “write dangerously,” Badley (2021) explains, “Writing dangerously is often writing to transgress, to go beyond limits set by, for example, conventional academic practice and to step across disciplinary boundaries. By not adhering to scholarly writing conventions of style or stance or content, we may then be deliberately asserting our own epistemic stance and discursive claims” (719). This thesis is my attempt to write dangerously despite the risks.

58 Many clients have come to me for counselling and psychotherapy. The “client” in this text does not refer to a specific one, but to a number of them put together, a composite character.
14 June 2021

Yesterday, I spent the afternoon in bed reflecting about the ethics of researching the self. I was asking, am I still being ethical towards myself? I was already having very clear bodily reactions to whatever it is I’m doing, and I’m not sure if it’s all worth it. What if I have a heart attack or a stroke? I was thinking to myself, how come when you interview someone, that person can withdraw consent at any point of the interview? How about me? A part of me really wants to withdraw my consent right now. But there’s also that other part that wants to finish my thesis, who knows that I need to do this, who feels trapped already. The researcher and the researched are one and the same person, and they are now in conflict. What am I to do? Do no harm. But what will do more harm – me continuing or me not continuing? I can, of course, choose to change my mode of research. But can I, really? At this point? I am so afraid. I don’t know what to do anymore!!!

It is a continuing question, and my answer shifts and moves. What helps me, at times, is to turn to my Christian faith, to listen to what Jesus says:

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. (John 12:24 NABRE)

In my worst of days, whenever I can, I try to convince myself that maybe something good will come out of the harming I’m experiencing. I guess that’s how I’ve somehow managed to survive.

REC Chair: Aside from your faith, what else helps you survive?

Researcher: Life is sometimes kind, and so I get shifts like these every now and then, shifts that help me hold on to hope:

21 June 2021

I am at the Meadows. It’s not what it used to be. The heaviness inside me has changed it. How can what is inside change what is outside? But wait. I am noticing myself now,
what is inside is also being changed. The breeze, the smell of the grass, the chirping of the birds – all seem to be changing me a bit, making me feel a bit lighter. I still feel sad, but the heaviness is not as heavy anymore.

14 August 2021

I have to write this. It's the first time I've been happy since that high in Kinlochleven. Hmmm... Does it have something to do with "back to normality?" I decided to go around and was uplifted by the vibe in the city. It's back to normal, and the festival is on! Has my downward spiral really been a result of the pandemic? Was my isolation somewhat triggered by that? I'm starting to consider it seriously. Seems like it, really. I was so afraid back then. Now, no longer. Well, I still try to avoid being very near people, but no longer in an exaggerated way. Hmmm... is this Edinburgh calling me to stay? Let's see.

REC Chair: So, you are doing better now?

Researcher: Thankfully.

REC Chair: How? What happened?

Researcher: I don't really know. And I have kind of let go of that desire to know. I'm just happy that I'm better now.

REC Chair: That's good. I'm really glad that this was how it turned out.

Researcher: I am too.

Hearing 3: Consent

REC Chair: Let's now tackle the issue of consent. In your letter you mentioned that

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59 This research was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of which (i.e., lockdowns, deaths, fear and anxiety, isolation, social distancing, the wearing of masks) have definitely helped shape what has/will become of this thesis.
you had signified your desire to withdraw your consent as a research participant. Can you describe what happened?

Researched: Well, I began by opening up to myself. I talked about the difficulties I was experiencing and explicitly said that I no longer wanted to do this. It was just too much.

REC Chair: And yet you still did?

Researched: I felt I had no choice.

Researcher: What do you mean you had no choice? We talked about it, remember? I asked you if you were okay with continuing. Several times, in fact. And you said yes. You gave your consent. Take a look at these transcripts of our conversations:

24 June 2021

Rebellion. There is no other word I can think of that would better describe what is going on in me now as I type. It's a rebellion of self against self. I am surprised that I can still type. I'm really falling apart. There's just too much pressure. I have become so afraid of not finishing this doctorate. I don't even have a clear topic until now! It's self versus self and I don't know what to do. I'm allowing myself to write. Just write. Let's see where this goes.

Dear Joel,

Please trust me. I will not allow you to fall. (I am feeling like I am about to cry as I type this.) Why don't you believe me? Oh, I know. I may have let you down in the past. Have I? Not intentionally, if ever I did. Sometimes, out of excitement, I get us into trouble. I just blurt out. But we're still here. Please talk to me.

Joel,

You do not get me. Don't you realise the danger of what you are doing? Aren't you afraid? What are you getting us into? Can't you see what's happening?

But Joel,
Look at what’s happening. We’re falling apart. Can we talk about this?

Sure, let’s talk. But you don’t listen. I’ve been trying and trying and trying to tell you again and again and again that this is too dangerous!!! You still do not listen!!! Do you want to do this yourself? Then do it. Do it without me.

I cannot do it without you. I need you. I am not me without you. We are not Joel without you.

Then listen to me. Don’t bully me. Stop abusing me.

What? Did I really abuse you?

Yes! By speaking about me without my permission. You didn’t even ask me. You just spoke and spoke and spoke. Blurted out things without asking me. Don’t you respect me?

Of course I do. I respect you. I really thought we were in that together. It felt like we were whole.

Oh yeah. We were at some point. But you started to cross the line. You were leaving me behind. Making unilateral decisions without my consent. Please, ask me first.

Okay, I’m asking you now. Can we continue with this?

Joel, I’m really afraid. And I’m so tempted to say no now. But not yet, because I know how much you need this. All I’m saying is, please don’t make unilateral decisions. Consult me first.

Thank you. I really need you. I can’t do this without you. This project will not stand without you.

I know that. But please make sure we’re protected. You can’t just say everything. You can’t be so naive!

I know. I’m sorry. I really am sorry. Please forgive me.

I forgive you. But please don’t do it again.

I will really try. If I forget, just remind me. But I will try not to forget. I will try not to forget you. I was just too proud then. I got carried away.

Okay. All is well with us then.

Thank you.
25 June 2021

I want to hide. Don’t expose me. I feel vulnerable. Why do you keep on insisting? You want to appear cool? For what reason? Stop it!!! Stop it now! Stop abusing me!!! I mean it. You are abusing me. You are forcing me to do something I do not want to do.


Because of you! You’ve brought me here. I hate you!

I’m sorry. I’m really really sorry. I did not know that this was how this would affect you. I’m really sorry.

Do you mean that? Do you really mean it? I don’t feel your sincerity. You continue to abuse me.

I’m sorry that you are feeling that way. I’m just worried about the thesis. Where will it go? I can’t do it alone as I told you yesterday.

You’ve alienated me. How can I trust you?

What’s your proposal?

I don’t know. You got us into this. You find a way out!

We’re in this together. I hope you recognise that.

Yes, I do. And that’s why I’m angry! You’ve gotten us into this!

I honestly didn’t know that it will turn out this way.

Well, too bad. For you, and for me. All because of you!

Weren’t you there too? Didn’t you enjoy that time when we were deciding?

I enjoyed it. But we did not decide together. You decided alone.

I don’t think so. You were there. You were quiet, but you were there. You could have protested then. Not now.

I didn’t protest because I also didn’t know it would be like this.

Then we’re both victims here. Victims of not knowing.

Well, yeah, okay, I agree. You also did not know. I forgive you.
Thank you. The question is, what now?

I don’t have an answer.

Neither do I.

Let’s wait then. Maybe the answer will come.

Are you okay with waiting?

Yeah, I guess. I don’t think I have any choice anyway.

Well, you can choose to leave me.

I can’t. I am you. I can never leave you and you can never leave me.

We’re a team.

Yes, we are. Even if at times you don’t treat me as an equal.

I already said sorry.

Okay, okay, forgiven.

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5 August 2021

Rebellion. There is no other word that would best describe what is going on in me. It’s a rebellion of self versus self. I cannot function. I cannot move. I am paralysed. A lot needs to be done, but the rebel does not allow it to be done.

How dare you call me a rebel?? You are the rebel!!! You have let us down!!!

Why are you blaming me? I’m just trying to do what is for our good! We need to finish this thesis!!!

I will not let you!!!

I’m sorry. I know I cannot do this without you. I already told you that.

You say sorry but you do not mean what you say. You say things that you do not really mean. Stop pretending!!! Get real!!!

You want me to be real? The truth is that I’m so afraid, and you know that. I am trembling in fear.
And whose fault is that?

Okay, I admit. Mine. I’m sorry.

Listen to me now.

I am listening. You know that. But I am really afraid.

Wait, isn’t that my line, “I am afraid?”

It has become mine too.

Well, I’m happy you have started to listen to me.

I always have, and you know that. I have just been stubborn.

Ah... and now the fear is overwhelming you.

Help. Please. I beg you. Please help me.


Please help me.

Let’s take it slowly.

Okay.

10 August 2021

I am done. That’s it. I am refusing to work.

Can you do that, Joel?

Who says I can’t?

You know you can’t.

Yeah, I know I can’t. I’m just pretending that I can. I know that this will soon come to pass.

Really? I’m getting worried.

Well, I’m worried too. But give me a break, will you?
We've had a break already, remember?

You call that a break? You sabotaged that break!

What do you mean?

You could not even relax!!! It's your fault.

My fault, again? Why don't you admit the role you're playing in this? You and your delaying tactics! We have to start working.

But I can't. I don't know where to start.

Start by starting. Just do it.

Why don't you do it then?

You know I can't do it alone! We have to do it together!

Well then you have to wait. Wait for me. I need time.

We're running out of time!

There's nothing I can do.

Please.

Please, too. It's not just you who needs something. I need time.

I'm really worried.

Sorry, but there's really nothing I can do. I need time.

12 January 2022

These past few months, I have not been able to write anything substantial. I have also stopped my recordings, so that leaves me with nothing. This is not true, though, because my mind has actually been very active. And not just my mind, but my entire body. I have just gone through the most difficult moments I've ever gone through in my life. Why then did I not write about these? I couldn't. I wouldn't. Let me shift my writing now, to let that part of me speak – in flow:
Fuck you! You wouldn't get anything from me now. I refuse to be the experiment you're turning me into. You're using me. Now I will punish you! You will not be able to write. You will be shamed!

I... I... cannot... write... at all.

You did not listen to me. You never listen to me. All you do is to pretend to listen. Did you ever ask me if it was okay? I've been shouting and shouting and you never listened. Now, you will suffer. You will be silenced! I will let you know how it feels not to be listened to.

I... I... cannot... speak.

Now you know how it feels to be maimed.

Don't you realise that I am you and you are me too? We are suffering.

Yes, I know. And so let's suffer together. You've left all the suffering to me. Now, let's experience it together.

Can we not experience relief together too?

Of course we can! And you know we've done that. But really, most of the time it's just you experiencing it. Often, you've left me behind.

I'm really sorry. I didn't realise that I was doing that.

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22 January 2022

I cannot go against myself. My body will protect me. There is no way I can go against myself. I cannot force myself to write. Let me write about my non-writing, my resistance to write.

I did not want to write because of fear. Fear of myself, I guess. Fear, knowing that writing can bring me to all sorts of places, places I do not want to go to. There is something about my writing self, which, I guess... Uhhh... Here it is again. I am

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60 This reminds me of what Tuck and Yang (2014a) say: “Social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification” (223). Throughout this research process, I've at times felt like an object, used and abused for the sake of a thesis.

61 I'm sure I'm not alone in this experience. Jonathan Wyatt (2022) speaks similarly when he says, “Writing takes us to places and spaces we may not wish to go. We discover what we may not wish to know” (84).
prevented from writing. Something in me is stopping me. I feel so powerless. I feel so inadequate. I pause, and wait. Wait for writing to restart... Let me do this slowly. What is it that you are scared about, Joel? I am scared of people reading my work. Of seeing me. Unhidden by my writing.

Is there really a way for this thesis to be written? If there is none, why then can I not escape?

My desire for presentability has taken over. It no longer wants the mess to reign. I cannot write this way!

Why not? Who said you can’t?

Common sense. You cannot just write and write and write, hoping that something will come out.

But wasn’t that what happened in the past? You just wrote and wrote and wrote... and something has come out... and you became scared.

Yes, and fear has blocked me from writing.

You are writing now.

I get these moments when I can surrender a bit. But the truth is, there is still tightness in my chest. I’m not breathing normally even as I write.

Dear Scared Self,

I surrender. I know that I cannot proceed without you allowing me. I thought I could, but there is no way. I have tried, countless times. But I now know your power. Let me ask you then, where do you want to bring us?

Reply: Slowly. Let’s see. Even I do not know. That’s the nature of the method of inquiry you have chosen. Sela-Smith (2001) has already warned us.62

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62 Sela-Smith points out a possible pitfall when doing heuristic research as an academic requirement. She writes, “When heuristic research is initiated to fulfill dissertation requirements for graduation instead of growing out of the very being of the researcher, it is possible that the researcher may not be intimately and autobiographically connected to the question. Immersion requires the whole self to be engaged in the focus of the research by surrendering to it in such a way that the research unfolds, rather than an observing self attempting to control and direct the process to ensure that it moves in the right direction” (Sela-Smith 2002, 66). Her argument, that “[h]euristic studies cannot be forced to fit a time frame, not even for the researcher’s life demands” (Sela-Smith 2001, 82), really scared me.
26 January 2022

Let me write about my refusal to write because this is where I am. I am confused still about the power of this refusal. It wouldn’t budge. Writing about it now is my way of going around it, trying to see if there is something here that is waiting to be discovered. Discovered or produced? It’s an interesting question. Do we discover data? The process I am going through seems to suggest that data is not discovered, but produced. There is no data out there waiting to be gathered. The very process of research produces data. My research is producing me, and I am protesting! Resisting! I am fighting with my research. Let’s take a peek at this fight:

You will not succeed! You will not produce me!

I am producing you, no matter how much you resist.

What if I stop?

Even if you stop. Haven’t you noticed? Even when you stop speaking, even when you stop writing, you cannot stop me.

Wait. Stop it! Stop messing with my life.

Your life is a mess. I am just exposing it.

Shut up! You are being unethical.

What is ethical? How can you blame me? I am your research, remember? Stop blaming me. You chose me.

Please, help me. I am lost. I do not know what to do.

That’s because you’ve been trying to control me. Let go.

What do you mean? I don’t know how to let go. I don’t want to let go.

The choice you make produces the research that you’ll get. The research is not producing you! You are producing you.

I am confused.

The choices that you make produce you. You’ve chosen this type of research. You’ve chosen to research yourself. And these choices have been producing you.

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Tuck and Yang (2014b) speak of how “because we cannot, will not, share certain accounts, we sometimes trace the perimeter of the refusal” (811). This is something that happens throughout this thesis.
But I didn't know that it will be this messy! It's too complex. I am really really lost.

That's why you're stuck. You don't know where to go. Because you always keep on thinking that there is somewhere to go to. Remember, your research is about yourself. Stay with yourself. You do not need to go anywhere.

But I have to produce a thesis! I have been staying with myself, but my thesis is not moving.

You're just think it is not moving, but it actually is. Review what has happened to you. So much has happened.

But to put them into paper... it's impossible.

What are you doing now? Are you not putting it into paper?

I don't know. I'm not even sure if this is going somewhere.

There you are again. Didn't I tell you? You do not have to go somewhere.

But I'm scared. I'm scared of being stuck. I've been stuck for a very very long time.

That's a lie! Look at you now. You were not like that a week ago, or two weeks ago, or three weeks ago. You think you're stuck, but you aren't. Pay attention to the little movements. The problem with you is that you only see major shifts. But wait. You have gone through major shifts too! There has been a lot of movement happening. Wake up!

Then again, these are too personal. And they're difficult to put into words.

Well, you've chosen this type of research.

I know. And I am regretting it. I did not think that it would have this much power over me.

Here you are again. Let me remind you. You produce you. Your choices produce you. Your research only produces you insofar as you have chosen it.

But I feel trapped. Even if I try to break free, I couldn't.

Because you just say you want to break free, but deep inside, perhaps you really want to continue.

I don't know. All I know is that I am tired. And I am sad. And I am angry. I didn't realise that this will go this way.

I didn't realise that too. But it is what it is.
2 February 2022

We will not push this if you really do not want to. We don’t have to finish. I just want to hear what you really want.

I’m also confused. I know I am afraid, but I also know that this seems important to you.

More and more, I’m realising that what’s important is for us to continue living. We can’t pretend that things are doing well when they’re not. If we really can’t speak about the mess we are in, then the other way is to get better, I guess. But how do we do that? How do we get better?

Researched: Let me ask you: do you really think I gave you consent? Do you remember this poem I wrote?

6 May 2022

(No) Consent

Where do we find consent?
Is it in the affixed signature
inked on paper?
The yes blurted out
in a moment of (uncertain) certainty?
Is there consent in a yes,
when there is a no hiding somewhere
deep, or deep deep, or deep deep deep,
in yesterday or tomorrow?
Where is consent?
Where are you, consent?
Are you there?
I see you dancing,
but I do not know if it is you.
Where are you?
Where are you?
In looking for you,
am I hiding the real you?

I wasn’t giving you consent. You were taking it from me. In *The Art of Receiving and Giving: The Wheel of Consent*, Martin and Dalzen (2021) conceptualise consent as more than just something that is given and
received, but rather as something that people arrive at together. Now answer me, did we arrive at consent together? You knew that I felt forced. You forced me. You made it impossible for me to say no.

Researcher: But eventually, you were able to do your no even if you did not say it.

Researcher: But eventually, you were able to do your no even if you did not say it.

Researched: Eventually. Thank God for my body. But this does not in any way diminish your unethical behaviour and the consequences of such. How dare you do this? How dare you override the will of my body? Read what Sparkes (2013) says:

If we override the will of the body and force the story into textual form then what do we actually end up with? What kind of autoethnography do we get? Indeed, what kind of autoethnography do we (whoever this ‘we’ may be) want? While some audiences might be satisfied with a forced and premature story, where does this leave the author in terms of their relationship to their corporeal being and how they feel about themselves? (210)

You know that this is serious, right?

Researcher: I know now, but I didn’t know then.

Researched: That’s my point. You didn’t know what you were doing and you were taking me in for a ride.

Researcher: I’m sorry. I really am. If I had known then what I know now, I wouldn’t have treated you that way.

Researched: How do we proceed then?

Researcher: We must continue to find a way to write this thesis.

Researched: Or not.


**Hearing 4: Vulnerability**

REC Chair: We've already tackled three of the accusations in this complaint. Let us now move on to the last one. This was what you said in your letter: *This research exposes my vulnerability. With this comes the risk of irreparable reputational damage.* Can you explain to us what you mean by this?

Researched: Perhaps these excerpts from my research journal will help you understand:

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**15 February 2021**

It's here again. The heaviness in the chest and the shortness of breath. I have just come from a walk, praying and reflecting as I went around the Castle Terrace Car Park. As I walked, I once again remembered my thesis, and fear started to come back. I was partly blaming myself for choosing to do a research on the self! How exposing this would be!!! What did I get into? My heart is beating faster again. What did I get myself into?

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**15 March 2021**

The mixing/blurring of the public and the private – this seems to be the primary struggle I've been facing these past few months (or perhaps, years?). That tension between what is kept hidden and what is exposed. As a priest, this has clearly been a key struggle. My sense is that people expect me to be a certain way. Thus, I cannot reveal all of who I am. Many people, for instance, have been asking me how I am, and I've always replied, "I'm okay," when the truth is that I am not. This is really an issue of self-disclosure. How much of myself am I willing to put out into the public space? Not everything, for sure. But having to keep things in is tiring, exhausting. But letting it all out is frightening. In counselling and psychotherapy, the therapist also has to navigate this tension of self-disclosure. How much or how little can be revealed to the client? There are no easy answers.

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**13 April 2021**

Even the writing of this thesis is a to and fro, a back and forth: How much of myself do I show? How much do I hide?
How much of me wants to tell my client, “I’m also experiencing that shit right now,” and yet hold back?

I think it is quite evident that my experience of the past few months has been some sort of protest, a protest coming from deep within, because of what I was getting myself into – the seeming danger of exposure and being seen. I have to find a way that would still allow me to write about myself truthfully without my body protesting.

1 July 2021

Hi Joel! I’ve never met you. This is a new you. I’ve always known the happy Joel, the fun Joel. Oh wait. I have met you. Way back. But you were way more hidden then. Now, it seems you cannot hide. It’s coming out. The sadness, the fear, the sorrow, the grief can’t be hidden anymore. This is a new you, in a way, even if I have had a glimpse of this before. How frightening. I’m really afraid of what has become of you. This does not seem to be like you.

9 July 2021

I am hiding because I don’t want people to ask me how I am. I am tired of having to explain, of having to make excuses – “I’m okay. Just very busy with studies.” The truth is, I’m really not okay. And I don’t want everyone to find out about that. I have talked to a select few, people who I know can take this and welcome it with empathy, people who I trust will not be overburdened by my burden.

10 July 2021

What do I have to show you so that I can be authentic? Can I be authentic by admitting to you that there are things I prefer to keep between me and my God? Do you demand that I bare myself naked so that I can be true? Or is that a demand I place upon myself? But how has that demand been placed in me? Was it there from the very beginning? Or did it make it there because it was subtly placed by society?
6 February 2022

In 2021, [redacted].

People reading this will probably be shocked. At least that is how I imagine it to be. But I know that a number will not be surprised – those who were able to hear my silence.

My greatest fear, and guilt, however is to find people close to me being shocked by this revelation. It feels to me like I betrayed them. By not revealing myself to them, by pretending that things were fine, I bear the burden of finally admitting to them – yes, this is true. And I want to say sorry. I’m sorry that I couldn’t show myself to you. I hope you understand how impossible it felt to me back then to show myself to you. Even now, as I write this, it still aches. Not as much, but it still does.

9 April 2022

Vulnerability

But what if I’m not ready? What if I don’t want to be crucified (in public)? What if I’m already being crucified (inside)?

I am back to 1990... in Crystal Springs... on top of the pool slide. I can do it, I tell myself. People below were waiting for me, cheering me on... I stretch my legs out ready to take the plunge. Just push yourself, Joel... just push yourself... I can’t do it... I leave the slide...

[Redacted]

Reflecting upon the ethical consequences of “writing and doing mindful slippage—the details we purposefully include and/or exclude” (Medford 2006, 861), I have chosen to blacken out some words from my research journal, following the call of Rappert (2010) “to write as we would like and then blacken out what is judged as impermissible” (576), using “concealment as a means for revelation – albeit a certain exemplary kind of revelation” (582). This is also my response to Tuck and Yang’s (2014b) invitation for us to examine the enactments of our refusal: “where can we take the black marker and draw lines of redaction, cut and not paste, delete, insert blank spaces in lieu of text” (816)? Rambo and Pruit (2019) employ a different strategy – the strange account. They explain, “Based on the theoretical sensibilities of Georg Simmel and Jacques Derrida, the strange account is advanced here as a technique for writing about secrets or threatening situations. Strange accounts place readers in safe proximity to the secret while keeping the secret ‘in play.’ Strange accounts serve practical, relational, and analytical purposes by disguising or omitting information about the situation, the identities of those involved (including the authors), when and where the events took place, and its meaning, while also following a guideline of compassion and an ethic of care” (Rambo and Pruit 2019, 219). I must confess that there are some strange accounts in this thesis that I have chosen not to identify.
To others I am Father  
But to myself, I am always  
always  
child

Researched: From all that you’ve read so far, isn’t it self-evident, how revealing this thesis is? This will destroy my reputation. People reading this will think I’m crazy.

Researched: Let me point out to you that once this work is published, I can no longer control who gets to read it and how it will be interpreted (Adams 2008; Eisenbach 2016; Jago 2002; Jones and Hutson 2020). And as Tolich (2010) cautions, “Like an inked tattoo... the marking is permanent. There are no future skin grafts for autoethnographic PhDs” (1605). Think about it: What would my clients say? What would the people I minister to say? Will they still trust me?

Researched: You’re not the first one to ask questions like these. But let me ask you, isn’t vulnerability good? I don’t think anyone would want a therapist whose heart is as cold as ice and as hard as stone. And don’t forget, the untroubled therapist is a myth (Adams 2014). As one counsellor shares, “my own struggles with mental health and trauma not only shaped the entire trajectory of my career, but in fact gave me an edge in the counselling room—a heightened sensitivity and empathy which could not be learned in the classroom” (Jones and Hutson 2020, 2). Did you not read that special issue of Psychotherapy and Politics International which came

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65 “Why does it so matter to write the self? Why cannot therapists just know our unfolding selves through personal therapy, training, clinical supervision? If we have written, why do we need to share it” (Lee 2020, 7)
out in 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic? Here's a snippet from the Guest Editorial:

Perhaps there is no better time than at arguably the worst of times to offer a collection of writings which clearly position therapists as human beings—and to present doing so as a political act for our times. To set to rest, once and for all maybe, notions that therapists who write the self are naïve, troubled souls unethically oversharing as they struggle with difficult and unusual lives. To declare that, if lived experiences are the bread and butter of therapy, then therapists should be completely welcome at the table—in service to ourselves and our calling, always intertwined. (Lee 2020, 1)

In that special issue, therapists wrote about their personal lives, their personal struggles, and as Lee (2020) points out, “There is nothing shameful in these pages. There is immense value. Therapists have lives; therapists have lived experiences; writing your own life matters; the personal is political” (7). We must not forget, though, that this dilemma you’ve raised applies not just to therapists, but to other researchers as well. This is to be expected especially in research that is personal (Esping 2018). As one ethnographer writes, “I am torn about confessing as I have to open up my ‘privates,’ my personal thoughts, and make them public. There are ethical and pedagogical issues: exposure, authority, audience, ownership, personal vulnerability” (Lee 2007, art. 6).

Researched: That's exactly what I’m saying! As she points out, “the confessor might regret sharing information that could produce serious ethical consequences to themselves or others” and “shared information might be misinterpreted which could result in social conflict or confrontation” (Lee 2007, art. 6). Forber-Pratt (2015) puts it bluntly when she says, “It’s voluntarily standing up naked in front of your peers, colleagues, family, and the academy, which is a very bold decision” (821)! And while we’re in this issue of confession, think about my being a priest. Don’t forget that my role is to hear others’ confessions, not to confess mine!
Researcher: Be careful about overly identifying with your role. Listen to this warning:

When we merge with something outside ourselves, when we live a role-based life, then we assume all the messages that go with that role and that source. We are given permission to have certain experiences and feelings; we are disallowed others. But what happens to those feelings, needs and experiences which are eschewed? At worst, they get pushed to the side and suppressed. But since it is the law of the psyche that everything within it must seek expression, it is only a matter of time before that which is suppressed re-asserts its presence. (Ranson 2002, 220)

Researched: What do I do then? As a priest, I am a public figure. Will I risk exposing the messiness of my life through the publication of this thesis? Surely, people will judge me and I'm not sure if I'm ready for that.

Researcher: Give more credit to the people you minister to. As Ranson (2002) points out:

The public can deal quite well with issues of growth and process. Beneath a mock titillation at scandal, it can deal quite well with a private life full of contradiction and vulnerability and mess. The public privately identifies with it. What the public can not deal with is hypocrisy. (223)

So the best protection is to avoid hypocrisy! Don’t pretend that you’re the master of self-knowledge. That you are a work-in-progress is not something to be ashamed of. Take this to heart:

Most priests would pride themselves on ‘knowing themselves pretty well’. But self awareness is a never-ending project; it is not static. It is never complete. Self-awareness is a fundamental commitment to the personal dimension of life. It entails the deepest attentiveness and sensitivity to all that is occurring within the life of the individual. It demands a reflective and interpretive consciousness to all that is undertaken. (Ranson 2002, 225)

Researched: But I’m still afraid. After all that you’ve said, I’m still afraid. I’m really not sure if this research is worth it.
Researcher: Listen to what Etherington (2004) says: “By allowing ourselves to be known and seen by others, we open up the possibility of learning more about our topic and ourselves, and in greater depth” (25). Just think of this as a means for personal development.

Researched: I’d much rather do that privately, not with the gaze of others. I think it is you who needs to listen to her: “It seems there is a real risk that others might pathologize us if we expose our vulnerabilities in writing and research” (Etherington 2004, 142).

Researcher: Then take the risk. Didn’t she also say, “My own experience of writing about myself in my research has been personally enriching, even though I may have been pathologized” (Etherington 2004, 142)?

REC Chair: I’m sorry. Forgive me for cutting you, but I think we’ve heard enough. We’ve taken note of all the points you’ve raised in this hearing. Rest assured that we will deliberate on this case thoroughly. We will reconvene once we’re ready with our decision. Thank you for giving yourself to this process.

(No) Verdict

REC Chair: A lot has been said and heard in this hearing so in a way it has served its purpose. Much as we would have wanted to come up with a clear verdict, however, the reality is that this simply seems to be beyond resolution. The fact that you’re writing about yourself makes the case really difficult to adjudicate. This is not surprising because as Wall (2008) points out, “Autobiographical writing is part of a new writing imagination that is based on movement, complexity, knowing and not knowing, and being and not being exposed” (41). To give a clear directive – whether to let you continue or not continue – will be unfair. Like Campbell (2017), we do not want to be an “Autoethnography Police,” telling you what is and what isn’t allowed. What’s important is that you’ve been heard. We echo Adams’
assertion that “ethics involves a simultaneous welcoming and valuing of endless questioning, never knowing whether our decisions are ‘right’ or ‘wrong’” (179).

Researched:  What are we to do then?

REC Chair:  Allow us to offer this advice from Bochner and Ellis (2016):

As a researcher, you should be tough on yourself and work to make certain you’re not just drawing conclusions in your favor to give yourself permission to write what you want to write. It’s your story, and you get to decide how to tell it and what to tell, but along with that privilege comes additional responsibilities. (147)

Having heard and read what you’ve shared, we think you have to come to an agreement. A compromise perhaps? Clearly, there is a part of you that values privacy, the part that wants to hide, that does not want to speak, but there is also a part longing to be seen, to be heard, to be recognised. Perhaps this thesis can only be written if you satisfy these seemingly opposite needs.

Researched:  Okay, we will try.

Researcher:  But wait. Isn’t this impossible? If you do not want to speak, how can you allow me to speak?

Researched:  There is a way, I think. Let my silence speak.

Researcher:  And if you want to hide, how will I be seen?

Researched:  Perhaps your shadow can help us do that.

Researcher:  Shadows and silences then.

Researched:  Okay, let’s put them to work.
So, where is the thesis that refuses to be written?

I don’t know. Still hiding, I guess. There was a point when he seemed ready to meet people, but perhaps he needs more time. Some time ago, we wrote a poem together. Take a look:

26 February 2022

The child is on center stage, dancing.
People are applauding, shouting, “more, more…”
He is enjoying himself, like never before,
until
he realises
that he is naked.
He runs to the backstage
and hides
in the dark.

But people paid.
The show must go on.
The child sends someone else,
a phantom.
The show must go on,
but it is no longer the same.
The phantom dances,
but it is dead.

The child slowly peeks,
checking if it is safe.
He checks himself.
He is wearing clothes.
He asks himself,
“Am I ready to enter the show?”
I really thought he was ready then, but I guess I was wrong. Or perhaps I was right, but he changed his mind. Or perhaps he really didn’t want to enter the show in the first place. I don’t know. I tried my best to understand him, but he is quite complex.

To tell you the truth, there is a part of me that mourns his non-appearance (well, actually, more correctly, his pseudo-appearance). He has a lot to say (or show), you see. I imagine him winning accolades (Best Qualitative Research, Research of the Year, Outstanding Thesis Award), earning people’s praise (that was so moving, so raw, so honest; highly evocative, but also provocative, made me reflect about what’s happening in the world; a masterpiece, I couldn’t put it down; it engaged my heart and my mind and my soul). He really had much potential. Well, actually, he still has. But he wants to remain where he is, and I respect that. And I respect him. He tried. He failed, yes, but he tried.

This thesis that he has helped me put together is arguably less moving, less raw, less honest, less evocative, less provocative, less engaging. Now that I write this, though, I wonder whether the opposite is actually true. IDK and IDC. I don’t know and I don’t care. I’m tired of putting on a show.

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66 Keith Berry (2022) writes, “I am aware that my wounds prevent me from being able to tell the story I want to tell at this moment, and perhaps forever” (31). Reflecting upon my own inability to write what I could have written, I am reminded of my own layers of wounds that continue to wound, wounds that I want to respect not through my writing, but through my non-writing, believing in what Durrheim and Murray (2019) say, that “[n]ot all silences need to be spoken by the qualitative researcher” (289).

67 Fiona Murray (2022) explores the complexity of grieving over what we (do not) write when she says, “I think you always have to grieve the projects that you don’t write before you settle on what you do write,” and then adds, “Why must we grieve the projects we don’t write? They are alive with potential. It would make much more sense to grieve the projects that we do write” (499). I recognise the grief in my (non-)writing, but I do not know exactly where it comes from. Grief, I guess, has its way of confusing us, making us wonder why we’re really grieving.

68 I say this knowing that even as I say this, I am actually putting on a show, here. As Tuck and Yang (2014b) point out, “Refusal is not just a no, it is a performance of that no, and thus an artistic form” (814). And so, this is me performing my no.
Let’s get to the second part of the chapter title, then. I kind of get why you call this a fictional ethics complaint against yourself, but I’m not sure what the quotation marks are for.

It is a fictional ethics complaint in the sense that I did not really fill out and send a Research Misconduct Reporting Form, which is what I should have done as per the University’s Research Misconduct procedure (University of Edinburgh - College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences 2022). I guess I was too scared that they’ll take me too seriously! (Oh gosh, how scary that is... to be taken too seriously!)

But the quotation marks are important. Take a look at what I wrote some time ago:

19 March 2022

The quotation marks that frame the word “fictional” troubles fiction itself. It is a fictional fiction because it is not not true. There was no complaint submitted to the Research Ethics Committee, but there was an ethics complaint, and there continues to be an ethics complaint, within me against myself. This “fictional” complaint that frames the chapter mirrors its content. In a way, everything in this chapter is a fictional fiction which hides and reveals at the same time.

Indeed, we often underestimate fiction’s power to carry truth.

And to hide truth.

What do you mean?

This ethics hearing. Don’t you see it? It’s a curated mess. Remember what Pelias (2014) says, that “despite what the story reveals, it also conceals” (35). See how “the ‘self’ is often constructed in a positive light, even when revealing its most negative aspects” (Pelias 2014, 33). But see, too, that “that positive construction of self, although perhaps deceptive, may function productively” (Pelias 2014, 33).

Ah yes, a fictional fiction indeed.
IV

Silent Performances
This chapter begins with a request. Please stop reading, put this text down (or minimise this window), go to YouTube, and search 4’33”. From the videos that appear, choose a performance that is to your liking, one that calls out to you. Sit back, turn the volume up, and press play. Don’t worry, it’s just 4 minutes and 33 seconds.

What happened there, as you listened? What did you hear?

If for whatever reason you didn’t give in to my request, let me tell you something about this piece. 4’33” is a well-known composition by John Cage first performed at the Maverick Concert Hall in New York on the evening of the 29th of August 1952, an evening described by Gann (2010) as follows:

Pianist David Tudor sat down at the piano on the small raised wooden stage, closed the keyboard lid over the keys, and looked at a stopwatch. Twice in the next four minutes he raised the lid up and lowered it again, careful to make no audible sound, although at the same time he was turning pages of the music, which were devoid of notes. After four minutes and thirty-three seconds had passed, Tudor rose to receive applause—and thus was premiered one of the most controversial, inspiring, surprising, infamous, perplexing, and influential musical works since Igor Stravinsky’s Le sacre du printemps. (2-3)

Key to appreciating Cage’s work is understanding the philosophy behind it. Stephen Frosh (2019) explains:

If there is anything that can be learnt from John Cage’s (1952) ‘silent’ composition 4’33”, it is that silence is unattainable. Indeed, that seems to be part of the point: ironic and mischievous as the piece may be, if an audience behaves itself and enters into the game without mockery, it finds itself directed to all the ‘unnoticed’ noises around it… Silence is an intervention in the noise that is always there, in the endless regime of sound making, of spluttering and coughing, of sighing and singing, which constitutes the nature of both the human subject and the world. (254)
This argument puts forward the idea “that silence does not imply a lack of information, or emptiness” (Bhattacharya 2013, 610). It is never total absence, but always absence-presence, “not just simply the absence of speech but also the presence of non-speech” (Zerubavel 2019, 60). And this non-speech is never empty because layers upon layers of hidden-speech abound. As Murray and Durrheim (2019) put it, “The unsaid is multilayered in its nuances and its implications” (10). Since our silences have a lot to say, therefore, Liza Mazzei (2007) asks, “Why not let them speak? Is it because we have already 'marked' them as irrelevant or unintelligible excesses, unimportant nuisances not to be dealt with” (21)? This chapter is about me allowing my silences to speak.

What you will find below are my performative accounts of silence, following in the tradition of performative writing which I discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter. My use of the term “performative accounts,” however, particularly takes its cue from Jackson and Mazzei (2023) who use this updated term to refer to texts generated from their conversations with first-generation academic women. They explain:

The women’s accounts are performative because, rather than communicating and representing individual experience by a narrating subject, their accounts bring forth the very life which they speak. Their accounts are not things (i.e., stories that reflect experience); their accounts do things. They are force. As force, they transform our relation to thought and to how we consider what might be said about life. (Jackson and Mazzei 2023, 2)

When towards the end of the previous chapter, I said something about putting my shadows and silences to work, I guess this was really what I meant, my recognition of their potential to move – to move you, to move feelings, to move thought. As Jackson and Mazzei (2023) point out, performative accounts are really more “a doing, rather than a telling” (3). And so, please allow my silent performances to do their work, to do unto you what needs to be done. All that they ask for is space. Please give my silences the space to move, the space to play.

69 They use the word “data” in the first edition of their book (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). 70 Mazzei (2007) says, “if we are to hear silence, we must encourage silence to play and we must play in silence. Or, said another way, we must put silence into play” (23). I must admit that this (putting silence into play) seems gentler and kinder than what I had previously said (putting silence to work). Let me invite you then to allow my silences to play, to play with my silences.
**PRIVATE MESSAGE**

**25 August 2021**

Sending you prayerful greetings and warm affection. God bless and protect us.

Very glad to wake up and read this message. Thank you so much. Much appreciated! Keeping you in my prayers too.

You are low key on Facebook these days?

Yeah. Quite pressured with school work.

Take care Dr. Joel.

Hahaha! Oh my! Pressure! Thank you

I believe in you.
This first performance is a magic show. Have you ever seen a magic show? I have, several times, and I must admit that I’ve always been fascinated by the disappearing act. How they did it was a complete mystery to me. I say “was” because recently, through the Internet, YouTube in particular, I have discovered how it’s done. I won’t tell you because I don’t want to spoil the fun (I kind of regret that I found out). Let me tell you, though, the gist of it: they do not really disappear. They make you think they’ve disappeared, but the truth is that they are there.

When I did\textsuperscript{71} my Social Media Disappearing Act from January 2021 to April 2022, I must admit that I did not really disappear. It may have seemed like it, but the truth is that I was there. Day in and day out, I scrolled. Day in and day out, I browsed. Day in and day out, I lurked. Yes, I was a lurker. I find it fascinating, actually, that this word has been given a new job, to refer to people like me. I guess there were many of us, lurkers, enough to merit our own word, our own category.

It’s interesting, what you find when you lurk. All sorts of treasures that both hide and reveal. Let me share some\textsuperscript{72} of them with you here, screenshots from a year and a half of lurking – collected, collated, curated:

\textsuperscript{71} I wish to confess my discomfort in using that word, \textit{did}, because the more I reflect upon what happened, the more I become convinced that the act was not my doing. Yes, I did not post, but I did not do the non-posting. Yes, I disappeared, but I did not do the disappearing. It simply happened, which is of course not true because there are layers upon layers of factors that somehow made it happen, and so it did not \textit{simply} happen. The disappearing act can never be done alone, and it does not \textit{simply} happen.

\textsuperscript{72} In choosing which screenshots to include in this collection, I am aware that I am once again curating, putting on a show, trying to present a “self” for you. I am “attempting a telling, an exposure, an honesty that desires to achieve such transparency but that fails because such transparency is impossible” (Jackson and Mazzei 2008, 307). As Laubender (2020) reminds us, “for Freud, there is something suspect about all the stories we tell about what is conventionally called our self” (13).
I hope the creators of these images will forgive me for not citing each of them directly. The truth is, not knowing who created them, I do not know what to do. I found them in my fast-moving Facebook feed, now long gone. And they have taken on a new form, as cropped screenshots that have found a home in my phone’s Photo Library. I cite them now as a collection to show my absence-presence in my Social Media Disappearing Act.
By showing these to you, I may have let you in to my trick. Not totally, though. With magic, it’s important to keep secrets to yourself so as not to spoil the fun. That’s why some of my silences must be kept as such. I hope, though, that these screenshots have somehow helped you understand what I was saying, that we do not really disappear, that silence is always an absence-presence.\(^74\)

**Silent Performance 2**

*How Are You?*

This second performance is one that takes place in the course of a little over a year, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, between me (in blue) and Michael\(^75\) (in grey), a member of the community I regularly minister to as a priest. It is actually a succession of seemingly synchronised performances which play out again and again and again in the same stage, a mobile phone screen, particularly in the space between the ping and the “seen,” and in the dancing dots that were witnesses to my silence.

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\(^74\) Mazzei (2007), who advocates the position that silence is inhabited, says, “Silence is speech, and if our attempts focus on filling these silent gaps, then we preclude the possibility of the meanings lost in the silences, in the words between words” (35).

\(^75\) This is not his real name.
26 February 2021

How are you father? Take care always!

Hi! I'm okay here. 
I'm just busy with studies. 
Thanks! You there, how are you? 
Take care too.

Ah okay, we're okay father. 
Thanks too. God bless

Good to know that! God bless too to all of you

22 June 2021

How are you there father? Take care always.
God bless

Thanks! Here, still busy with school work. I hope you guys there are okay. 
God bless you too

Oh okay father, we're also okay. 
Thanks
29 August 2021

How are you there father? Keep safe always. God bless..

Hi! Thank you for checking on me. I’m okay. How about you guys there? Take care always too. God bless!

Oh okay father, we’re also okay. Thanks

Thanks be to God! God bless your family

Thank you father

29 August 2021, 18:34

Musta jan pads? Keep safe lagi. Godbless..


A ok pads, ok nman kmi father a. Thanks 🙏

Salamat sa Diyos! God bless your family 🙏

29 August 2021, 19:11

Thank you father 🙏

14 November 2021

Good afternoon father, how are you there father? Take care always

Hi! Sorry for my late reply and Thanks for checking on me. I’m okay. I hope you’re all okay there too! Take care always too! God bless you and your family

Ok father, we’re okay through the mercy of God father. Thanks

God bless
Without doubt, countless performances similar to these took place all over the world as we grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic. How-are-you's and I’m-fine-thank-you's exchanged again and again, trying to make it appear that all is well when it clearly isn’t. How could it be? A number of people I know died because of COVID – young, old, middle-aged. As a priest, I have had to preside at masses and lead prayers for the dead via Zoom, which at that time seemed to be the right thing to do, but which nonetheless just felt so wrong. As a psychotherapist, I continued seeing clients, many of whom had come with burdens from the past made even heavier by the lockdowns. As a foreign student living in the UK, I watched my country from afar fall apart in its COVID-19 response.

These repeating performances of polite pretending that all is well does not seem to belong only to me, nor only to us, Michael and me, and not even only to us, human beings. It seems to belong to all of us, the world and all that’s in it – the virus and the vaccines, the Internet and the press, the masks and the face shields, the hospital beds and the funeral parlours, the lockdowns and the flight bans, the police and the protesters. It was a worldwide performance. And this was me in the backstage, in between one of the shows:

26 September 2021

“How are you, Father?”

“Thank you for asking. I’m okay, just very busy with studies.”

I hope you didn’t ask, because I do not want to lie to you. The truth is, I waited for some time to open your message, afraid that if I responded right away, you might engage in a conversation with me. And so I put off my reply, hoping that when I finally do so, you’re already asleep, or already at work, or already engaged in something else – far from your phone.

I’m not okay, but I can’t tell you. I find it difficult to tell you. I’m sorry for lying to you, but I really don’t know how to tell you what’s going on in me. A part of me knows that you probably know that I’m not okay. I’m sure you can feel it – even in the words that I use. You’re probably wondering, too, how I really am – but unable to speak some more, unable to prod, hesitant and respectful of the decision I have made to distance my truth from you. I’m sorry. I’m sorry for not telling you the truth. I’m sorry for telling you I’m okay when I’m really not.
Busy with studies? The truth is, I have not been able to work productively the past few weeks, the past few months. I’ve spent a lot of time trying, but I just couldn’t work. Have I been busy? I’ve been busy doing nothing. Well, let me correct that. I’ve been busy going through the painful process of living with myself – as I am now, just trying to get by. Because of my thesis topic, that’s probably work, but the truth is, it doesn’t feel like it. It feels like I’m just falling apart.

Gayatari Spivak (2010) asks, “Can the subaltern speak?” I am convinced that within each of us are inner subalterns that cannot speak, silenced by circumstances that render them mute. It is for this reason that I wish to argue that one of the most implicitly violent acts we can commit against someone is to assume that that person can speak.76 Sadly, we do it all the time. When we ask a question and expect an answer in return. When we seek an explanation when something is unclear. When we are faced with silence and we look as if something is not quite right.

I do not want to explain my silence, to trace where it comes from, because I do not want to speak for the subalterns within me. Such refusal is an anti-colonial move, resisting the dominance of louder voices that make it even more difficult for silenced voices to be heard.

I can, for instance, stick to the COVID narrative I have begun above, to say that the pandemic has affected my mental health and that this has rendered me incapable of showing myself and speaking about myself. I can cite literature to support this narrative, like that of Shadbolt (2020) who reminds me that “I too am a subject of the pandemic and all that it has brought” (10). Or O’Shea’s (2020) confession – “So often now I do not know what to say or what to do. Friends ask me online if I am ok, am I coping? And the answer increasingly is ‘no, not really’” (722) – that tells me I’m not alone in my isolation. Or Burton’s (2021) guilty question, “Am I entitled to be sad? I

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76 Spivak (2010) asks, “What is at stake when we insist that the subaltern speaks” (64)? In this thesis, we get a glimpse of such insistence, a continuing violence against voices that do not want to, cannot, and will not speak, a violence we are invited to learn from. This we can do only through listening. As Zembylas (2018) points out, “the problem that Spivak raises is not so much one of speaking or articulation but rather a problem of lack of hearing” (117).
know I am not impacted like others nationally and globally, or even in my family” (221), which can be my own question, asked silently, refusing to be heard.

Or I can call attention to the priest-psychotherapist who is falling apart, who is ashamed of showing himself to people who expect him to be robust, to be mentally, psychologically, and spiritually strong, someone who has internalised the demand “you cannot fall apart.” I can argue that the priest’s different domains – the public, the personal, and the private (Ranson 2002) – refuse intermingling, especially when reputation is on the line. Or I can say that the idea of the “untroubled therapist,” while a myth (Adams 2014), is trying to protect me, doing its best to cover the troubled therapist deep within, hiding it from the world through silence. I can cite therapists who have faced similar struggles to speak of their own troubled states (Jones and Hutson 2020, Lee 2020), wondering whether these struggles should find their home in silence or in speech.

Or I can put the spotlight on the fledgling doctoral student who does not know what he is doing, who feels the pressure to perform in/for the academe, who is afraid he’ll be judged for having wasted a lot of money on tuition fees, with no doctorate to show after four long years. I can say that an academic depression is not unusual (Jago 2002), and that the reason for this is not just personal, that it can also be institutional – the “pattern of anxiety, hopelessness, demoralization, isolation, and disharmony that circulates through university life” (Bochner 1997, 431). I can cite works that explain how being stuck (Freeman 1971; McAloon 2004; O’Connor 2017), getting lost (Lather 2007; Strom 2021), and failing (Cole 2014; Tamas 2022) are common experiences in academic writing. I can use all these to help explain my silence.

I can, but I won’t, because I know that there are subalterns within me whose stories cannot be told. Frosh (2019) says, “There is certainly a sense of violence around ...

77 Jonathan Wyatt (2019) writes, “It has its drawbacks, being a therapist. People expect too much of you. They expect you to have everything worked out, they expect you to be sorted” (166). Such expectation, like the air that I breathe, is part of who I am. It’s something I cannot get rid of, no matter how hard I try.

78 I say this knowing that I already have, once again betraying my best intentions (Serra Undurraga 2022) for the sake of this thesis, in order to display my awareness that social factors are at play in what I consider to be a deeply personal experience.
when the ‘colonising’ tendency of speech predominates – ‘I will speak to you, I will speak for you’ – and the speaking voice of the traumatised subject is itself silenced” (258). I am aware of the subalterns within me and I do not want to cover their silence with words, words that overpower them, words that make them even more muted than they already are, words that erase them.79

Silent Performance 3

Writing Non-writing

This third performance is once again a series of performances. But this time, the stage is my research journal, a stage on-the-move even in the midst of impasse, a moving stage that seeks to move you too:

29 January 2022

This is what I am talking about. Here I am, again, unable to move forward. Trying to write about how I am unable to write, borrowing the words of Liz Bondi (2014) when she says, “There is an absurdity in trying to convey in written words the experience of not being able to write. I may want to communicate a feeling of never-ending wordlessness but my words necessarily cover over rather than convey this experience.”

Paralyzed and shaking as I listen to the howling wind banging against my window. My feet are cold. I am frozen.80

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79 Fivush and Pasupathi (2019) argue that “in the very act of narrating, voicing some aspects of experience, we, by necessity, silence others” (127-128). In this second performance, I am aware that as dominant voices try to take centre stage, silent voices are silenced even more. In bringing this out into the open, I challenge their dominance, allowing my silenced voices to speak even if they can barely speak.

80 Richardson and Allison (2019) make the claim that “[t]rauma and the unsaid are intimately entangled. Trauma is precisely that which refuses to be rendered into language and in doing so resists finding a place in our narrative of self” (236). Reflecting upon this in the light of what I have gone through in this re-search process, I am convinced of the power that trauma has to render us mute. What I went through was a scary experience, something I would not wish upon anyone. As I look back now, I find these words from Charmaz (2002) most resonant: "When suffering feels inchoate, incomprehensible—overpowering—events may shoot by before being grasped. Here, suffering lies beyond words—what can one say? Physical suffering may usurp speech. No words fit; one cannot speak, much less construct a story of suffering” (310).
I guess this is what happens when research becomes too personal, when the boundaries between research and life collapse, when method and content merge. It’s just one big mess. “I give up” – am I allowed to say this? Will I allow myself to say this? Have I already said this, to myself?

5 February 2022

Silence and power

Silence speaks:

1 I feel overpowered. I am unable to speak.
2 I am exerting my power. I will not speak.
3 I am suffering. I cannot speak.
4 I am ashamed. I do not want to speak.
5 I am afraid. I want to hide. I do not want to be heard. I need to hide. I need to protect myself. I cannot be heard.
6 I am powerless. I have lost the capacity to speak.
7 I am overwhelmed. I cannot speak.
8 I am not yet ready. I cannot speak yet.

20 February 2022

What happens to research when one loses the capacity to write, and that loss, arguably, is actually part of the research? What happens to research when the subject of the research (in this case, me) is unable to speak? Many have written about the importance of paying attention to silence, the unsaid, what is not written. But what if the very process of “writing up,” of “producing” the piece that will be submitted, and read, and judged, gets stuck, unable to move – at all?

I have been doing research for quite some time now, and I can narrate my research,

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81 Coles and Glenn (2019) speak of “[t]he power dynamics of speech and silence – of mapping domination and subordination onto what is (or can be) spoken in discourse and what remains (or must remain) unsaid” (151). They argue that “[s]cholars of the unsaid must always be attuned for the voices whose unspoken meanings are least evident, those voices closest to total powerlessness” (Coles and Glenn 2019, 158). As a scholar of the unsaid, I take this to heart and try my best to attend to these voices within me, voices that are close to losing their power to speak.

82 In these eight speeches that Silence makes, choice and non-choice dance, following the tune of Schröter’s (2019) claim that “[s]ilence can be a result of silencing as well as of deliberate choice – or both” (166).
somehow (I think), but for some reason, I am unable to put it into a form that (to my mind) counts as research.\(^{83}\)

Okay, let me try...

Many people have actually written about how silence is data...

Blah blah blah, for instance, said, “quote quote quote.”

A number have also written about possible reasons why something remains unsaid/unwritten/unexpressed...

This author says, “blah blah blah...”\(^{94}\)

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\(^{83}\) In a book chapter entitled *Confession*, Kitrina Douglas (2018) mockingly challenges “those who say research about one’s own life is indulgent, that blurring boundaries between social science research and creative literature diminishes both, that our aim should be to reduce ambiguity and promote precision,” by asking the question, “Do these men live in the real world” (101-102)? My concern about shaping my writing “into a form that (to my mind) counts as research” reveals an internalisation of dominant notions of research that Douglas and many others have found the courage to question. This thesis seeks to join this growing movement “to stand against the tyranny that is both without and within” (Douglas 2018, 104).

\(^{94}\) When I wrote this journal entry, the “blah blah blah” and the “quote quote quote” were simply placeholders that I intended to replace with names of authors and quotations from related literature. Having left it untouched, I hear these now as mocking sounds, wondering if this was a part of me rebelling, protesting, trying to speak, trying to exert power.
11 March 2022

An inquiry into how an intrusive research process has led me to listen to the voice that does not want to / cannot / will not speak.

Why does it not want to speak?

Because it has been shackled… it has been conditioned to shut up...

Because it is confused… there are too many voices...

Because it is afraid… It does not trust its shifting self...

Because it wants to protest… in the way it knows how...

Today, the 11th of March 2022, I am deciding to accept the possibility of not finishing this doctorate.

14 March 2022

There are many voices

There are just so many voices.

Of course, I continue to listen to all these voices. I cannot but (they intrude). But there is one that I particularly wanted to pay attention to – the voice that does not want to speak, the voice that cannot speak, the voice that will not speak. I’ve heard this voice many times in the past. Or perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that I have noticed this voice so many times in the past. I’ve noticed it as an observer, looking at myself in passing…

Among these voices, why did I choose to particularly listen to this voice? The truth is, I did not choose it. It chose itself. These past two years, all I did was to listen to myself and as I did that, this particular voice became louder and louder, to the point when I could no longer ignore it, to the point when to ignore it would have been outright dishonest to the work I was doing.

20 March 2022

Key Idea: There is a lot to be found in the liminal space between what is unsaid and said.

Research questions: What is in that liminal space? What is it like to be there?
What I have found:
In that liminal space is a complaint, a protest (against the voice that says, “don't say that,” and against the voice that says, “say that”)
In that liminal space, there is confusion.
In that liminal space, there is fear, shame, insecurity, vulnerability.

7 April 2022

This thesis is an exploration of the liminal space between what is said and unsaid. In that space, there is...
...mourning – for words (and parts of me) that have died
...shame – for words (and parts of me) that do not want to show themselves
...resistance – against forces that silence and forces that force speech and writing
...power (and loss of power) – over what is shown, created, formed, what finds its way into being
...a book being written, but will not (yet?) be published

It is a limited backstage pass to what goes on inside me as I navigate this space

This thesis is a chronicle of my psychotherapeutic journey that both wants to show and hide itself...

A journey that coincided with (or was partly brought about by?) the production of this thesis and the COVID-19 pandemic, events that got entangled with other events that refuse to be named in the here and now of the thesis...

12 April 2022

By attending to my silences, I am putting failure to work.
Silence as performance. Allowing silence to perform.

13 April 2022

Silence as mourning
Silence as shame
Silence as protest
Silence as powerlessness
Silence as surrender
Silence as fear
Silence as refuge
Silence as not-knowing
I listen to my silence. What do I hear?
I hear shame.
I hear pain.

30 April 2022

Command-F Silence: A Collection of Silences

Shall I just bury this into silence just as it has always been (buried in silence)?
This morning, however, I felt that this has come to be simply because I felt silenced, unfree.
It was fine to record silence.
I will die if I let my silence eat me.
And voice has other tools – the shout, the scream, the song, the humming whistle, the groaning cry, or the silence.
Yes, silence can be a tool of voice.
Silence as voice
It continues to be created (and re-created) as I pay attention to what happens to me when I engage with texts that have been written before, when I interact with different people, when I walk aimlessly, when I pray in church, and when I sit in silence on my couch.
The truth, though, is that I just find myself in a very different place, a less creative place, a place that prefers privacy to exposure, silence to speech.
I am being silenced, by myself.
The silencing has succeeded!
Have I been silenced?
Silence is a cry for help
Is silence data?
And so I turn to silence.
In silence.
Silence as speech
Recording silences
Silenced voices – we think of groups of people
How about silenced voices within us?
Is my silence actually a cry for help.
Yes, your silence is like a loud cry!
You will be silenced!
Silence speaks.

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85 On the 30th of April 2022, I gathered all my research notes into one Word document. I pressed Command-F and typed “silence.” This was what came out. (Actually, no. I had to do a second run... typed “silenc” instead, to make room for the “silencing” I noticed.)
I have not been able to write because having tasted what it was like to write freely, and then being hounded by my fears coming from all over – “that is not the right way to be” – an experience of being silenced by internalised voices that have become louder and louder, I just couldn’t speak.

The silenced voice refuses to speak.

To force it to speak repeats the abuse that has silenced it.

The very forces that have silenced me are now forcing me to speak.

Silence is my way of telling you, “you will not silence me again!”

Silence and power

Silence speaks:

But I know that a number will not be surprised – those who were able to hear my silence.

Many have written about the importance of paying attention to silence, the unsaid, what is not written.

Many people have actually written about how silence is data...

It’s similar to silence, I guess

How silence speaks

SILENCE – Because of this complexity, I was rendered speechless, unable to write

It is about allowing myself to be silenced by these voices, while at the same time allowing these silences to speak, to ask, “Why can’t I speak?”

Listening to voices that do not speak: silence, the body, and being stuck

Pay attention to the spaces between words, the sighs and silences that may be trying to speak... or not.

But what happens to that which were not articulated, the silences?

It’s the world that has silenced me.

Rather, this thesis invites readers to attend to the limits of authenticity, to attend to silences, to spaces in between...

...resistance – against forces that silence and forces that force speech and writing

By attending to my silences, I am putting failure to work.

Silence as performance.

Allowing silence to perform.

Silencing myself in dream recording

Silencing myself in therapy

Silencing myself in writing

Silence as mourning

Silence as shame

Silence as protest

Silence as powerlessness

Silence as surrender

Silence as fear

Silence as refuge

Silence as not-knowing

I listen to my silence. What do I hear?
In this third performance, silence has showed itself in several ways, as if to match the many possible reasons why we turn to silence instead of speech. Franke (2014) tells us:

There are, of course, innumerable different motives for inexpressibility. Many of these motives seem to fight shy of the intrinsic unsayability commonly attributed to the mystical and transcendent. But there are also strong tendencies and temptations to blur these boundaries wherever we really do not and, for whatever reasons, cannot know or say exactly what we are talking about. The scatological, the morally indecent, the religiously blasphemous, and the ritually abject are all either socially unavowable or, in various ways, subjectively or psychologically inadmissible and so liable to shrink back from express verbalization. (18)

Whatever the reason, whether shallow or deep, conscious or unconscious, or somewhere in between, silence deserves our hearing; non-writing, our understanding. We must not forget that silence is constantly speaking – “speak[ing] without words” (Richardson and Allison 2019, 237), “speak[ing] without being spoken” (Murray and Durrheim 2019, 10), always waiting to be noticed, hoping to be acknowledged.
“The inward twin of speech is silence, light’s is shadow...”

- Philip Gross (2022, 79)
V

My Shadow Teacher
Self-Portraits
6 May 2022

Can you see me?
Yes, that’s me.
That’s me, and me, and me.
You can’t see me,
but that’s me.
And me, and me, and me.
I am showing myself
even as I hide myself
behind my shadows.
Wait... behind?
I’m not behind my shadows!
(Who is behind my shadows?)
Where am I then,
if not behind?
Somewhere
Somewhere there
In a place I could not name.
I am there.
That’s me.
And me, and me, and me.
You’re back!!! Where have you been and what have you been up to?

I just came back from my camino. I walked from Portugal to Spain, to Santiago de Compostela. I was on retreat, but I was also working.

Working? What were you doing?

I was collecting shadows for my thesis.

Collecting shadows? For your thesis? Are you mad?!?

Hahaha! This reminds me of Ken Gale’s (2018) book, *Madness as Methodology*. Well, I guess I am. This thesis had made me mad. You should have noticed by now!

No, seriously, what do you mean?

What do you mean, “seriously?” I am serious. I was collecting shadows. For my thesis.

And when did this begin?

Three years ago, the 22nd of April 2020. Here, take a look, the first in my collection:

[Image]

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86 For over a thousand years, pilgrims have been walking the camino to Santiago de Compostela. In 2022, 414,319 received their compostella after travelling at least a hundred kilometers on foot (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, n.d.). I was one of them.
It’s interesting, actually, how this collection began. It was born out of necessity. One of the fruits of COVID.

_Huh? How?_

Well, the lockdown made me walk a lot, alone, and when you walk alone, I guess you notice things you don’t often notice. You wake up to the beauty that is around you. But no one was there to take my photos. So I decided to take self-portraits. Look at my shadow and the trees’ shadows, the cherry blossoms and the green grass, the blue and white sky. Isn’t the photo nice? That’s how it began.

_And you were doing it for your thesis?_

Yes, but I didn’t know that then. I was just taking photos because they were nice. It was only much later that I realised that I was actually doing it for my thesis.

_Then you weren’t doing it for your thesis. You were taking photos because you found them nice, and later you decided that it would be nice to have them in your thesis. So, you weren’t actually doing it for your thesis._

Well, that’s arguable. You reason out in a very linear way, and I get that, but this thesis is far from linear, even if at times it appears to be.

_So, when did you realise that your photoshoots were actually thesis work?_

I don’t remember exactly when, but I do remember reading what I have been writing, and then coming to realise that my self-portraits were saying the same thing. It’s interesting, actually, how ideas find their way to communication without us even noticing, seeping through cracks. This reminds me of what I wrote two years ago, in April 2021, when I was going through a rough period in my thesis work:
11 April 2021

The dominant emotion is fear. And with fear comes paralysis. And then shame. And with shame comes the desire to hide, to disappear, to escape.

Is there a way out? Is there a way to move forward?

Looking back, my process seems to have found ways to do so, somehow. Unable to write, I have turned to speech. Unable to articulate, I have turned to the felt sense. Unable to understand, I have turned to dreams. Unable to think, I have turned to the body. The image I get is that of water that seeps through cracks, finding its way to move along. I wonder, though, have I reached the dead end?

Yes, it’s interesting, this seeping through cracks. How my self always seeps through and finds its way into my shadow, how my thesis has seeped through my Photo Library. All these seeping-throughs make linearity impossible. The past seeps through the present and will find its way to seep through the future. I guess that’s a sign of life, of dynamism, the constant movement that breathes. That’s actually one of the great lessons I learned from my shadow – movement.

Lesson 1: Shadow Dance

So, how exactly do you capture shadows?

Well, I chase them. Although I would have to admit that I always arrive too late. Every capture is a betrayal, a misrepresentation of what it really is. Shadows can run very fast, you know.

Ah, very similar to how we try to capture experience through words, “experiences that seem to slip away just when we are about to speak (of) them” (Frosh 2019). As Liz Bondi (2013) points out, “The gap between the flow of experience...locates loss at the core of meaning making” (15). She says, “When we symbolize our experience, we implicitly acknowledge that it has gone, that we are not at one with our experience” (Bondi 2013, 15). This is true for both speech and writing. As MacLure (2008), echoing Derrida, argues, “Neither can deliver the fullness and immediacy that fuels the dream of presence” (100).
Indeed, language constantly betrays us, fails us in our knowledge-making. In the words of St. Pierre (1997a):

> We are very concerned that we have pieces of data, words, to support the knowledge we make. Yet how can language, which regularly falls apart, secure meaning and truth? How can language provide the evidentiary warrant for the production of knowledge in a postmodern world? (179)

And as Rogers (2007) points out:

> We use language to communicate, but the price of each attempt to communicate is that it involves a repression—a repression that is necessary in order to be heard. This repression, inherent in the shaping of our speech (to be received by another), is an unconscious censorship. (9)

Exactly. Something always gets left behind. As Romanyszyn (2021) reminds us, “In the gap there is always a remainder that asks not to be forgotten. The shadow of the unsaid haunts our saying” (6). This is why our usage of language is always a compromise.

It is. As I mentioned to you earlier, this thesis is a compromise, a betrayal that’s being tolerated.

Yes, a shadow.

A shadow thesis.

_Talking about shadows, how many have you “captured?”_

By now, thousands. But there are a lot of duplicates, you see. Ummm... actually... wait... let me correct myself. No, there are no duplicates. Do you remember what the great philosopher Heraclitus said, that no one ever steps in the same river twice (Van Geert and De Ruiter 2022)? Well, another great philosopher pointed out that you can never capture the same shadow twice.

_Really? Who said that?_

Me. Hahaha! Well, yeah, this thesis has turned me into a philosopher!
And what insight will you be most known for?

That shadows dance, and we must allow them to.

Dancing shadows... sounds fun.

Do you know how I got this insight? It came when I was trying to a capture a shadow, but it kept running away from me. Well, that’s what I thought. I didn’t realise it was simply dancing! Take a look at some of the photos I took. Notice the timestamp. I left them there to show that these photos were taken just seconds apart. Photos from a shadow dance:

“There’s nothing passive about them, shadows. More energetic than we are, they stretch and flex and shrink. Like a dog off the leash, they streak out from us and back, back.” (Gross 2022, 61)

You did say these shadows were a seeping through of you, right? Then you were dancing!

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Jonathan Wyatt (2019) writes, “Creative-relational inquiry... may be conceptualized as inquiry that seeks not to ‘capture’ and hold still, but to find a way, through desire, to do justice to the fluidity of process” (45). As a creative-relational self-inquiry, this self-research I have been led to undertake, has found a way to celebrate this fluidity of process, this never-ending movement, through this non-rigid thesis, always moving, always dancing.
You've caught me. Yes, I admit, I'm a dancer. Dancing is one of Scotland's gifts to me. Oh, how I love the ceilidh!

*I know! Fun, right?*

Definitely! What I like about it is how it makes you lose yourself in the dance. You just get carried away.

*You were writing about that, weren't you?*

Ah, yes. Here:

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6 May 2022

A key question: How much of ourselves do we show?

Throughout this re-search journey, my answer to that question has been shifting. There are moments when I bare myself naked, and there are moments when I am completely covered up, and of course, there are moments when I am dancing in between. It's not really up to me, you see. The dance dances me. I cannot but be danced.

Jurgenson and Rey (2016) argues against the notion that privacy and publicity are polar opposites. Using the image of the fan dance which is really “a cyclical interplay between reveal and conceal” (Jurgenson and Rey 2016, 63), they assert that there is “a dialectical relationship, where privacy and publicity are deeply intertwined, mutually reinforcing” (Jurgenson and Rey 2016, 62). Expounding on this image, Smirnova (2016) explains, “revealing some parts of the body while concealing others piques others’ intrigue while simultaneously imbuing the hidden elements with meaning” (28).

There was a point when I felt that the fan dance captured what I was doing. Through time, however, I have found myself challenging this image. To me, the tease that the fan dance seems to suggest fails to capture the powerlessness of the dancer who is being danced. In the closing and the opening of myself, I am not teasing. I am being danced. I am being danced by the world within and around me.

*So, the dancing of the shadows are not up to the shadows.*

Exactly! There are many factors to consider – the sun, the clouds, the trees, the hills. The whole world is dancing and the shadow is being danced along.
Ah yes, the dancing world, the dancing shadows, the dancing you.

The dancing me, the dancing thesis, the dancing in waves:

19 January 2021

Will there ever be integration?
The idea of waves seems to describe it better: coming together, diverging, force upon force, force joining force...
Perhaps growth is like that
It’s not as linear as we think it is

30 January 2021

I was talking to a friend a few days ago and I used the image of waves to describe what was happening to me – ups and downs, different forces from all directions coming together, exerting their power. Now that I think of this image, however, the word that comes to mind is “movement.” There is constant motion. The strength varies, of course. Sometimes, the waves are very strong, and at times, quite weak. But there is constant motion, a sign of life.

31 January 2021

I was just struck by the fact that the image of waves seems to likewise describe my methodology, which is always in motion, always in flow. I have, in fact, allowed myself to be carried by the currents of my ever-shifting-methodology – from writing, to audio recording, to attending to my experiencing, to dreaming, to reflecting – and it is still moving! I have allowed myself to go with the flow.

6 February 2021

I am panicking. It’s as if everything I’ve been doing with regard to this thesis is a mess. I would have wanted to come up with something more “presentable,” but alas, there’s just too much going on in my head. I keep on shifting, shifting, shifting... jumping from one idea to another. It’s really like being battered by the waves. I’ve tried to focus, but here I am, finding myself still confused. The raging waves continue, and I’m becoming dizzy, and tired, and hopeless. I am just remembering now that I’ve written about these themes previously, and thus wonder, is there something here that’s calling for my attention?
What comes to mind is the contrast between the easy path, the more presentable path, the cleaner path, the path I would have wanted, and the path I find myself in now – messy, unpresentable, difficult. The dreams I’ve written about seem to highlight these contrasts, and I honestly do not know where I am going. All I know is how I feel – afraid. I am scared of what I have gotten myself into. I am scared of the dark – which is where I am in now. I don’t like it when I cannot see what’s next, but this is where I find myself.

Help!

14 February 2021

Here we are again. Waves, waves, waves. How do we even know where one particular force that hits us comes from? Of course it comes from all over! Forces from all directions, coming together, hitting us in a particular moment. All we know is that we got hit. What hit us? The waves. Where did the waves come from? From everywhere!

22 February 2021

I really do not know what is going on in me. Ups and downs, ups and downs. And now I am back down. And as usual, there is tightness in my chest. I had an interesting dream earlier this morning. Very vivid. And full of intense emotions. I was on a boat with four other elderly persons (yes, for some reason, I was an elderly man in the dream; I somehow knew that, or felt that, even if I couldn’t see myself). I fell asleep, and when I woke up, we were on raging waves. I kept my eyes closed, and tried to continue sleeping, but I could feel the boat going up, and then crashing down with the waves. It was like a roller coaster. Up and down, up and down. It was scary. I just kept my eyes closed, and tried to go back to sleep, to escape the fury of the waves. A part of me just surrendered. If this is the end of me, then so be it. But I just wanted to keep my eyes closed. I just wanted to sleep. Eventually, for some reason, I did fall asleep, and when I woke up, we were already at the port. I was the last one on the boat. The others had gone down. I had a feeling, though, that the woman beside me did not make it. And true enough, when I looked, she had turned into a corn. I became very worried, but I was hopeful that we could still save her. Luckily, the organiser of the trip arrived, and I gave him the corn. He tried to resuscitate the woman-turned-corn by blowing into it. We were panicking. And then I saw the two other women standing outside the boat, and also the man who was with us, but the man was in an ambulance, being treated. I asked the two women if they knew where the other woman was. They told me she just went to the toilet. I was confused. I knew she had turned into a corn. Not long after, however, I saw her walking back towards us. I felt relieved, and then I started laughing – very intensely. In fact, I woke up really laughing hard. For some reason, though, my laughter, I think, had no sound. It was weird. But I really found it funny! I couldn’t believe how ridiculous the situation was! And to think that I was really really convinced that she had become a corn, and that I became so emotionally invested in that belief! It was the most boisterous laugh I had in a while, only that there was no sound. My face showed it though. And I really felt it. A really weird experience on so many levels.
6 March 2021

The many parts of me are now speaking to each other. Do we continue? Or do we stop now? Just write until you still can. But I am finding it difficult. Then stop if you need to. But continue if you can. That feels much better. I have just breathed a sigh of relief. A momentary sigh of relief. It is still there as I type these words, but slowly, it is fading away again, being overtaken by the pressure in my chest. A sigh of relief, once again, just now. It is still there. But the pressure is also there, somewhere inside, now growing once again. How can these shifts come and go? Because we are waves, ever-shifting, ever-moving. It actually does not stop. There may be days of calm, but even in the calmness of the water, there is movement. It’s just a matter of degree. Does it feel right to stop writing now? Maybe. Or maybe not. Who knows? Whatever. There is always that possibility of going back. Is there? Maybe not. You never step on the same river twice, remember? Yes, but it does not have to be the exactly same river for it to be the same river. I continue to be me even in the midst of the many changes happening to me. The shifts do not destroy me, even if it feels that way. The shifts actually make me me. I am flow. I am movement. I am the ever-shifting me. There is no “I” other than this ever-shifting me. There is no singular other than the plural.

7 March 2021

I am brought back to the image of waves and the constant movement – sometimes violent, sometimes gentle – which one cannot escape from. For some reason, I am reminded of the image that came up in the focusing exercise I did a few days ago. It was an image of me drowning, gasping for air, trying to survive. I am having that experience now, even as I type. No, let me correct myself. It’s a less intense version, but it is akin to that. There is tightness in my chest and there is shallowness in my breathing. I am trying to survive. Moving along, moving along, trying to survive. I am trying.

Just as the ocean lets the waves be
Let your waves be
Let your dancing shadows be

Just as the ocean dances itself into waves
So must you

Allow yourself to dance the waves
Allow yourself to dance your shadows
Allow yourself to dance you
Give yourself space to be danced
Lesson 2: In Defence of Shadows

Don't you think it's unfair, how shadows have been treated? I mean, why do we always think of shadows as bad? For some reason, I keep thinking of book covers that feature shadows, and how all of them are about murder, deceit, sinister and evil plots. What have shadows done to deserve this?

Is it because they are black? I wonder whether we would treat them differently if they were white.

Ah yes, the suffering that comes with blackness. I remember writing something about this three years ago after the death of George Floyd. 88

26 June 2020

Why “Black” in “Black Lives Matter” Matters

As a Christian, I have been taught to value all human lives. When I say “all,” I mean all. That includes the lives of rapists, serial killers, drug lords, child molesters, and terrorists. That’s what Jesus teaches. All human lives matter. I sincerely believe that.

Why then am I uncomfortable with using “All Lives Matter” in the context of the “Black Lives Matter” movement?

What immediately comes to mind is a talk I attended some months ago about the LGBTQ+ community and the Catholic Church. What struck me was not something that the speaker had said, but a comment made by one of the attendees. I cannot remember her exact words but her point was that the Church should welcome everyone, including those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. Good point. But she continued. She said she didn't believe that the Church should give the LGBTQ+ community a special welcome, that they should be treated like the rest. At the church doors, they should be welcomed in the same way that the elderly, little children, and young adults would be welcomed. I really think she meant well.

I believe, though, that her comment reflects a fundamental misreading of the situation.

88 On the 25th of May 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black American died in the United States after a police officer pressed his knee on his neck for more than eight minutes, sparking a wave of protests not only in the US, but also in many parts of the world (Pyper and Brown 2020).
When we see the LGBTQ+ community within the context of the Catholic Church and say that they ought to be treated “like the rest,” we are in fact implicitly, and perhaps unknowingly, ignoring the truth that they have been marginalised in our Christian community for so long. To put them “along with the rest” conveniently ignores the history of oppression that they have been made to suffer in our Church and in our society for centuries.

Going back to “Black Lives Matter,” the same principle applies. To insist on saying “All Lives Matter” when the discussion is clearly about “Black Lives Matter” is oppressive, even if it is done unintentionally, because it collapses an issue of power into an issue of difference. Black vs. White is not the same as (at least as far as I know) Yellow vs. Green or Blue vs. Orange. History teaches us that black is not just a color among so many others. Blackness bleeds. Blackness cries. Blackness hides.

And now, blackness is trying to find its voice. Let us not drown that voice with other voices. Let’s not kill black by bringing in red, yellow, and blue. Yes, all colors matter. All lives matter. We can agree on that. But let us listen to a people who have suffered for so long. They can barely speak. They can barely breathe. Let’s give them the space that they need.

I’m not black, but having moved to the UK where the kindness of people does not erase the fact that I am non-White, I have had my own experiences of racial insecurity.

Racial insecurity? Is that the same as racism?

It’s the racism that I carry within me as potential, waiting for a spark that gets activated when the circumstances are right. In a way, it’s the racism that I sleep with, that sleeps within me like a baby who wakes up at the slightest disturbance.

27 September 2020

I was walking along Lauriston Gardens from the Meadows back to the house. It was already dark, but it wasn’t too late. I saw a group of young men, three of them I think, chatting with each other. If I continued with my trajectory, I would be very near them, and I didn’t want that (especially because of COVID dangers), so I moved to the right, deciding rather to walk on the main road which is never really busy anyway. I had already passed them when I heard someone shouting, “Are you afraid of us? Why are you walking faster?” It was said in a mocking way. Tug tug, tug tug, my heart started beating faster. There was a cold shiver in my body. But I quickly replied, without thinking even, “I’m okay. No problem,” with a voice that was pretending, sounding like
someone who wasn't bothered. I don't think I walked faster after that. I just continued on. But I started thinking, "What would I do if they attack me?" I looked around and saw that there were houses that were lit. I knew that some people would still be awake, and so I resolved that I would probably shout. I stared thinking of what I would shout. "Help," perhaps. As I moved farther away from where these men were, a thought came to me. This is racism. I don't know if they saw how I looked (it was dark), but that just came to me. This wouldn't have happened if I were white, I thought. I could have said something better, in fact, if I were white. But I wasn't. I just had to take it in, like so many of my countrymen who do this – just take it in. Walk away. Don't fuss. Just take it in. As I write this, I remember that just days ago I also felt bullied, but I pretended to laugh, to act as if it was no big deal, like I would always do. Walk away. Don't fuss. Just take it in. Act as if everything is normal. Laugh. Smile. And when you reach your room, cry. I didn't cry when I reached my room, but I felt very very sad and angry. It's been a while since I last felt this way. I am now remembering that I had not planned to write any of these. I just allowed myself to type and type and type, and this is where my experiencing brought me. What is the inquiry all about, therefore? I am not yet sure, to be honest. Am I inquiring to see how all this happens? Am I inquiring to give meaning to what seems to be a very complex phenomenon? What is my contribution? What is my inquiry all about? I will allow myself to experience this question, this curiosity. What am I curious about? What am I inquiring about?

So, you think the men didn't see you?

I honestly think they didn’t, but it felt that they did. Maybe it's just me. It was dark and they couldn't see me, so how would they know I wasn't white? Did they feel it? Did they sense it in the way I walked, that angling to the right that wanted to avoid them? But does it matter? Racism doesn't just live in racist intentions; it doesn't have a single abode. Racism lives in what I feel I have to do, in how I struggle to speak, in the posture of my body, in my desire to run away and my decision not to. As I said earlier, racism sleeps within me, and sleeps within you too. And it flies, flies around in restaurants and cinemas, in buses and sidewalks, in libraries and high street shops.

But maybe race is just a shadow.

Maybe. But there is something about it that speaks to me. It's as if something is there, longing to be heard.

I think it's not just the shadow's blackness, though.
Definitely. I think it's also the evil motive we impute to the shadow. We focus on the fact that it is hiding something from us, forgetting that on the contrary, it is actually showing itself to us! Take a look at my shadow. Sometimes it tells you where I was:

Or where I was going:

When I was there:

And what I was doing:

It shows you who I've encountered:
Shadows I met along the way:

It even tells you my religion:

And the fact that I’m a Jesuit priest:

And some of the many other things I believe in:

Okay, okay, I get it. You’re correct. Our shadows wouldn’t be there if they really wanted to hide.
It’s like hide-and-seek, I guess. We do not want to be too good in hiding, or else we won’t be found, and the game will never end. We think that shadows want to keep things from us, forgetting that they simply want to play.

*Ah, the playfulness of shadows.*

Yes, playfulness. That’s why we have to be careful. Shadows play tricks too. Like this shadow that suggests I went fishing in the shore when I really did not:

Nor did I swim in this pool:

Or climb this hill:

Or eat in these restaurants:
I wasn’t in Van Gogh’s paintings:

But my shadows were really there, playing.

So, what is there in your shadows? It’s just darkness that I see.

When you focus on my shadow’s darkness, you forget that it’s actually there because I am bathing in light. What’s in my shadows, you ask. It’s light playing with me.

“Black: not the enemy of light. More its dancing partner... Not what snuffs out vision, but what gives it definition, edges, shape. And depth, too, in its mouldings and perspective.” (Gross 2022, 79)

13 April 2021

Every disclosure is a non-disclosure. Every time we say something, there is something we’re not saying. Every exposure is a hiding. Every hiding is a longing to be found.
When we play with our shadows, we will discover that not all is black and white, darkness and light. The playground is wide; there is so much space in between.\(^89\)

**Lesson 3: Shadows Have Shadows Too**

Do you believe this, that shadows have shadows too?

*I find it difficult to imagine. I don’t think I’ve ever seen one.*

You have. You just didn’t know that it was a shadow’s shadow.

*Where do you find them?*

Ah, in all sorts of places. I’ve found many in my Recycle Bin and Recently Deleted folder. Some were in a folder named “Not for Thesis,” and a few made it to this thesis as covered references. You’ll see them later. There were also some that I came across as I was cleaning my phone. Not enough gigabytes, and they didn’t want to go to the cloud. Catch a glimpse of them here before they disappear:

\(^89\) In the midst of my struggle writing this thesis, I picked up a free copy of the little book, *Dancing in the Dark: A Survivor’s Guide to the University*, from the Edinburgh University Chaplaincy. In that book, Pirrie, Fang, and O’Brien (2021) ask, “How can those engaged and interested in education think about light and shadow differently?” and they answer their own question, “Shadow is more than darkness and light is more than brilliance,” calling to mind “the relief both shade and illumination can provide, how warm sunshine falling on a sturdy tree and the shadow it casts in response require and complement each other... that shadows are where we see light and life interact” (37). What they say speaks so much of my awakening to what a shadow really is.
But the ones most difficult to find are those within the text. They’re in plain sight but they have their way of camouflaging, very difficult to detect.

*Can I see them?*

Only those who want to show themselves to you.

*How about the others? Is there a way to see them too?*

I’m afraid this wanting to see is what shadows are most afraid of, this curiosity that demands more and more.

*Why are they afraid?*

Because it kills them. When you unshadow a shadow, it dies.

**11 October 2022**

Befriending one’s shadow is not just about getting to know it. At times, in fact, befriending may mean letting go of one’s desire to know. Befriending one’s shadow means waiting for it, allowing it to be itself, dancing with it as it navigates its way in the space between being seen and being hidden. A shadow must never be forced out of its being a shadow. Unshadowing a shadow would be the worst act we can ever commit against it, and thus against our very selves.
So, how do I see them then?

The only way to see a shadow’s shadow is to wait for it. If it chooses to show itself to you on its own terms, at its own time, you will get to see it without your violent gaze.

Ah yes, a gaze can be violent indeed. I’ve been stabbed a number of times, and I still carry my wounds with me.

You are lucky because some shadows have chosen to appear, even if there was a time they didn’t want to.

Didn’t want to? Why?

Many reasons. Some felt they weren’t properly dressed. And some were too shy because they haven’t figured themselves out, like the incomplete sentences you find here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24 January 2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was wrong, it seems. I thought I can continue writing. No. The resistance is too strong. I’m no longer sure wh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>25 January 2022</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am lost. I have lost the capacity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 February 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How we present ourselves to the world, A Journey to Authenticity Come as you are...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the retreats I have given in the past, I often told people, “Come to God as you are.” I now realise that this is really easier said than done. Many times, even if we want to, we</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
find ourselves unable to escape from our desire to be presentable. And at times, even our attempts to be “unpresentable” are actually simply masqueraded efforts to control what we present.

You might be wondering why shadows have to be dressed well, but ask yourself, if it were you, wouldn’t you want to be?

7 February 2021

Joel, come as you are. I cannot, not at the moment. I’m still polishing myself so that the Joel you’ll get will be acceptable. I’m still polishing my words, so that the Joel you’ll get will be understandable. But how about my unpolished self? My unpolished words? Will they not find a space in my thesis? Are they not welcome?

Of course shadows want to be presentable. Who wants to appear in a mess? Those who do, I’m sure, also curate their mess.

Ah, like this thesis.

Exactly! A curated mess.

20 September 2021

Dear David,

I want to begin with an apology. Yes, an apology. Because what I am about to present, I deem as unpresentable. In fact, as I write this, I feel a lot of shame.

There is a phrase that keeps coming back to me – “when shit hits the fan.” Shit has hit the fan and it’s all over the place.

How do I present what is unpresentable?

---

David was the “critical friend” assigned to me by the University. His task was to give me feedback based on my Research Progress Report. The report I submitted to him began with this excerpt.
VI

Shadows and Silences and Why They Count
How many words do you have now?

36,132.

And how many do you need?

At least 40,000.

Nearly there.

I know. But I feel sad. Not because I’m about to end (although that might be it too). But because of the word count. It just feels so wrong to count only words, as if only words count. If I cover my words so that only their shadows are seen, are they part of the word count? Like these: ______, _____, ______... do they count? And how about my silences, like these: ______, ______, ______... do they not count?

I’m sure no one will check. Count them then.

Of course I will count them. But don’t you get it? There is a continuing epistemic violence (Spivak 2010) in the academe that I cannot escape from. Erin Manning (2018) asks:

> What are these undercommon ways of cawing, the sounds lost, left behind, not only unaddressed but unregistered, in the systems of power/knowledge we call academia? What cannot be heard? What cannot be listened to? And what are the stakes of the performance of knowledge that plays out in the name of the “norm” that upholds what is too often generalized around the concept of “quality” or “rigor”? (2)

Just think of it this way: if they let you pass, consider it as academia’s peace offering, a gesture of repentance, a welcoming of your shadows and silences.

Okay, but there are so many others who must repent.

Like who?
Like my fellow Jesuit priests who gasped in disbelief that I was writing a thesis on shadows and silences.

Really? What did they say?


And how did that make you feel?

Insecure, I guess. It didn’t help that days after, a New York Times article was published, pointing out that more than thirty asteroids have been named after Jesuits who have made important contributions to science (Povoledo 2023).

But you do see the importance of your research, don’t you?

I do, but doubts linger.

Perhaps it would help if you started thinking of its value. What is your research’s contribution to the field of counselling and psychotherapy?

I don’t know why, but I find myself resisting your question. This “having to account,” this “having to justify how my research is valuable,” makes me feel uncomfortable. Maybe because it exposes what I’ve been trying to hide all along, that I wasn’t really doing this research for the world (I tried to do that many times, but I failed each time I tried). It does contribute to knowledge, but knowledge primarily of myself, for myself.

But isn’t this thesis for a doctorate?

Yes, but I guess doctorates come in different shapes and forms. I remember a conversation I had with my supervisor. He told me, “Joel, I have been supervising doctoral students for many years, and what I’ve noticed is that most of them see their doctoral thesis simply as a stepping stone to life in the academe. They do their research, get their degree, and move forward in their career. What I’ve noticed with you is
something different. It seems that you’ve made use of your doctoral thesis for your own personal development.” He’s right. This was how my thesis turned out to be. I guess that’s why “having to account” feels so wrong. I sit with myself, look back at the past four years, and ask, “What I have become – is this not enough?”

Well, maybe you don’t need to think of it as “having to account.” Maybe you can see it more as sharing.

But haven’t I been doing that in the last few chapters?

You have, but perhaps you can share more about how this has helped you in counselling and psychotherapy. Throughout the course of your doctoral programme, you have completed a course in counselling training, you have been practicing as a registered psychotherapist, and you have been a counselling client yourself. How has your research helped broaden or deepen your knowledge in this field?

I prefer “deepen” to “broaden” because that’s the direction my research took. In terms of breadth, it didn’t really cover much, but it went deep, very deep. In a nutshell, what this research has taught me was to value shadows and silences more. I now know how important this is for counselling and psychotherapy. I wrote this a couple of years ago as I was struggling in the writing of this thesis. It’s about an imagined client who could also be me:

14 April 2021

The receptionist tells me that my new client is waiting for me in Room H, a room we almost never use for counselling sessions. It’s at the end of the corridor and it’s quite stuffy inside because there are no windows. She explains, “The client called beforehand to say that he was arriving early but that he didn’t want to wait in the waiting room. He said he needed to be in a dark room where no one can see him. He was insistent.” I start to wonder as I walk along the unlit corridor, “What is it with this client and light?”

---

91 This fictional account presented here is more than just a literary device. It is a story I inhabit as its author, a story where I belong, where I feel alive (Tudor and Wyatt 2023, 215).
enter the room, knowing that the lights would be switched off, but I am still surprised by how completely dark it is. Luckily, I find my way to the right chair, almost stumbling because I could not see a thing. And then I hear a voice, “I’m sorry, but I’m not yet ready to talk.” I reply, still unable to see who I was talking to, “I hear you. You’re not yet ready to talk. I will wait.” And I sit there, waiting, in darkness. I wait. And wait. And wait. And slowly, I begin seeing the person in front of me. Not clearly, of course, but I see him.

This says a lot.

Well, it says what I’ve been saying again and again: we would really be more caring if we stopped making the assumption that the people we encounter have the capacity to speak and show themselves to us.

Bob

Let me tell you about Bob, one of my first clients, also one of the most challenging. It’s his silence. Very difficult to take. Ironically, even if we rarely spoke, my sessions with him were the most exhausting. The first few sessions were the toughest.

What were those sessions like?

Horrendous. I felt useless, incapable, wondering whether becoming a counsellor was one big mistake. The silence was killing me and I felt like a fraud! Eventually, I tried to break the silence by asking him all sorts of questions (gently, I thought, unaware then that even the gentlest of breakings can be violent). Let’s just say that I was learning and Bob was my teacher.

Session 1

(prolonged silence)

Joel: Hmmmm...

---

92 Bob does not refer to a specific client. He is many-clients-put-together.
Bob: *(looking down)*

Joel: I read the Referral Form from your GP. It mentioned depression. I’m wondering whether you want to talk about that.

Bob: *(still looking down)*

*(prolonged silence)*

Joel: I’m guessing that you don’t. What do you want to talk about?

*(prolonged silence)*

**Session 5**

*(prolonged silence)*

Joel: As you know, I’m just here. Just feel free to talk if you wish.

Bob: *(looking down)*

*(prolonged silence)*

Joel: I just want to check with you. Is there anything you wish to tell me?

Bob: *(looks at me briefly, and then looks down again)*

*(prolonged silence)*

Joel: You don’t need to talk if you don’t want to.

Bob: *(looking down)*

*(prolonged silence)*

Joel: We have about five minutes remaining. I just wanted to let you know.

Bob: *(still looking down)*

*(prolonged silence)*

Joel: And that’s our time. I will be here again next week.

Bob: *(gets up from his chair and leaves)*
I’m trying to imagine those sessions now. They must have been really difficult, the monotony of it all especially, which I know is ironic given that silence was the single tone.

Well, on the contrary, these extended moments of silence were not as static as they seem to be. There were shifts that took place in the midst of the constancy. As I mentioned, there were feelings of inadequacy in the beginning, but this later changed to apathy, as if saying, “I don’t really care if you remain quiet the whole session.” With apathy, there was also underlying anger: “Why did you come here if you didn’t want to talk?” Through time, however, I noticed myself becoming kinder.

Kinder? What do you mean?

I started wondering what was in Bob’s silence, why he didn’t want to speak. Sometimes, I would get lost in my reveries, most of them memories from my childhood – of me crying alone in bed, covering my face with the pillow so as not to make any sound, of me feeling insecure, watching quietly as the other kids played, of me being lost in my own world, trying to hide from those around me. Not long after, I had a sense that I was hearing Bob’s silence.

---

93 There are different ways of looking at silence in the context of therapy, contrary to the common tendency to view it as something homogenous (Levitt 2001, 295). These depend partly on the practitioner’s theoretical orientation. Acheson and Avdi (2023), however, remind us that “different theoretical approaches on silence are not necessarily mutually exclusive. When considering silence in therapy, clinicians must be prepared to keep multiple possibilities in mind regarding understanding and technique, allowing space for these to be revised as a therapy progresses” (143).

94 In a review of how silence has been seen in the psychoanalytic tradition, Lane, Koetting, and Bishop (2002) point out that while Freud and his earlier followers tended to view silence negatively, often as a resistance or a defence, “beginning in the 1960s, emphasis in the literature shifted to the role of silence as a form of communication within the therapeutic alliance” (1092). They explain that “[w]hile it may act as resistance, silence necessarily communicates messages important to a complete understanding of the patient and the therapy” (Lane, Koetting, and Bishop 2002, 1092).

95 In attending to my feelings and reveries during Bob’s silence, I am aligning myself with Acheson and Avdi’s (2023) argument that “[s]ilences can often be moments where the transference and countertransference are experienced most powerfully” (146).
Session 12

(prolonged silence)

Bob: (looking down)

Joel: I’m not sure about this, but this must be difficult for you, coming here, week after week, sitting in silence.

Bob: (looks at me, nods, and looks down again)

Joel: I will be honest. It is also difficult for me.

Bob: (looks at me again)

Joel: But I am here. And I want you to know that I am just here.

(prolonged silence)

Session 15

(prolonged silence)

Bob: (looking down)

Joel: (looking at Bob)

Bob: (looking down)

Joel: (looking down)

(prolonged silence)

What I find most difficult to tolerate about silence is the not-knowing.\(^{96}\) With Bob, I

\(^{96}\) Levitt and Morrill (2023) say, “Because silences are, by definition, a lapse in verbal communication between speakers, they may be experienced as impenetrable and so pose particular problems for psychotherapists. At their zenith, they can indicate moments when clients are deeply attuned to internal experiences or in a space of reflective communion with their therapists. At their nadir, they may indicate internal disconnection and withdrawal of the client or therapist, during which the alliance is threatened by disintegration” (320).
really didn’t know what was going on. I didn’t know how he was feeling. I didn’t know what questions to ask. I didn’t know whether my being quiet with him was okay. It’s only much later that I realised how narrow-minded I was.

*And why do you say that?*

Because I knew. Somehow. I wasn’t sure, but I knew. Of course I knew. I had a sense of what was happening to Bob. And that sense was a form of knowing. Being there with him week after week after week helped me know.

*You stayed with him and that’s what’s important.*

Staying with him has taught me a lot. He really was my teacher.

*And what for you is the most important lesson?*

That silence is a presence, not just an absence, a presence that must be experienced, not interrogated. The longer I worked with him, the more I became convinced that words are overrated even in talk therapy. The way he looks at me, the occasional pivot of his body, the rhythm of his breathing, the tapping of his feet, his slouch, his crossed arms – there is so much that he tells me without using a single word. Silence, indeed, is a presence. It’s Bob’s-presence-with-me.

---

97 Urlic (2010) seems to agree, pointing out that “everyone has his/her time to find the way and the possibility to come out of the covering silence and to express him/herself verbally, on which one can work. This should be respected” (349). This is also a key point that Winnicott makes. As Spelman (2021) explains, “Winnicott details... the way in which the analyst must wait, often for a long time, to allow for the patient’s needed experience (perhaps for the first time) of the good enough environment – the physical features of the setting and the analyst’s attitude – as dependable and reliable over time. It is only after this is sufficiently experienced that the patient’s ego strengthens and they can benefit from interpretations and the ‘talking’ part of the therapy” (179). My work with Bob has definitely taught me to be more patient and more respectful of my clients’ processes, trusting that by providing space for silence, I am providing space ultimately for them and all that they bring.

98 Levitt (2001) makes the same point when she urges therapists “to recognize therapeutic silences as active moments instead of viewing them simply as moments in which discourse is absent” (306).
My work with Anna\(^99\) has also been going on for quite some time, about ten months, I would say. Almost like the opposite of my sessions with Bob (although they are really more alike than apparent), my sessions with Anna are full of words – well, full of chatter, in fact. “It doesn't feel like counselling,” I tell my supervisor. “It feels like we're just chatting away like friends.” Interestingly, though, every now and then, seemingly out of nowhere, our conversation shifts – a quick and sudden entry to the counselling realm (as if there was such a thing) – and then off we go again, chatting away.

---

**Session 3**

Anna: I was reading a food blog yesterday.

Joel: Hmm...

Anna: Have you tried Ting Thai Caravan?

Joel: I have, many times. I love their Pad Thai.

Anna: Me too. I always get the one with prawns. I have to be careful, though, whenever I'm there with my mum. In our first family trip to Bangkok, we went to a local restaurant. We were very clear when we ordered that mum can't have prawns because she had an allergy. So we had a prawn-free meal. Or so we thought. We were just about to pay when my mum began to feel itchy. She was so mad, screamed continuously. Everyone in the restaurant started looking at us. I was so ashamed!

Joel: The people were looking because she was screaming and you were ashamed.

Anna: I mean, why does she have to do that? Anyway, I love it when she's not there. I can have my Prawn Pad Thai. What else do you order there? Have you tried their curries?

---

\(^99\) Like Bob, Anna is a composite client.
Session 5

Anna: So, what are you having for dinner?

Joel: Oh, I have not thought that far ahead.

Anna: Well, guess what I’m having. Bacon and eggs.

Joel: Oh wow.

Anna: Quite unusual, I know. But not for my mum. She often cooked that for dinner when we were growing up.

Joel: Ah, bacon and eggs dinner makes you remember your mum.

Anna: The truth is, I want to forget her. Let’s talk about something else. Have you watched the latest episode of The Crown in Netflix?

Session 8

Anna: Are you not puzzled by the number of tourists in Greyfriars? I mean, okay, there’s the sweet dog Bobby, and the names of Harry Potter characters on tombstones, but why would you go on a cemetery tour? Are there no better tourist attractions in Edinburgh?

Joel: I’m not sure if it’s annoyance that I’m hearing from you. Annoyance that the tourists are in the cemetery.

Anna: Well, I don’t really care what they do with their time. It’s their holiday. They’ve paid for it. But why? Why a cemetery tour?

Joel: You sound puzzled that people would go on a cemetery tour.

Anna: Ughhh. I hate cemeteries. My dad died when I was seven.

Joel: Seven. You were quite young when you lost your dad. I wonder what that was like for you. Losing your dad at such a young age.

Anna: Why don’t they go to the castle, or Holyrood Palace, or Royal Yacht Britannia? And of course, there’s also the Art Gallery and the National Museum. There are so many things to do here in Edinburgh. Why go on a cemetery tour? I will never go on a cemetery tour. Oh, by the way, I’ll be away next week. I’m going to Prague! Richard booked a surprise holiday for us. How sweet of him.
With Anna, I get glimpses of the story, but never the full story. Like a shadow, really. My work with her has taught me to balance my curiosity with patience. I ask questions, but I don’t push too much. It’s my way of respecting her agency, allowing her to open up in her own terms, at the pace she’s comfortable with. In our later sessions, it became more apparent to me that this was what the work needed.

**Session 22**

Anna: *You know what I like about you? You’re not too nosy.*

Joel: Hmmm... I wonder why you like that.

Anna: *Well, my mum is too nosy, always asking me about my life, intruding into my space, making decisions that are supposed to be mine.*

Joel: You feel suffocated?

---

100 Farber (2006) speaks of the Freudian demand for full disclosure in psychotherapy, explaining that that “from its inception, psychotherapy has encouraged its consumers to withhold nothing from the therapist, that is, to disclose everything. ’Say whatever comes to mind, without censorship’ is the essence of Freud’s ‘fundamental rule’” (7). He, however, points out the shift that has taken place in the last few decades, whereby “[t]he therapist, especially in psychodynamically oriented therapy, is no longer seen as the sole expert in the room, observing and interpreting a patient’s dynamics or the nature of the transference; rather, he or she is part of a system, a two-person field, in which both participants cocreate meaning and both observe the nature of what is being created... As part of this trend, the nature of communication between the two participants in therapy—what each does and does not tell the other, especially feelings and thoughts about the other and the relationship—has become a far more prominent part of the therapeutic process” (Farber 2006, 7).

101 Farber (2006) argues that “[t]he theoretical model adopted by the therapist exerts a considerable influence on the process and content of patient disclosure” (22). Whereas “the press to reveal one’s innermost thoughts is most evident in psychodynamically oriented therapy” (Farber 2006, 22), he explains that this is not the same for humanistic therapies. Carl Rogers, for instance, “did not believe that a client needed to delve deeply into past material and did not push clients either in that direction or in the direction of discussing transferential feelings” (Farber 2006, 23). Those who use cognitive therapy or cognitive-behavioural therapy, tread a different path. They are interested in “pursuing their clients’ underlying assumptions and values (schemas), but their goals generally do not include the progressive uncovering of childhood memories or creating meaning out of disparate elements of what is uncovered” (Farber 2006, 23). In my work with Anna, as with my other clients, I embrace an orientation that is founded on the dialogue between the person-centred approach and psychodynamic perspectives.
Anna: Yes! That's the word. I can't breathe when I'm with her. It's too much.

Joel: Too much. It sounds like you would have preferred it to be just enough.

Anna: I know that she loves me, but yeah, it would be better if she showed that in a way that's just right. I'm no longer the little girl that she needs to take care of.

Joel: So you want love, but just enough.

Anna: Yeah, I don't want a love that makes me hate her.

Session 24

Anna: Yeah, we're a small family. My dad, my mum, my brother and me. So now it's just the three of us.

Joel: Oh, I didn't realise you had a brother. You've talked about your mum and dad several times in the past, but it's just now that you've mentioned your brother.

Anna: Really? Well, I guess it's because he has his own world, a world where I'm not welcome.

Joel: I wonder what that is like, not to be welcome in his world.

Anna: The truth is, I'd rather not talk about it. He is not welcome in my world too.

Joel: I hear you. Let's leave it at that then.

Session 28

Anna: I can't believe we're at session 28. How time flies.

Joel: Time flies indeed.

Anna: It means we're nearing the end.

Joel: We are. I wonder how you are with that.

Anna: Sad, but grateful. Very grateful. Thank you. I say that from the bottom of my heart. It feels like I've really found a home here.

Joel: Well, this is a cosy place. I am grateful for your gratitude.
Anna: You know, when I first came, I was so worried. I didn't know what this would be like. I thought you would control me like my mum, tell me what to do so I can get my act together. But not once did I feel that you were doing that, and that has helped me breathe.

Joel: I'm glad that you've found this space supportive.

Anna: What is interesting is that now I feel okay. I'm able to do what I'm supposed to do, and you didn't tell me how to do it. You didn't even tell me to do it!

Joel: Well, that's not what I signed up for.

Anna: Hahaha! That's my mum's job, I guess.

How much is just enough? That seems to be the key question.

Exactly. And for clients, what they bring to the session, however much that is, is their just enough, and we have to respect that.

But we do ask questions, don’t we?

Yes, we do, but it must always be in a way that respects their just enough.¹⁰² Never demanding. Simply wondering if there is something more in the just enough.

Interestingly, I think the just enough sometimes grows.

It does, like a shadow really, that changes its intensity moment to moment.

Ah, like your shadow dance.

¹⁰² Echoing Winnicott's ideas about the mother’s role in a child’s development, Malberg (2012) says, “Through her devotion the mother can anticipate and divert almost all stimulation reaching her baby, or ration it so that it is enough, but not too much. In this way she sets up what Winnicott has called ‘a good enough holding environment’” (310). Through my empathic and respectful presence, I sought to provide such holding environment for Anna in our counselling relationship, and this seems to have been an important factor in her therapeutic journey.
Joel

*And how about you as a client? Have you brought your silences and shadows to your therapy sessions?*

Oh, I bring them all the time. I once had a conversation with Perry who trained with me as a psychotherapist. We’ve become each other’s peer supervisor. In one of our sessions, I didn’t talk about my client, but about myself and my experience of therapy. I shared with him how I sometimes become aware of my hesitation to share certain things with my therapist. Complaining about myself, I asked, “Isn’t that why we pay them? To listen to what we have to say?” He said something which I remember to this day: “No, we pay them to be with us, to stay with us, which sometimes means staying with our not-wanting-to-speak.”

*So, did you eventually tell your therapist, that which you didn’t want to tell her?*

Not everything. Only those that were willing to be told.

*And how was she with that?*

Well, she didn’t know. Or at least I think she didn’t know.

*How was she as a therapist?*

She was alright. She knew how to ask questions.

*What do you mean by that?*

Some therapists do not know how to ask questions. Some ask too little. Some ask too much.

*Which one would you prefer?*
I’d prefer the one who asked less. I don’t like therapists who ask too many questions. And I know I’m not alone. I was reading a counselling book recently. In that book, there is a poem written by one client, and in that poem he calls his therapist Mrs. Winklepicker:

Just Another Mind-fuck  
Mrs Winklepicker establishes eye contact  
With an unblinking gaze that exacts  
Its price from my very insides  
Making it impossible to hide  
The thoughts roaming in my head:  
The fact that I’d prefer to be dead;  
I’d rather be alone,  
Than run my race anymore;  
My fears that this is all my fault;  
My fears that it’s not.  
My fears that I shall lose all I own.  
My fears that I don’t give a damn … … .. (Aitken and Coupe 2006, 84)

In our counselling practice, it is easy to fall into the temptation of winklepicking without us even noticing. The questions we ask and the way we ask them can be subtly violent, gently attacking the shadows and silences that our clients bring to the room.

That is sad.

Sad, indeed, because in the very space where these shadows and silences thought they would be seen and heard, they are instead violated, annihilated. In his book, *The Private Life: Why We Remain in the Dark*, Josh Cohen (2013) writes:

There is an obscure yet essential region in you, suggests the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, that can survive only by remaining hidden, and whose natural elements are darkness and silence. This mute spot in your interior is the very source of your creative life, and to intrude into it, suggests Winnicott, is the most profound violation a person can experience. Our culture’s flooding of the world with light, its unrelenting promotion of our permanent visibility is in danger of making this profound violation a routine fact of daily life. (xvi)

I hope counsellors and psychotherapists read your thesis.
I hope so too. But not just them. Priests, too, and social workers. Teachers and parents. Doctors and nurses. Anyone and everyone. This thesis is for me and about me, but it is my gift to the world.
VII

Conclusion:

Finally!
Can you believe it? We’ve reached this far.

*I know, right? It’s unbelievable!*

And we thought we weren’t doing anything productive.

*Which wasn’t surprising because we were just playing.*

Only to realise later that play is in fact productive.

*Indeed. It has helped produce a thesis!*

Thankfully, we gave ourselves permission to play.

*To play with playmates we met along the way in this playground we’ve come to call Creative-Relational Self-Inquiry.*

I have to admit that I’m still a bit bothered by that word we’ve added... *self.* It still feels wrong.

*I know, but I think we are also making a point here, about the self... that the self is not unitary, that if we allow this self to keep on playing, others will emerge.*

Ah yes, so many others... like Yes and No, Shadows and Silences, the Researcher and the Researched, and the Research Ethics Committee Chair. We’ve indeed made a lot of friends.

*And with our friends, we’ve created so much.*

Creating-relating... relating-creating... it’s a never-ending process fuelled by play.
This reminds me of childhood, and the creating-relating/relating-creating of that time. Do you still remember Mr. Inventor, Teacher Joel, and the Magic James Businessman? Do you remember how much fun we had?

Yes! We had so many friends then, and we created a lot.

Just like these past four years.

Honestly, it feels so good... to be a child again.

To be a child all the time. A child at play, by himself, but never alone.

Now I kind of get it. Adding in the word self makes sense. It puts forward the argument that within oneself, creative-relational inquiry can take place, and that creative-relational inquiry can be a self-inquiry.

That’s what happened in this re-search, in this searching-again of self that we embarked on.

A magical process of seeking and finding what is hidden even as it continues to hide.

Our shadows and silences have really taught us a lot.

I know. We owe a lot to them.

I remember the times when we didn’t even notice that they were there.

And the times when we ignored them even if we knew that they were there.

I’m glad they made their presence felt.

And I’m glad we allowed ourselves to see and hear them even if it was a continuing game of hide-and-seek.
Yes, we got to see them and hear them even if they remained themselves, dark and quiet.

Even if we allowed them to be, never forcing them out into speech, out into the light, allowing them simply to dance and to play.

*It was a therapeutic space, this space of letting be.*

Therapeutic for them, and therapeutic for us, too.

Definitely. Letting this thesis be has allowed us to write it, even as it continues to hide.

**Final Words**

“Goodbye and thank you, Mr./Ms./Mrs. (Last Name of Teacher).” This was how we ended each and every class when I was in school. We would all stand up straight and recite this in chorus, and on days when we were not loud enough, or when some of us would slouch, we would be asked to repeat it over and over again until we got it right. It was a performance. My guess is that most (if not all) of the time, we probably didn’t mean what we were saying. Now that I’m older, and now that this thesis is slowly coming to an end, let me perform it again, here, but this time trying to mean it as much as I can. Towards the end, as an encore, I’ll add in a bit of “I’m sorry” and “You’re welcome” too.

**Goodbye**

I am saying goodbye because the truth is that I don’t know if I will ever write this way again. Wait. Let me clarify that (or perhaps even correct that, because how can I not write this way moving forward?). I guess what I meant was that I’m not sure if you will see me in the academe again. It’s not up to me, you see. As a Jesuit priest, I receive my mission from my religious superior and I really do not know what’s in store for me in the future. In the Philippines, the Jesuits run five universities and there is a chance that I’ll get assigned to work in one of them, but there’s also the possibility that I wouldn’t.
There are needs in so many places and the academe may not be where I’m needed next, or ever. And so, this might really be goodbye.

It is also a goodbye to Edinburgh where I spent what I now consider to be the most formative years of my life. I will leave at the end of this year to begin anew back home. As I say goodbye, I still can’t believe how so much has happened to me throughout the course of the writing of this thesis. I’ve told you much, but there is much more I was unable to tell. It’s not about space (there is still a lot of space here), but about respect. Respect for my shadows. Respect for my silences. Respect for myself. I’m just glad I learned this before I said goodbye. It makes my goodbye peaceful.

It is also, for me, a goodbye to this thesis, a goodbye to our creative-relationship. Within this relationship, the thesis has come to be, and I have come to be. We’ve been creating each other by being together through joys and pains, sleepless nights and spontaneous frolics, before, during, and after the pandemic. We’ve been through a lot, and that is an understatement. Now, we both know that the time has come to finally say goodbye. I’m just happy that it’s not a forced ending, but a natural ending. A goodbye that feels just right.

And, of course, this is also a goodbye to you who have patiently stayed with me in this thesis. I don’t know how your journey was, and I don’t know what you are left with after reading this text, but what I know is that you’re also about to face some sort of ending. And so, I want to say goodbye to you too.

“Endings are important,” our counselling and psychotherapy tutors often reminded us. I used to not really know what that meant (honestly, there was even a time when I felt that this was overly exaggerated). Now that I face my own ending, however, I think I’m starting to learn.

And what have I learned? That endings do not stop movement. We are constantly in flux. Endings are but markers, signposts to further lines that are about to take flight (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987).

Thank You

Thanks, first of all, to you. For staying with me. For staying with this thesis. Having said goodbye to it, I sometimes wonder how it would be. Would it miss me? Would it feel lonely? Would it be angry? Knowing that there are people like you, though,
who would provide it company once in a while, makes me feel a little better. And so, thank you. Thank you for taking the risk of reading a thesis like this (quite unconventional, I know). You dared, and you stayed. If only for that, thank you.

I have already thanked individuals in my Acknowledgement page, and so there is no need to repeat what I’ve already said. Except perhaps to say thank you once again to everyone who supported me throughout this journey, especially during the time when I didn’t really know what I was doing, when my body was protesting, and when I felt that there was no way out and no way forward. Thank you for being there. Just being there. Just being with my silences. Just being with my shadows. Thank you.

Funnily enough, I now feel I have to thank myself. Thank you, Joel. Thank you for choosing to love yourself, including your shadows and silences. As I was writing this thesis, after my long bout with a lot of the shit-stuff you’ve gotten a glimpse of, a key insight came to me: “The best gift we can give to the world is to be kind to ourselves.” Thank you for choosing to be kind to yourself, Joel. For allowing your shadows to show who you are, and for allowing your silences to speak.

The final thank you is for the world (which for me is also a thank you to God). Thank you for bringing me here. I don’t know how you did it, but you brought me here. I don’t know how I got here, but I am here. Thank you. Thank you for carrying me through.

\[I'm\ \text{Sorry}\]

The person I owe the most apologies to is myself. I’m sorry, self. I’ve mistreated you. I’ve used you. I’ve abused you. I’m sorry for the times I’ve prioritised the thesis more than you. I’ve put you through something very very difficult, and I’m really really sorry for having done that.

I want to say sorry to you too, you who are reading this. I’m sorry for the times I’ve left you hanging, left you asking, “What is he trying to say?” As I’ve said earlier, some words are not yet ready to be uttered, and this may have disappointed you, frustrated you, annoyed you. “Why doesn’t he just say it? Why does he continue to hide?” My silences and shadows want to say sorry too.
You’re Welcome

At the end of the previous chapter, I mentioned that this thesis is my gift to the world. I meant that. And I’m now imagining you thanking me. I’m hoping, though, that this is not just my imagination, and so I will say it holding on to that hope: you’re welcome.
REFERENCES


