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Echoes of Silence: Writing into Reverberations of Trauma

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Abstract

This thesis argues for performative ways to write trauma, ghosts and silence against the particularities of German post-war experiences. It begins with the re-discovery of a photographic image that provides a starting point. I unfold linguistically uncalibrated yet embodied knowledge into insecure or uncertain registers of traumatic intergenerational reverberations. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory of trauma, I chart a trajectory from individuated self towards one pledged on intersubjective conditions for an iteratively-emergent subjectivity. Trauma framed in terms of interrelational silence is woven into the material fixicity of the image, with its fleetingly evoked and fragmented slivers of memory. Positioned on the cusp of an inquiry that troubles the coherence of a subject-who-knows, I argue for an eruptive heterogeneity that speaks creatively to possible ways of re-presenting the significance and specificity of familial and national silence in the aftermath of an abject war. The discreetness of trauma, ghosts and silence is reconfigured in terms of an in-betweenness of generational reverberations; these echoes form the layers into and against which I write silenced, repressed and marginalized voices, voices shaped predominately by absence from dominant discourses. The transgressive nature of writing against the grain, of writing against the primacy of certainty is developed further through the chapters, mapping a complex methodological and theoretical possibility. I trouble notions of 'data' in light of contestations that favour ambiguous possibilities pertaining to hauntings and ghosts, aware of the paradoxical nature of linearly constructed arguments in support of fragmentary and fragmented knowledge claims. The complexities are further accentuated through texts written in different genres,

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which seek to mirror context and emergent content. The thesis builds into an enmeshment of reverberations within which space is given over to Other, drawing fictitious and fictionalized voices into contestations around narrativization and finitude.

Keywords: Trauma, Silence, Ghosts, Psychoanalysis, Generational Reverberations, Performative Writing, Intersubjectivity

Language is how ghosts enter the world.
They twist into awkward positions
to squeeze through the black spaces.
The dead read backwards,
as in a mirror. They gather
in the white field and look up,
waiting for someone
to write their names.

Anne Michaels, *What the Light Teaches*

One. Accidental Beginnings: Caught by Reverberations of Trauma

When I took hold of my parents' things after my father died a few years ago, I found, amongst the detritus of lives lived, a framed photograph of a little girl holding a doll. It was a black and white print, slightly faded around the margins, behind glass the surface of which held on to fingerprints. If I recall correctly, the photograph was taken in the small studio of our local photographer, whose name I cannot remember. I laid the print aside, and continued with unpacking. What I was searching for I cannot really say with

any certainty. Over the coming months, the little photo would often slide into view; it kept emerging in odd places, almost as if it had wandered there on its own accord.

Many days later, while folding laundry into neat piles, my thoughts were interrupted once again by the photo. Eyes and mouth begged me to look and I began to feel shy about my gaze. I felt drawn into the moment, and all I took in was this girl, maybe five years old, dressed in a warm coat, with a small scarf tied in a loose knot under her delicate chin. Lips tightly pressed into themselves, holding back any sounds, seemingly convinced of their utter uselessness. Eyelids slightly slackened, held open more out of convention, she looks up out of the frame into a beyond behind the camera, dark eyes closed off to whatever she sees, devoid of curiosity. A finite image, taken as memento before an exodus, or so it seems.

I barely remember being taken to the photographer, cannot recall if I was being asked to remove my coat, to turn round and to smile at the camera. I am not sure if I remember folding my hands around the plastic hands of my doll, holding her as one would take hold of another. I seem to recall the leaden grey darkness of a room that encircled me, cut through by the sharp brightness of a singular light. I seem to remember acrid smells. I seem to remember someone standing in the corner watching me, watching over me, but I have no recollection who that might have been. I acknowledge the girl in the photo as me, and I guess, but don't really know, that a disjuncture of this kind is somehow meaningful.

I remember more.

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I remember an excursion in my wicker pushchair, my mother pushing me past the brewery on our way to her mother, my grandmother.

I remember lying in my cot, next to my parent's bed, slipping my finger into the joints where wallpaper meets wallpaper, and creating little crevices in the plaster. I remember the sun shone brightly that day. I remember I was happy.

I remember the night the distillery behind our house burnt down. I remember my mother waking me to show me the raging flames and me screaming because I did not want to see. I remember the next days and weeks, unable to look out of the bedroom window because I would see burnt and devastated buildings.

I remember liking to be taken to the shoe shop, not because I wanted to have a new pair of shoes, but because I liked the machine which would x-ray my feet and I could see right into my bones.

I remember the many nights my parents went out and left me alone. I remember getting up to dial the telephone number of their friends to check if they had arrived safely. I remember I would not go to sleep otherwise.

I remember the time I asked my mum for an empty cigarette packet and collected little caterpillars from the bushes in the yard. I remember that she asked me to release them back outside as soon as I took them upstairs.

I remember playing with a little girl who went to the wrong school. I remember that I never played with her again.

I remember being sent into the cellar to pick up coal for our stove. I remember holding my breath from the last step of the stair - open the wooden door, down

the dark corridor, into the small hatch, scuttle coal into the bucket, close the wooden door - and exhaling on reaching the first stair up to our flat.

I remember the range in our kitchen, but I cannot remember where I sat at the dining table. If truth be told, I cannot remember if I sat at the table.

I remember my mother feeding me raw liver, because I needed the nutrients to counter a slow decline into what was thought to be leukaemia but which later turned out to be less harmful. I remember being very slight, thin, emaciated. I remember that there was never any conclusive diagnosis for my ailment.

I remember being sent away to a *Kinderheim*¹ a children's recuperation home, before I began primary school. I remember crying myself to sleep every night. I remember giving up crying after more than three weeks. I remember my parents picking me up and feeding me cake on our journey home.

I carry little memories, I carry slivers. I carry barely narratable fragments, often hewn out of the stories others left behind. I carry imperceptible silences whose residue is smeared across me like a stain. I am stained by what is beyond words. I have become a wordsmith, working with marks I can barely trace against the solid ground of absences.

I cast words onto the smooth whitish background of the computer screen, have done so for longer than I care to recall, for longer than I have written this thesis. There is a certain solidity in the 'smithyness', the place where heavy metals melt into unctuous flows only to cool down into definite forms. This thesis breaks some of the codices around definitiveness; it interrogates the fragments

¹ Literal translation: children's home

of stories I was told as a child, as if they would suffice to placate my curiosity, would stop me from wondering about, and maybe from wandering into terrain which, in its exclusionary silence, became incontestable.

This thesis, of sorts, is an attempt to let trauma speak. It consists of writing into and out of collapsing certainties, ways of meaning making when embodied knowledge troubles, and is troubled by, familial and socio-cultural discourses, or their lack. It offers a way into making sense of disjointed experiences, memories, silences. It speaks ghosts, hauntings, ephemeral flights.

The text you are about to read does not offer assured finitude; it offers little in terms of referencing a grand theoretical overarching framework. What it does do, however, can be understood as a process of unfolding what had previously been kept tightly under wraps, an unfolding of articulations around loss, around trauma and its reverberations, always under some proviso, some means of retracting, of troubling certitude and conviction, as if trauma and ghosts can only be made meaning of through fragmentary and refracted narrativization. I iteratively visit themes from a slightly different angle, use creative forms not only in respect of the empirical work of this thesis, but also in my attempt to draw you into debates around trauma, epistemology, or methodology. This is a 'forewarning', of sorts, of a long wait for more personal stories; at times, I imagine, it is a frustrating and, possibly, even unbearable wait, purposefully undertaken to evoke some of the imponderables I needed to negotiate in my coming into language.

My vocabulary is knotted into linguistic sequences that pay as much attention to form as to content; but such is the nature of knots that whatever is linearly aligned has the propensity of breaking when tugged, or ending up knotted

into knots! Narrations into and out of such writing practices problematize what I understand as re-presentations of research which do not always 'play by the book', even if THE book has been closed on account of its persistent lack around ambiguous, or possibly dubious knowledge claims. Narrations into what appear to be uncharted waters offer, once one steps into the flow, stepping stones in the form of others who negotiated such hazards successfully (Gannon, 2013). The 'narrative turn', articulated initially by social constructionists (Hyvärinen, 2010) in response to hegemonic assumption around what Bochner (2013:52) calls "the sanctified scientific doctrine of truth through method" sought to deconstruct *grand narratives* in favour of knowledge situated in small stories, stories told from the margins, in voices often omitted from prevailing discourses. In addition, I seek to problematize narrations which are buttressed by a rather categorical assumption of a cohesive subjectivity, offering instead an 'I' that gives merely an impression of coherence. That my endeavours break with some of the conventions of what a thesis *should* look like is intentional: built on a telling, as theses are generally wont to do, this text is interlaced with showings in that it purposefully hurtles the reader into complexities which seek to convey traumatic flashes, acting as diffractive (Barad, 2003) device to the experiences that have come to underpin my understanding of traumatic reverberations.

To be iteratively caught in performativity, is that not the nature by which life, or what we take for it, is laid out? In repetitious encounters, so often out of the blue, with fears, anxieties, horrors, unwanted memories, we had perpetually, and erroneously, thought to have suffused with enough re-enactments to put them 'to rest', only to start again, somewhat differently, somewhat adjacently, but always invested in bringing to the fore what has lain in deep shadows?

Is it the fixicity with which the 'laying to rest' trope substantiates the majority of first-person accounts of trauma that mainly informs my critique? Is there a way of reading Denzin (2013:126), who suggests that "in writing an autoethnographic life story, I create the conditions for rediscovering the meanings of a past sequence of events", without being troubled by the way in which the 'autoethnographic life story' seems to slip effortlessly into an amalgam of autonomous conditions that seek insightful foreclosure through epiphanies of an 'and-it-all-becomes-clear-in-the-end' type? While such narrations would show, as Bochner (2013:52) attests, "characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence; and trying to preserve or restore continuity and coherence", how can I possibly find resonance in their ulterior goal "to make happiness more probable" (2013:54)? I find Bochner's reflection on the sine qua non of autoethnography not only contentious but also reductive. What he suggests, if I understand him correctly, is a way of appropriating experience by proxy, as an amalgamation of the writer's and the reader's affective response, the 'epiphanic moment' (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), in order to "experience an experience" as suggested by Ellis (Ellis, 1993, cited in Ellis et al., 2011:277). Apart from the impossibility of doing just so, after all, the subject who thinks and writes experience is always already different to the subject of the experience (and which should be understood as a newly constructed and interpreted event), I certainly do not want to deny a certain pull towards sharing narratives. After all, as Sawrey (2005:792) says, "people share plot lines and recognize their lives in the life of others", it is its purpose I find harder to swallow – coherence, continuity, and happiness. And yet, with "the question of happiness [as] the

most urgent calling of autoethnography” (Bochner, 2013:53), is it entirely spurious to follow its trajectory and arrive at a ‘healing’ trope as overarching principle in writing autoethnographic accounts of trauma?

“My suggestion that the textual self is a performance draws attention to the artfulness of ethnographic writing that is responsive” says Gannon (2013:229). I respond to my situated particularity through writing. I write in a variety of genres, from dialogue, by way of a letter, a riff on repetitious beginnings towards a take on multi-layered polyvocality. As such this text can be read in terms of what St.Pierre (1997:407) might call “figurations [...] that tear through the orderliness of humanist language”, a tear that resonates with what has remained, and most likely still remains, elusive. I write into silence, into shreds, seek out a modicum of terra firma from which I can begin to locate myself at the cusp of the unspeakable. Such fragmentary writings, or writings into marginal borders, form a substantial part of the frame informing this thesis, and from which I begin to trouble the ground of *autoethnographic* performative accounts of trauma. I am unable to demarcate a defining line between *autoethnographic* and *performative* writing; it seems wilful, arbitrary even. There is indeed “no longer a God’s eye view which guarantees absolute methodological certainty”, so Denzin (2013:70), in a riff on Haraway (1988a), assures me. I nevertheless ask if autoethnography, informed by a narrative “that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Spry, 2001:710), is sufficiently marked by iterative resonances between self and other to be comparable to a performance practice, “whose essence”, as Pelias (2013:397) so poignantly contends, “is found in its disagreement about its nature”, and, if so, whether it holds on to a value system deeply embedded in interrelationality. I return to the argument later on when drawing on the

notion of a self whose account, as Butler (2005:8) would have it, is always “implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacity for narration; indeed, when the ‘I’ seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist.”

This thesis reflects some of the balancing acts (Holman Jones, 2005) I performed into and out of my writings. “It is” says Speedy (2013:29), “as if I keep meeting myself arriving at the same brief clearing [...], but each time I arrive it is from setting out along a different pathway.” My writings are, at times, purposefully difficult, in an attempt to mirror some of the difficulties I have experienced in grappling with flights into absences which became vividly present in language, only to disappear at the blink of an eye. My eyes, whose gaze was held by what was at the time not recognizable, not calibratable or accessible to concerns I, much later, began to understand as “culpability of history’s legacy” (Alexander, 2005:434). I wrote into intimate familial and national silences in the wake of a perfidious war; I wrote into trauma, into melancholia and mourning, as a means of grasping what was at stake: “

[Performative writing] operates metaphorically to render absence present – to bring the reader into contact with ‘other worlds’ ” says Pollock (1998:80), “to those aspects and dimensions of our world that are other to the text as such by re-marking them.” I am unsure if what I did could be considered in terms of ‘re-marking’, rather than suturing an embodied probability onto a linguistic possibility. I marked, and was marked by, utterances whose flow I was at times barely able to contain within the terms of available discourses. I took

solace in Phelan's (1993:168) remark that "in the sociality of the production of meaning, words and symptoms mutate as they pass across the thresholds housing us in different bodies". I read her 'sociality' against the isolative qualities I am familiar with, where thresholds marked less a traverse into potentiality as their inherent danger. I knew from early on that words had meaning only in singularity and specificity, dedications, if you will, to immutable significance.

I am sitting at my desk; the strong fingers of an autumn storm play an orchestral piece on the single string of the flagpole, and then – silence, only to be punctuated again by an intense staccato. White noise, I believe it is called, indiscernible background racket against which thoughts surface to an unknown rhythm. Ta-ta-ta-ta-tttt-tat-tat-ta-ta-ta. Again, always different, again. And again.

And it is by way of repetitiousness that I begin to seek out discursive undergirdings to what is so delicately and complexly interwoven into the particularities of narrative uncertainties, in order to settle on psychoanalytic and, to a lesser extent, psychosocial theory. How do I read this body, my body, in all its alienable and alienated dispositions, its 'paralytic pauses', against the script of theories which, while "believing their own terms to be the most comprehensive, the most basic, the most fundamental route to establishing or unsettling the stability of the real" (Phelan, 1993:3), know of its paradoxical axiom, that is, the mapping of the unconscious as "that chapter in my history which is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter" (Lacan, 1973:21)?

Psychoanalysis offers, on reflection, the definitiveness of a theory which thrives on what is censored, impenetrable, what is ghostly and haunting; it thrives, in a sense, on what it does not know, on what needs, necessarily, to remain unknowable. Yet, it offers a 'something' onto which I can hang memory-fragments and their enmeshment with fissures and gaps. I write psychoanalytic theory in order to anchor myself, as if writing into trauma and ghosts cannot be done without a metaphorical theoretical safety jacket. Furthermore, psychoanalytic theory offers an extensive lead into trauma theory, serves as paradigmatic marker in order to make sense of what I begin to think of as "the ineradicable legacies of violent histories through generations", as Schwab (2010:1) so succinctly puts it. Often referred to as 'transgenerational transmission of trauma' with its rather mechanistic and directive undertones, I rename the process, call it 'reverberation', with notions of repetitious reflections in all directions.

It might be a truism to say that psychoanalytic theory is the theory of trauma, considering that trauma has been underpinning psychoanalysis for more than a century ever since Freud and Breuer (1893/1956:6) developed a specific theory in response to their studies on the nature of hysteria: "In traumatic neuroses the operative cause of the illness is not the trifling physical injury but the affect of fright – the psychical trauma". While Freud refines theories in light of an ever evolving understanding of his patients' afflictions, in particular around his work with soldiers marked by what they had to bear witness to in the trenches, he remains firmly accountable to the epistemic certainties at the beginning of the 20th century with their unprecedented drive towards scientization. My investment in Freudian territory, however, is not an attempt to trace the seemingly ineradicable momentum towards an ideology of

psychological pathologization underpinned by notions of individuated autonomy, but rather a search towards a less foundationally defined, more ambiguous, fluid subjectivity, constituted in and through the other.

And it is by way of the other that this text, this thesis, accrues momentum. Drawing on theories of performativity, positioned adjunct, but not necessarily in opposition to ethnographic subjectivity, my suggestions can be read as means of writing into registers which contest hegemonic knowledge claims of “coherence, centering, singularity, and authenticity” (de Freitas & Paton, 2009:484). The ‘I’, in all her heterogeneous incohesive subject position gives over to an ‘in-betweenness’ to settle on an always already ‘more than’, or what Spry (2011:506) calls “an embodied communion (pleasant and difficult) with others.” Entangled with what is not of me, what can, possibly, never be rendered into a sufficiently-defined linguistic idiom, I circle around the notion of ‘data’, offering in turn a variety of beginnings into the complex, and often implicit undergirdings that contribute to its figuration. Contesting the Deleuzian argument that relies on inchoate intensity bereft of signifiers in order to propose a plane of multiplicities, I locate myself against what I consider the terror of deterritorialization and side with an amalgam of uncertainty and calibration, performative to the extent that it always speaks to its own “reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meaning already established” (Butler, 1999:178), yet is undercut by the impossibility of doing just so.

Ghosts, I suggest, slide into such radical instability, they settle on the cusps of waves, large swells which unmoor the most secured anchors. They ride into view when least expected. *Nothing is as it seems*, they whisper silently from up

close afar. *Imagine. And listen.* And I don't know what comes first – the listening or the imagining – but, possibly, such distinctions have become unnecessary in the entwinement of fear and love, informing, as they do, not only “the domains of the speakable, but are themselves bounded through the production of a constitutive outside: the unspeakable, the unsignifiable” (Butler, 1997:94).

And here I am, here we are, *you* with me, you and me, folding stories into each other, conjuring voices, colliding with theory, failing theory, but always, always writing, because, frankly, what else could I possibly do?

Two. Kitchen Conversations: Theorizing Trauma and its Echoes

I drink the last drops of tea, smooth the rim of the cup against my lips. My thoughts are like fish that don't want to be caught; they slip around, and I follow headlong into memories, theories, cul-de-sacs, fail to grasp anything long enough before the distraction of another promise – of clarity, or of theoretical steadfastness - stops me right in my tracks, and I feel disloyal to what I have not yet clutched, rendered into language with which I can begin. Beginnings.

I stay put, look intently at the framed photo which is propped against a vase of daffodils. There she is, I think, there she is, and yet, apart from the image right here in front, what else can I say? It is not, I whisper almost inaudibly, as if there is nothing to say, I just don't know how to. How to proceed in uncovering what has been tightened into a dense mass of silence, until she, I, needed to look beyond the wooden frame, the boundary that defined what I was privy to know and what was 'out of bounds'.

'What are you up to, mum?' My daughter Kitty's voice is soft, slips into my reminiscence like a cool fan.

'I am trying something. I am trying to make some sort of sense,' I answer, 'some way of beginning what has so far been devilish hard to get hold of...'

'Hmmm, not sure I get you.'

'I'm not sure I get myself, Kitty. I am looking at this,' I point at the image, 'and then... then I just seem to get sucked into into a maelstrom of thoughts, feelings, nothings.'

Kitty takes the photo, strokes the glass in a gesture that is as much cleansing filaments of dust as shy comfort. She looks at the image, looks at me, back to the image.

'This is...' her voice is hesitant.

'I was four or five, I think.'

'Mum... you look as if you have to go somewhere else, as if you don't belong any more, and this...' she hesitates, 'this makes me sad. It looks like you had left way before the picture was taken. What happened, what on earth happened?'

Yes, I muse, what on earth happened?

I wrote the above intermezzo as entry point into what is to follow, that is, as the beginnings of thinking of significant dissonances, of silences, in terms of multifarious reverberations of trauma. In what is to follow, I adopt a psychoanalytically-informed frame of reference in an interweave of theory and contextual particulars of a life in Post-War Germany in the 1950s, a life lived against the backdrop of unimaginable loss. It stands to reason that attempts to render into words what had been shifted into margins, or what had been pushed into recesses carry their own set of ghostly presences, in the way that gaps or fragmentations of language, the recalibrations into speech, or writing, stir up some of the resonances in which these hauntings have arisen in the first place. To conjecture that my experiences fall within the categories of trauma should not be read as overarching claim; it is but one way of making

sense of the profound questions I have had in relation to an embodied sense of being, of being wordless in the context of what needed to be spoken.

'What on earth happened?' addresses more than just an incidental event, to be passed over, slipped into a category labelled 'experience', and almost forgotten about. As I unravel further later on, any event, no matter how seemingly insignificant, has the propensity of sliding into the foreground. "Somehow, day-to-day events in my life have a way of triggering memories. Somehow, ordinary daily occurrences are not so ordinary when they become gateways to recovering memories" says Poulos (2012:319). The difficulties arise, I think, when these occurrences fail to make the leap into recovering memories associated with the incidents to which they were initially tied. I missed the stepping stones which connected the dots between events when I was young, and for a long time I have remained tethered to the liminal space of, what to me, feels like 'more than nothing, yet less than something'. And is there not an altogether other incongruity at play here, in that accounts of trauma inevitably omit such ambiguity and neatly present a package devoid of its very nature? Is this, after all, the nub of what is so difficult? The im/possibility of speaking trauma, silence, ghosts, in a way that acknowledges its own paradox?

I am caught by the preceding sentence. I hover over the paradoxical nature of writing first-person accounts of trauma, as if the 'I' can speak coherently of its own demise, its own fragmentation. Undoubtedly, autoethnographic literature attempts to write and offer insights into the nature of trauma through accounts infused with the researcher's subjectivity, 'sitting in the gore' as Tamas (2009) so compellingly puts it – but, as Gannon (2006:477)

attests, “much autoethnographic work leaves the speaking self relatively untroubled in the text.” The autoethnographic field is rich in evocative narratives which, I suggest, assume a rather homogenous subject position, weighted towards consistency rather than authorial ambiguity and incoherence.

Of course, the writing of autoethnography is always embedded in the actuality of the narrator’s life, where “every telling is constrained, partial, and determined by the discourses and histories that prefigure, even as they might promise, representation” (Britzman, 1995:232). A testimony, as Tamas (2011:55) argues, “cannot offer totalized, complete accounts. It is both formally and temporally complex, and may behave like a fantasy.” The issue, I have come to realize, is not how to write trauma, but the manner in which the elusiveness, ambiguity and silence associated with trauma can be approached, by turning “back on the very act of writing, making it difficult if not impossible to make sense, to make claims, to make meaning” (Pollock, 1998:73).

What I offer in this thesis is a beginning of sorts, a beginning into incomplete narratives that interweave psychoanalytic theory of trauma into the discovery of the photographic image in a balance of telling and showing. I continue by way of dialogue, the invocation of an other as reflective interlocutor, in awareness of Jackson and Mazzei’s (2008b:303) warning that “the notion of a coherent , explanatory subject who gathers up meaning and reflexively lays bare the process of knowledge-production, as if that process is self-evident” would suffice in allaying my fears that any process of meaning-making is not always inherently problematic.

So, where do we go from here? I mean, what you are about to undertake is tricky, particularly if you draw on psychoanalytic theory and juxtapose a THEORY with your last claim of not making any claims!

We have a rather wonderful saying in German: *Nichts wird so heiss gegessen wie es gekocht wird*. What that means is that ‘nothing gets eaten as hot as when it comes just off the stove’.

I’m not really sure what you are saying...

I am somewhat troubled by the assumption that we can speak ‘healing’ or ‘coping’ with trauma. And while I certainly do not mean “to trivialize the trauma written about in autoethnography” (Clough, 2000:287), I suggest that we begin by inquiring into the nature of trauma before attempting to ‘do something to it’ - think it, speak it, write it – that is, consider it as acts of interpretation the purpose of which is not necessarily embedded in ‘healing’. Let’s talk theory, theory that has possibly, and most likely, something to say to my perplexed question of ‘What on earth happened?’

What on earth happened?

I cannot give an explanatory answer, and yet, something of a sufficiently significant nature might have happened for me to forget. And it is in light of my forgetting...

That what has happened can possibly be understood as trauma?

Not everything we forget is due to trauma. However, traumatic memories often provoke such profound anxieties that they become unavailable to conscious thought. We, simply, cannot but forget. Or rather, our ego is

invested in keeping itself in a relative state of equilibrium, and we repress in order to prevent a release of anxiety.

This is a bit fast right now. I mean, you speak ego and repression and anxiety as if I should know and frankly, I don't, so if you don't mind...

Of course, I am sorry. In order to locate ourselves in psychoanalytic theory...

I reckon we start with – well, I do get an inkling with whom we need to start!

We might have to detour deep into Freudian territory, and this, I'm afraid, might well take a while, and... (Pause).

I've got time.

No time but the present, no? Ego, repression, anxiety - when Freud argued almost a century ago that “the data of consciousness have a very large number of gaps in them” (1915/1964c:166), he sought to draw on a concept that tried to make sense of experiences which could not be grasped otherwise. Dreams, slips of the tongue, neurotic symptoms – these expressions were hinting at unacknowledged wishes, impulses, urges and ensuing anxieties which needed to be kept at bay (Nicholas Abraham & Torok, 1994; Frosh, 2012). Freud names this process *Verdrängung*, or repression, as that which has been ‘pushed away’.

If I understand Freud correctly, he suggests that behind every conscious thought lies the miasma of what needs to be shoved into the margins, or repressed?

Yes. But he goes further. He surmises that the unconscious is solely graspable through the return of what has been repressed. Freud says: “Thus we obtain our concept of the unconscious from the theory of repression” (1923-1925/1961:15). What seems imperative in his theory is the causal relationship between symptom, and the uncovering of its unconscious source. In fact, he

states that “symptoms are never constructed from conscious processes; as soon as the unconscious processes have become conscious, the symptom must disappear” (1916-1917/1963:279).

1916 – a bare two years into the First World War.

I am in no doubt that his ideas were deeply marked by the war experiences he came to witness. But we should not forget that he began his writings in the 1890s and continuously revised his theories on account of his extensive casework. In any case, were we to extend the line of thought further, we cannot but ask what kind of links might exist between the Great War, the development of psychoanalytic thinking, and “what happened when the psychoanalytic movement was brutally faced with the requirement to defend or repudiate its Jewish identity” that is, when “it met its great political adversary, Nazism” (Frosh, 2009:3).

The period your parents were born into, and your grandparents...

But of course! Both sets of grandparents lived through World War 1, and my parents were born in the 1920s; they belonged to the first post-war generation, just like me.

And?

Irrespective of what an inquiry into trauma and its reverberations will shed light on, is it not interesting to think through the possible implications of these linkages? How much should be made of what Frosh (2009:1) calls the ‘Jewish science’, in the sense that most psychoanalysts at the time had been Jewish, “but those who are not Jewish are frequently thought of as if they were”? And, were we to concur with Frosh’s argument, in how far are the advances in

psychoanalytic theory counterpointed by the steady and unstoppable rise in anti-Semitism? The inter-war period spoke to traumatic echoes, reflected and generated in the socio-cultural and political discourses of its time. What was played out in my parents' families, what was talked about, and, possibly more importantly, what was rendered unsayable? Can the suggestion hold that something of a repetitious nature might make itself known, when we think of the previous generation held in the grip of "encapsulated and imprisoned anxieties, terrors and confusions of the adults surrounding them, and in particular from the words and even the phonemes with which these terrors were transmitted, apparently over their heads but in reality unconsciously penetrating and dis-easing them" (Bacon, 2010:16)?

Hmmm

Indeed! These questions do not necessarily require an answer; they hint, I think, at inflections that permeate your life, my life; palimpsests, or, as Bacon (2010:5) would have it, "the welter of half-heard, half-understood but intensely felt 'other' voices which the child is surrounded by and through which he is trying to orient and understand himself and the world." What we are beginning to grapple with are theoretical underpinnings to processes where a child's orientation and understanding of the world are compromised to such an extent that only fragments remain available to the adult, shards of memory, intersected by silences, inhabited by ghosts. (Pause)

Trauma?

I would think so. (Pause)

Voiceless?

Sometimes. (Pause). The haze of what needs to be repressed, to paraphrase Freud. (Pause). The symptom, as he says, is solely the “derivative of unconscious processes” (1916-1917/1963:279).

Ergo - if we become aware of the processes by which the symptom is produced, it should just disappear?

It seems so simple, doesn't it? The freeing from the shackles of the unconscious... Mind you, it needs to be read against the context of its time, when the endeavour to prove psychoanalysis' contribution to science had to be underpinned by a positivist vision of true humanist possibilities. The concept of the unconscious became the lens through which previously incomprehensible behaviour or traits not only began to make sense, but offered a way out of the “isolating, frustrating, conflictual clutches of the remnants of infantile mental life” (S. Mitchell, 1993:16).

So if we go into analysis, we do so in order...

“to uncover the fragments of the patient's latent dynamics embedded in the associations and to reconstruct their original configurations” (S. Mitchell, 1993:58). Similar to an archaeological dig, the analyst uncovers what has always been there, albeit kept hidden. Lacan (1973:21) calls the unconscious “that chapter of my history which is marked by a blank or occupied by falsehood: it is the censored chapter.” It is, in contrast to consciousness, not governed by rational or logical restraints (Frosh, 2012). In dreams, for example, time and space condense or expand, they “paint a timeless montage, brushed freely by remnants of past, present, and possible future experience” (Schneider, 2010:521). The paradox seems to be that while we can ascertain from Freud's description that “the repressed is the prototype of the

unconscious" (1923-1925/ 1961:15) - which he, incidentally, subdivides further into the preconscious and the unconscious -

Hold on a minute! How can something be so finitely categorized that can only be apprehended through inference?

I don't really know. I imagine that Freud needed a matrix which could explain the processes whereby ideas, on the cusp of rising into conscious thought, needed to be repressed. "The reason" Freud (1923-1925/ 1961:14) says "why such ideas cannot become conscious is that a certain force opposes them, that otherwise they would become conscious". The beliefs or ideas which can never come into conscious thought are subject to 'Verdrängung'², they are pushed aside or away because "they are so shocking or painful that something stops them from making that journey" (Billig, 1999:16). We keep those ideas hidden in the recess of our unconscious, even from ourselves.

And given that we need a certain equilibrium to live our lives, your original question begins to make sense. 'What on earth happened' is an inquiry into what you had to keep under wraps, not because you wanted to, but because you couldn't do otherwise. And was the post-war earth not truly a devastated and devastating place? (Pause).

I would think that something of that nature played its part. (Pause). The image of the little girl in her coat and headscarf speaks quietly to a home that did not, does not feel safe, imbued with "childhood memories, just as impenetrable as are such documents when I do not know their source" (Lacan, 1973:21). (Pause). But back to Freud for now: you recall he argues that not everything that has been hidden in the depth of the unconscious is solely a derivative of

² repression

trauma. Furthermore, he suggests, that “repression is not a defence mechanism which is present from the very beginning” (1914-1916/1964:147). Billig (1999:17) puts it quite categorically: “We have to create our unconscious. Unless we do something – unless we repress or push aside thoughts – we won’t have an unconscious. In this respect, the unconscious has to be created by an activity”.

And the activity in question...

I am unclear if the dominant activity is repression. But what can be argued is a foregrounding of language. The unconscious is dynamic, a dynamic storage facility for ideas or wishes, which are of prime importance to a person who cannot express them. It “needs time to reveal itself” according to Lacan (1973:77). Psychoanalysis’ axiomatic task could be understood as being in the service of such revelations, or, in Billig’s (1999:40) terms, “undoing the blockage, allowing the unconscious thought to flow into conscious awareness.”

Is this your investment? Are you invested in ‘undoing the blockage’? Is that behind writing yourself into fragments of memory? Do you intend to grasp what is hidden behind the story of the little girl who needed to look to what lay beyond the picture frame?

Questions, questions, questions... Patience, my dear! I am not sure if the term ‘undoing the blockage’ does not align itself rather too smoothly with my substantive critique in relation to autoethnographies of trauma, in that the process of ‘undoing’ results ultimately in an ‘undone’ – as *healing*, as *moving on*, or as *coping with*. Besides, I am equally unsure if there is a finitude to grasp ‘behind the story’ or ‘beyond the frame’. (Pause).

(Pause). And yet, here you are, invested in psychoanalytic theory to begin to make sense of what has been elusive.

What a paradox, isn't it? The search for coherence and meaning-making in the face of profound meaninglessness. Where were we?

The unconscious is dynamic...

And some ideas or beliefs are so anxiety-provoking that they cannot be allowed to rise to the surface of consciousness. Terrifying unconscious impulses need to be defended against. All defence mechanisms can be thought of as arbiters in a continuous negotiation between unconscious ideas and anxiety arising out of those ideas. But instead of working retroactively, defence mechanisms ward off threats "before the attack materializes. This still involves identifying a threat, but now well in advance of its actually making itself felt" (Billig, 1999:56).

A threat to what or to whom?

In short – to the ego. Freud (1923-1925/ 1961:17 original in italics) says that "we have formed the idea that in each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes; and this we call his *ego*", and he goes on like this: "The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passion" (1923-1925/ 1961:25).

So the ego feels threatened by unconscious beliefs and defends itself? How so?

Remember that the ego is invested in the repression of ideas which challenge its equilibrium. Hence material which is too anxiety-provoking needs to be shut off from conscious thought, through denial, projection, displacement, reaction-formation (Frosh, 2012), for example. Traumatic memories often

provoke such profound fears that they become unavailable to conscious thought.

And we repress in order to prevent a release of anxiety?

Freud calls these repressions: *repression proper*, or *after-pressure* (1914-1916/1964), in contrast to *primal repressions*, which act on the representation of drives, in the way “that the ideas attached to the drives are so troubling that they are repressed *before they are even known*” (Frosh, 2012:60 original in italics).

So we repress in order to not know what we don't know? This ties us into a Gordian knot. And how would we know what we don't know? Is this preventative forgetting?

I think that Freud tries to solve it partially by offering a very ambiguous and ultimately too ill-defined concept: “The ego is not sharply separated from the id; its lower portion merges into it. But the repressed merges into the id as well, and is merely a part of it” (1923-1925/ 1961:24). The difficulty arising here is that the unconscious ego tries to protect the conscious ego by means of unconscious repression (Billig, 1999).

Hmmm

Maybe we can content ourselves for the time being with concepts that understand repression as an unconscious strategy of ego defence.

Hang on a minute. What about the id? I assume that we cannot conceptualise one without the other?

Indeed. And let's not forget the super-ego, which acts as internal judge in setting up particular idealised norms or values, firmly held in the unconscious. To recap: Freud saw the id as the unconscious ground inhabited by drives and repressed ideas, with the ego developing into a complex system of negotiation:

“As a frontier-creature, the ego tries to mediate between the world and the id, to make the id pliable to the world and, by means of its muscular activity, to make the world fall in with the wishes of the id” (1923-1925/ 1961:56).

So the ego is an arbiter between self and environment?

It seems that way. And it does so on account of a process called internalization: “What this means is that the ego takes as its paradigm the experiences, fundamental to early life, of taking things in to build itself [...], and getting rid of things in order to free itself from discomfort” (Frosh, 2012:73). For Bollas (2011:60), a “child who internalizes generative parents – who contribute to the evolution of his personal idiom – aims to develop such inner processes and to seek the excitation and novelty as means of triggering personal growth”.

And in childhood trauma such processes are somewhat compromised?

Could the suggestion be upheld that a child whose parents have been unable to be generative in Bollas’ sense is thoroughly curtailed in making sense not only in relation to itself, but also in relation to the Other? That a child who witnesses “and [is] afflicted by the collapse, disappearance or transformation of trusted and idealised figures and symbols while at the same time finding ways to survive and make some sort of sense of not only what was said and could be seen, but perhaps as important what was not said, what [she is] believed not to have heard or seen or felt” (Bacon, :9) is caught in perpetual liminality? (Pause).

(Pause)

We are engaged in iterative processes where the ego tries to consolidate the demands of the super-ego, at the same time as the libidinal drives of the id.

The super-ego?

Colloquially, it is what keeps us in check, the prohibitions we have internalized, “the compelling obedience” as Frosh (2012:74f) puts it, “to an internal authority”. He goes on: “Unconscious ideas pump away, demanding things, and the ego has to mediate between them and reality so that the individual does not suffer too much. They are amoral and potentially dissolute, and it is the task of the superego to maintain standards, even if by doing so the individual becomes overly constrained”. We are all, in a return to Freud, driven by instincts which fall outwith the realm of external pressure. He says: “In the first place, an instinctual stimulus does not arise from the external world but from within the organism itself” (1914-1916/1964:118). For Freud, these stimuli are the “signs of an internal world, the evidence of instinctual needs” (1914-1916/1964:118), and these needs seek satisfaction. Freud draws a definitive line between an instinct or drive whose aim is satisfaction, and the object which might offer such aim. Frosh (2012:46 original in italics) says: “*Drives* [...] are basic biological forces operating all the time and fuelling the psychological activities of the mind”.

But surely we cannot function if we were to follow Freud’s dictum? We cannot just let our drives run riot!

Of course not! Remember that we spoke about the task of the ego as mediator. A strong case is to be made, however, for locating the root of Freud’s vision in conflict, in our need to repress our instinctual stimuli in order to attain a modicum of order. Conflict plays out against what Freud calls the “instincts and their vicissitudes” (1915/1964a) with their desirous inclinations. Billig (1999:74) argues that “two sets of processes – the social and the repressing –

unfold in parallel". We can think of these conflicts as counterbalances in order "to prevent the ego being overwhelmed by anxiety" (Frosh, 2012:51).

Go on!

Is the notion of an ego overwhelmed by anxiety not familiar? Are we not talking trauma? Freud is familiar with phenomena he begins to term 'traumatic neuroses', on account of his observations of soldiers returning from the Front with particular unfamiliar phenomena. Conceptualizations of trauma as psychopathology accrued relevance in light of a shift from the medico-physiological model of wounding, breaking of the skin due to excessive force, and its effect on the whole body. Freud's appropriation of the term defines trauma as wounding of the mind due to an emotional shock.

Wounding of the mind due to an emotional shock... (Pause). I am beginning to get a sense of your inquiry - and 'What on earth happened' somehow accrues more relevance. (Pause).

Trauma consigns itself to perpetuity, as Freud argues in his lecture 'Fixation to traumas – the unconscious' (1916-1917/1963:275): "We apply it to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates." Furthermore, these phenomena, like flashbacks, nightmares, dreams of terror, incomprehensible events, have a tendency to re-present themselves, as making themselves present, in what Freud calls the 'compulsion to repeat': "He [the patient] is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past" (1920/1964:18

original in italics). The compulsions, Freud begins to argue, to repeat what is profoundly unpleasant could be related to “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things” (1920/1964:36).

I'm not sure I understand you. (Pause).

Freud theorized what has become known as drive theory as early as 1905, when he came to recognize a primary drive invested in sexuality – underpinning the seminal ‘pleasure principle’ He revised his conceptualizations in the 1920s on the grounds that not everything can be attributed to sexuality in need of satisfaction. In offering instead a dualistic model (after conceding that “the aim of all life is death” (1920/1964:38)), he seeks to account for an inherent conservatism, and sets the death drive in opposition to the sexual drive. Both drives, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, are invested in the reduction of tension. In 1923, Freud refines his concept further. *Eros* comprises uninhibited and inhibited sexual instincts as well as ego-preservative instincts, whereas the death instinct, with “sadism as its representative” (1923/1961:40) is invested in destruction. “Both [instincts] would be endeavouring to re-establish a state of things that was disturbed by the emergence of life” (1923/1961); the struggle, if you will, is part of the “complex interplay of the Eros–death instinct” according to Tauber (2012:44), without which the ego remains thwarted by the vicissitudes of the id.

And what about the ‘re-establishment’ to a state of things prior to disturbances? It sounds somewhat biblical.

You recall that we talked about drives and the need for satiating objects? That the other, or object, in the Freudian sense, is purely a means for satisfaction?

Eros is permanently on the hunt for objects, initially, as Freud would have it, narcissistically inflected...

Hold on a minute. Are you saying I can be the object of my desires?

Freud argues as early as 1917 that he thinks of auto-eroticism as “the universal and original state of things, from which object-love is only later developed, without the narcissism necessarily disappearing on that account” (1916-1917/1964:416). Finding such object, however, is “fairly complex and no comprehensive account has hitherto been given of them” (1916-1917/1963:329). He goes on to conclude, however, that “the first object of the oral component of the sexual instinct is the mother’s breast which satisfies the infant’s need for nourishment. The erotic component, which is satisfied simultaneously during the [nutritive] sucking, makes itself independent with the act of *sensual* sucking [*lutschen*]; it gives up the outside object and replaces it by an area of the subject’s own body. The oral instinct becomes *auto-erotic*, as are the anal and other erotogenic instincts from the first. Further development [...] has two aims: firstly the abandonment of auto-erotism, the replacement of the subject’s own body once more by an outside object, and secondly, the unification of the various objects of the separate instincts and their replacement by a single object” (1916-1917/1963:328f italics in original).

And it all begins with the mother. In fact, it’s all and always about mother. (Pause)

Mother, and mothers. (Pause).

Hmm. (Pause.)

(Pause). And yet, is Freud’s description of erotic desire sufficient? Is there not **also** a reciprocity at play?

Say more...

Rose (2014) puts it quite succinctly when she asks “why does the psychoanalytic representation of the infant focus on the baby’s sexual impulses towards the mother and remain silent on those of the mother towards her child”?

Are you making a case that motherhood curtails Eros? And what, frankly, has that got to do with trauma?

Following her suggestion that “mothering [seems to be] one of the ways our culture purifies itself of the sexuality that in most cases still brings motherhood about” (Rose, 2014), can we spin Rose’s thread further? Imagine a mother who, in whatever way, is unable to reconcile herself with the mutual sensuousness of mothering, is ambivalent about its inherent eroticism, not because she is adverse to displaying what she considers her erotic markers, but because interwoven into the fabric of sexuality are repetitious failures at bearing a child, at mothering. (Pause). Might she unconsciously impart in the infant a sense of shame, of blame – the reminder of what was not to be? And a little girl, whose gaze is firmly directed outside the wooden picture frame, might possibly know something of the nature of unconscious concealment. (Pause).

(Pause).

In any case, and in returning to Freud, we can begin to understand internalized objects, with the mother being the first love-object, as an introduction into more relational aspects of psychoanalysis. But of course, as Billig (1999:73) would have it, “the demands of civilized life [...] conflict with the instinctual demands of human biology. [...] These instincts have to be curtailed if humans are to live orderly social lives.” We are, in the words of Butler (1997:2),

dependent on “a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency.” The very process of becoming subject entails, to a certain extent, subjection, and there is always an other, even if the other is self. Through a tentative link of Freudian biological drive theory with relational concerns we embed the argument of subjectivity in a social and historical situatedness – there cannot be one without the other.

I understand that the infant/mother relationship has profound implications, being, I assume, the blueprint for any subsequent relationships. And? I mean, is there a link to the nub of ‘what on earth happened’?

I am offering, as it were, a comment on two particular aspects of an infant’s development. Firstly, that the infant is invested in seeking **the** object – mother, mother’s breast – in order to satiate a need according to Freudian drive theory, that is, as “the isolated individual contending with endogenous drives, conflicts, defences” (Applegate, 1999:202). Secondly, that the infant is always already relationally embedded, that is, held in processes, which “account for a subject who comes into being as a consequence of language”, as Butler (1997:106) would have it. Bacon (2010:5) argues along similar lines by suggesting that “we are born not only into language, but more precisely into words. We are formed and pre-formed by the language of others; spoken of, through and around long before we can speak and speak for ourselves.” In other words: the subject not only seeks the object, but our understanding of self is irrevocably connected to an other, in the sense that our subjectivity cannot be separated from our situatedness in the world. On returning to your question whether or not there exists a link... (Pause). I might tread on fragile ground here, but when I think through the implications for a young child

whose world is less facilitative, or, coloured by silences rather than words, then a substantial potentiality is in danger of being squashed. (Pause). And is it not worth noting again the other trajectory, the one that posits my grandparents, my parents' parents, into the timeframe of the First World War, with its potentially traumatizing impact? The last century was indelibly shaped by events of an incomprehensible magnitude. My parents, both born in the 1920s to parents whose lives were marked by such events, veered, in their teenage years, into another catastrophe. Yet how had they, in turn, been received, what kind of narratives were offered to them? "After all," so Butler (2005:62f) "no one survives without being addressed; no one survives to tell his or her story without first being inaugurated into language by being called upon, offered some stories." I would suggest that these considerations surely have had a bearing on what turned out to be a repetitious disaster. As to the nub – shall we see where we get to first?

I understand you as saying that we are indelibly implicated in and by the narratives told all around us, we are always already in relationships. (Pause).

That's it! According to Applegate (1999:204), it is Donald Winnicott who has been credited with "germinating the key plots and subplots of the intersubjectivity story." Winnicott's focus is on early infant development and the relationship with the infant's primary caregiver. The mother has the role of providing a 'facilitating environment' in which the child's inner potential to develop a 'true self' can unfold (Frosh, 2012:110).

Again the onus is solely on the mother. The role of the father is ill-defined.

Undoubtedly, a certain criticism can be directed towards Winnicott and his view of gendered stereotypes with an idealized version of mother as arbiter in

her infant's development. Note the term 'good enough mother' which Winnicott coined, and which attests to her ability to name affect, and by doing so, ameliorate what has been fearful or anxiety-provoking to the infant. Held physically in her arms and emotionally in her thought, the mother offers security in order to enable her child "to gain a sense of trust in the world and of security in her or himself" (Frosh, 2012:110). The 'good enough' mother shuttles between the needs of her infant and her growing ability of self-development.

Was it not Winnicott who famously proclaimed that 'there is no such thing as an infant'?

He did. What he stated quite provocatively was his underlying developmental premise that there is no child without the attention and care of her mother. A child is born into a fluid and continuous matrix of language, social relations, culture. The 'good enough mother' facilitates "a mediating milieu that simultaneously protects and potentiates" (Applegate, 1999:205). What Winnicott argues is a gradual decrease of 'primary maternal preoccupation' from oneness with her infant to an increase in her affective self-regulation (Applegate, 1999; Frosh, 2012; Ogden, 2004). The infant is validated through her mother's gaze, in that "the caregiver's eyes reflect the infant's gathering sense of self" (Applegate, 1999:207).

And without such gaze... (Pause)

(Pause). Indeed. One can surmise in how far a mother's inability to name what could not be named could have imparted its own deep shadow not only over the infant, but equally over the mother/infant dyad. (Pause). The 'good enough' mother, to follow Winnicott, while attentive to her infant's needs,

does not take her over. “She is both there for the infant whenever needed, and capable of separating herself sufficiently so the infant can develop into her or his own self” (Frosh, 2012:111). The paradox is that the increase in the infant’s sense of self operates simultaneously to her disillusionment with her mother. Or, more precisely, it is through a sense of separateness from her mother that the infant can begin to sense herself. Such processes can be facilitated through transitional objects.

I still have a teddy bear...

Exactly! These objects are invested by the child with particular significance. “The infant – whose subjectivity had been previously tied to mother’s interpretation – now, for the first time, becomes the author of meaning, the interpreter of the blanket, teddy bear, mother’s breast, the creator/discoverer of the transitional object” (Gentile, 2008:936f). These objects are situated in an ‘in-between’ space where the real meets the symbolic.

I frankly don’t get this. What do you mean?

We have briefly deviated into Lacanian theory and his suggestion that some objects have been given a privileged status, indexing “the passage from real to symbolic” (Leader, 2006:121); these objects are linked by absence and presence. While developmentally a newborn infant is “in a totally intransitive relationship to the world he cannot yet distinguish from himself” (Wilden, 1968:163), and drawing on an interpretation of the *Fort/Da* game in Freud’s ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920/1964), Lacan, as read by Wilden (1968:163 original in italics), asserts that “for the object to be discovered by the child it must be *absent*.” In short, the object offers something of the mother without being the mother, it comes to re-present presence in light of her

absence. In Winnicott's terms, the transitional object stands for the mother and "for the internalized version of her which in favourable circumstances is all the time building up and forming the basis for belief, and for the capacity to suffer loss without loss of part of the self" (1955:437).

And in less favourable circumstances, the capacity to experience loss is compromised?

It seems to be the case, doesn't it? Winnicott (1974:103) names such curtailment 'fear of breakdown', as description of "the unthinkable state of affairs that underlies the defence organization." According to him, failure in providing a facilitative environment may compromise the infant's ability to regulate, or, in Winnicott's words, "the ego integration is not able to encompass something. The ego is too immature to gather all the phenomena into the area of personal omnipotence" (1974:104). The paradox here is, according to Winnicott (1974:104 original in italics), "that clinical fear of breakdown is *the fear of a breakdown that has already been experienced.*"

Are you saying what I think you are saying? That something of a breakdown happens outwith awareness of it happening? It reminds me of... (Pause).

Trauma? Without doubt Winnicott places great emphasis on the maternal ability to provide a holding, and hence facilitated and mediated, environment to her infant; a failure to do so is registered, but "the victim of the trauma, caught unawares, suffers a disruption of his/her ego integration. A consequence of this is that the traumatic experience cannot be encompassed. [...] The traumatic reality cannot be met due to the limited capacity of the ego to process it" (Hernandez, 1998:137f). We remain, if you will, in the liminal territory of a non-experienced experience. (Pause).

(Pause)

Laplanche and Pontalis (1988:465) argue that a key component of trauma is “the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it”, ergo, we can surmise that trauma, in a sense, breaks into the self without possibility of protection. Mitchell (1998:121) suggests that “trauma, whether physical or psychological, must create a breach in a protective covering of such severity that it cannot be coped with by the usual mechanisms by which we deal with pain or loss.” Her definition, as you know, is closely aligned with the Freudian one: in ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920/1964:27), Freud conceptualizes an organism which defends against external aggression from the environment, and states: “Its outermost surface ceases to have the structure proper to living matter, becomes to some degree inorganic and thenceforward functions as a special envelope or membrane resistant to stimuli”. Freud thinks of the membrane as a barrier, or protection, which averts from the underlying layers the full impact of external stimuli. For excitations of a magnitude that breaks the membrane, Freud affords the term ‘traumatic’. On opening the metaphorical floodgates, so Freud, “an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism’s energy and to set in motion every possible defence measure” (1920/1964:29). As indicated earlier in his observations of traumatized soldiers, he concluded that, instead of remembering traumatic events which belonged to the past, patients would regularly be “obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience” (1920/1964:18).

I am beginning to get a sense of trauma and the ripple effects it must have left in its wake. The last century was marked by unimaginable events... (Pause).

Caruth (1993:24) proposes that repetitious experiences of violent events, through flashbacks or nightmares, “can only be understood ultimately in terms of the absolute inability to avoid an unpleasant event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way”. Yet, what is particular to those incidents which surpass ‘psychic meaning’, or which have been repressed into the deepest recesses of the unconscious? Of course, not every horrific event leaves incomprehensible traces in our psyche. What seems to be undergirding trauma is its unexpectedness.

What do you mean?

“We cannot make use of anxiety as a preparatory signal”, as Mitchell (1998:121) would have it. The event falls outwith our expectancy, “and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth, 1996:4). Freud argues that it is specifically the notion of fright, or what he calls “the factor of surprise” (1920/1964:12), which buttresses what he considers a key concept in trauma; he goes on to distinguish fright from fear and anxiety, and affords them distinct markers in relation to danger. He is aware that these terms are often used interchangeably, but they should not be considered to be of synonymous value.

Go on.

For the following to make sense, I shall read the passage in German: “Schreck, Furcht, Angst werden mit Unrecht wie synonyme Ausdrücke gebraucht; sie lassen sich in ihrer Beziehung zur Gefahr gut auseinanderhalten. Angst bezeichnet einen gewissen Zustand wie Erwartung der Gefahr und Vorbereitung auf dieselbe, mag sie auch unbekannt sein; Furcht verlangt ein

bestimmtes Objekt vor dem man sich fürchtet; Schreck aber benennt den Zustand in den man gerät wenn man in Gefahr kommt, ohne auf sie vorbereitet zu sein, betont das Moment der Überraschung“ (Freud, 1940:10)

Lingua Germanica

She sat down. Yes, she thought, she would always find her way in books. Her fingers rested on the slightly sticky cover, moved along the spine, the indentations of the title barely tangible. Like braille, she thought. She pushed her glasses further up the bridge of her nose, looked out of the window, and down again. Where was I, where am I? She smiled. And then she remembered. How come, she thought, how come I read this in German? She opened the book.

Mother tongue – mother’s tongue.

I am somewhat perplexed and almost dumbfounded that I seek out Freud in its German edition, a rekindling of some kind of hope, I imagine, that I can find, in the text, what has been elusive for as long as I can remember. It seems too simplistic to draw parallels between Freudian psychoanalytic theory *read in German* and the pull of the primary relation, my mother’s tongue, my mother tongue. And yet, is that not what this thesis is partially about?

To read in German is as familiar as the sound of my mother’s voice; the texts in front of me attach themselves to what I have grown into, call me into a reciprocal arrangement with a proposition by the eighteenth century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder : “Every nation speaks the

way it thinks and thinks the way it speaks” (Stroinska, 2001:2). I was forged, and in turn forged my self in a linguistic paradigm that I had more often than not tried to forget about, to leave behind, to obliterate even, only for it to return, in proverbial Freudian manner, through reading Freud!

The return of the repressed. She smiled again. What is it that returns, she thought, if not that which had made no sense? Nonsense. Which did not fit into the words she had been taught? How come – as if there was indeed a coming into, a beginning to this tale, a beginning she needed to find in a language that had not enough words for her. She looked up. That was her beginning, her ‘coming into being’, a fabrication into lack. And now, she thought, now she is here. She looked at the words on the page, fuzzy ink soaked into paper, black onto barely white. Pentimento. Reminiscence. Faded yet readable.

When, as Holman Jones suggests, “writing and reading, identities and lives, are performed in relation with and to others “ (2011:323), it follows that my identity and my life has been, and is, shaped by what I have internalized by way of my mother tongue (and mother’s tongue), just as much as it is inflected by the shift into a different socio-cultural and linguistic matrix, and my relationality within such shifting parameters. This ambiguity is played out in the context of reading myself into theory in German, to the extent that I often, but not always, offer you, the reader, my own translation of texts rather than draw on what is readily available in English. It is an offering through which I make a particular claim on belonging, even if what I belong to has been historically infused with perversity. The paradox is that any such claims are immediately undercut by translating German sentences into English idioms. I understand these ambiguous shifts from one matrix into

the other and back again as markers of uncertainty, of indeterminacy, as means of iterative re-orienting and re-locating myself not only in relation to what I have left (but to whose siren calls I continue to respond eagerly), but also to what I since have found, in a different sense of belonging, or rather, in a sense of belonging differently. These offerings could hence uphold a particular argument, in that they are attempts to draw you into complex ambiguities, into difficulties, impossibilities rather, of declaring a self that is predicated upon cohesion, singularity, and unity.

Such ambivalence is further played out in respect of my writings. From the beginning of the processes by which I formed, and was formed by, what you are about to read, I wrote in English, my adoptive tongue. Through more than thirty years I mothered my self in/to linguistic calibrations, until I learnt to speak it sufficiently to 'know my place', even if located knowledge is an inherently slippery concept. I am unsure if these ideas account for the impossibility of writing this thesis in German. I, simply, can/will not do so. I say 'cannot' not only because my German is at best rudimentary and would possibly not serve me sufficiently in fulfilling academic criteria laid down in respect to PhD accreditation. I say 'cannot' because I know that to write out of a matrix which paid scant attention in my childhood and adolescence to trauma, to ghosts, to death, would defeat me, would, possibly, return me to the site which had never been given words.

She traced the outline of words, words she knew about but did not know. She shifted, looked up and smiled.

I translate the passage as follows: 'Shock, fear and anxiety are wrongly used as synonymous expressions; they are easily distinguishable in their relation to danger. Anxiety denotes a certain condition in expectation of and preparation for danger, even if the danger is unknown; fear demands a specific object one is in fear of; but shock is the name for the condition one gets into when one encounters danger without being prepared for it, it emphasizes the moment of surprise'. The Standard Edition translation differs only marginally from my own: "'Fright', 'fear' and 'anxiety' are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger. 'Anxiety' describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. 'Fear' requires a definite object of which to be afraid. 'Fright', however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it. It emphasizes the factor of surprise" (Freud, 1920/1964:12). A later translation (Freud, 1920/2003) substituted 'dread' for 'fear', but retained the term 'fright'. The translation of *Angst* as 'anxiety' seems adequate, given that they follow a not dissimilar etymological trajectory (Oka). *Furcht* translated as 'fear' carries more ambivalence, as it is etymologically closer to 'fright', the notion on which hinges Freud's theory of trauma. 'Fear', on the other hand, links etymologically to *Gefahr*, which appears in its English translation as 'danger'.

Oh come on! Is this not just semantic? I mean, do we have to go into the minutiae of permutations, as long as we understand what each term defines?

No, and yes! I believe that the question of adequacy or inadequacy of translation shies away from the difficulties within which complex concepts are

disseminated. We continuously constitute and are being constituted by language, irrespective of the linguistic idiom; I suggest that 'understanding' in the sense you use it does not begin to acknowledge what goes on at the threshold between self and other, particularly if we fail to pay attention to those minutiae. (Pause).

Point taken! (Pause) So, 'Schreck', or in its English translation 'shock/fright' speaks to an almost inevitable element of utter surprise at impending danger.

For sure. It implies, say, the flooding of 'the mental apparatus' with stimuli. Frosh (2013:19) goes further and argues that we often unconsciously seek out 'the thrill' and "avoid [...] anxiety precisely in order to give ourselves a fright", though I am not convinced by his argument: does the 'thrill' not link with the potentiality of danger without which the 'thrill-seeking' activity would remain mundane? I suggest that the term 'shock' rather than 'fright' might better serve to convey the vehemence with which the external world enters self and the devastation of the ensuing deluge, even though Freud used the term in a more derogatory manner. Suffice to mention that the term 'fright' as utilized by Freud more than 90 years ago has lost its intensity in contemporary English and barely registers in relation to traumatic experiences.

What happens when we get a shock on the scale of Freud's proportion?

Paradoxically, if "severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving risk to life" coincide with physical wounding, such "a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule *against* the development of a neurosis" (Freud, 1920/1964:12 original in italics). The inference here could be read twofold: can the argument be upheld which suggests that the visible break in the "shield against stimuli from the external

world" (Freud, 1920/1964:28) might function as an external reference point to bind, or "master[...] the amounts of stimulus which have broken in" (:30)? In trauma, as suggested by Laplanche and Pontalis with a rather mechanistical approach, ideas about, or memory of the event are insufficiently bound to its affect, which is energetically free-flowing. Psychoanalysis endeavours to "re-establish

[...] the relation between the memory of the traumatic event and its affect by restoring the connection between the different ideas involved and so facilitating the discharge of the affect (abreaction)" (1988:62).

Complete affective indifference comes to mind, a turning away into silence, into amnesia – I imagine they are effects of repressed affect, which undoubtedly returns. It haunts us, doesn't it? (Pause). You spoke about the importance of wounds in traumatic events. Is there more?

Wounds can, I imagine, be understood as stark reminders of having averted death, as external marks of the incomprehensibility of survival. At the same time, the visible wound binds, so to speak, affective response, pain, hurt, confusion. Caruth (1996:58) hones in on this point thus: "Trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival. It is only by recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience." The wounding, I suggest, can hence be understood as an embodied signifier of events which fall beyond signification. A mark, if you want, of shattered membranes, where "the outside has gone inside without any mediation" (Caruth, 1996:59), but which, by its very nature, implies unmitigated yet unintegrated experience.

The physical wound speaks to the dichotomy of violence beyond assimilation as it occurs, and the very act of survival.

Do I understand you correctly that the underpinnings of trauma is its indirectness to experience?

Some theorists argue that trauma can barely be articulated in those terms. "To say that trauma must be relived or re-enacted in order to be 'surmounted', assumes that trauma is or was a lived event. But trauma is an event of unliving. The unlived event becomes traumatic precisely because it is empty" (Phelan, 1997:60). There is, if you will, no centre to trauma - the traumatizing event falls beyond that which is available to consciousness. In Lacanian terms, trauma signifies the impossibility of signification. "The breach in the mind - the conscious awareness of the threat to life" is due to 'fright', as Caruth argues, in that "the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*. The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known" (1996:62). Our incomprehensibility of survival in the face of death marks the painful need to repeat, through dreams, symptoms, flashbacks.

We cannot but relive the unlived experience?

Indeed. Freud suggests to understand it as "endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of traumatic neurosis" (1920/1964:32). We perpetually fail to grasp the gap or fissure between near-death experience and its rendering into meaning, that is, its assimilation into consciousness. These 'threshold' experiences prompt the repetitious return of what can only ever remain elusive, because

they fall outwith the temporal sequential matrix. Our survival, in such close proximity to death, remains equally enigmatic, because it eludes means of signification.

We are caught in the loop of a compulsion to repeat in the knowledge of its ultimate futility?

So it seems, doesn't it? For Caruth, "the incomprehensibility of survival [...] is at the heart of Freud's formulation of the death drive" (1996:64), which she extends to the trauma of 'awakening' into life: "In inanimate matter and by unimaginable force the characteristics of life were awoken." (Freud, 1940:40 translation by author). The inanimate precedes the animate, death precedes life, and it is by sheer force into unfathomable awakening from death into life that we begin our return towards death. Hence, "the aim of all life is death" (Freud, 1920/1964:38).

And yet, we can never grasp the mere possibility of our own death. (Pause). What existential dilemma...

In witnessing death in the other, or death of the other, I witness what Critchley, as cited in Stolorow (2007:48) describes as "relational character of finitude". It is the fundamental bind towards our existential certainty, or, if you want, "virtue of our common finitude" (2007:49), which foregrounds our relational embeddedness in this world. Death, by that token, could be considered the closing bracket of our relational 'Being in the world' (Heidegger, 1993). (Pause).

(Pause). Is this where we end?

I am not sure as to where we end. (Pause). The notion of a self is always engaged in some sort of relation to an other, as Mitchell would have it: “Being fully human (in Western culture) entails being recognized *as a subject* by another human subject” (2003:63f original in italics). The shift from the Freudian ‘object’ to interrelational subjectivity not only deconstructs notions of separated autonomy, but it considers the intrinsic reciprocity of such processes. To recognize and be recognized as a *subject* permeates the boundaries between self-agency and dependency, in what Mitchell (2003:64) calls “our efforts to have our own way [...] and our dependence upon the other”. We are moving into a terrain which foregrounds a less homogenous self, a less coherent self, a self with more permeable boundaries - one who needs to be recognized in all her heterogeneity and dependency on one another. Benjamin (2000:297) frames it as the “tension between recognition and omnipotence” which in turn shapes our intersubjectivity. The process whereby we iteratively become subject, in what Wainrib (2012) calls ‘subjectivation’.

Subjectivation? What do you mean?

The frame within which notions of subjectivation were initially thought about arose out of Foucault’s argument that any “person is *subjectivated*-she/he is at once rendered a subject and subjected to relations of power through discourse”(Youdell, 2006:517 italics in original). It was subsequently taken up, among others, by Butler in her argument that “no individual becomes a subject without first becoming subjected or undergoing ‘subjectivation’” (1997:11). I am, as it were, “initiated [as subject] through a primary submission to power” (Butler, 1997:2). The matrices within which I can pronounce an ‘I’ are not only

never of my own making - and in that sense require subordination - they provide simultaneously the conditions of my ongoing becoming subject. Subjectivation unfolds hence through its relationality to others, to other, to alterity – from the very beginning. As Lacan suggests: “Symbols in fact envelop the life of man [sic] in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him [...]; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gift of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairy spirit, the designs of his destiny” (1973:42). We are enmeshed in processes of subjectivation, which operate in various registers “between psychic reality and shareable reality, between repetition compulsion and creating something new, between becoming the subject of our desires and a degree of subjection to others’ desire, as well as to the norms and limitations of the culture in which we are immersed” (Wainrib, 2012:1116). I suggest extending those registers further and thinking about subjectivation in the context of conscious and unconscious processes, and the repression or subordination of what cannot be made available to consciousness. My becoming subject can hence be thought of simultaneously as an iterative submission to the unconscious. (Pause)

Hence to become subject is...

A processural investiture into relationality, a relationality that precedes birth, undoubtedly. Think of the stories being told in utero which link parental expectations, or familial narratives into a contextual socio-cultural web of relationships. Or consider Winnicott’s affective attunement between a mother and her baby, rhythmical sounds, exchange of looks or gestures. Both invest themselves in, and constitute themselves through, a sensuously rich relational

matrix which foregrounds differentiation as much as “mutual recognition by establishing a sharing of experiences” (Wainrib, 2012:1118). These processes operate as blueprint for ongoing reciprocal or mutual recognition.

So what happens when these processes are foreshortened, when links are fragile at best, or not sufficiently reconciled?

Hold on to that question, if you will. To continue: In his reflections on ‘Trauma and human existence’ Stolorow’s (2007) wide theoretical arcs draw not only on analytic theories, but equally on existential philosophy to argue intersubjective interdependency. Trauma, for Stolorow, is held not within the Freudian domain of an “isolated, faltering mental apparatus, unable to process the instinctual energies flooding it from within its own depth” (2007:9). Trauma arises out of “unintegrated affect states [which] become the source of lifelong emotional conflict and vulnerability to traumatic states because they are experienced as threats both to the person’s established psychological organization and to the maintenance of vitally needed ties” (2007:3). Stolorow foregrounds the relational context as benchmark against which future experiences can be gauged. He builds a case against Freudian drive theory in favour of affect as “something that from birth onward is regulated or misregulated, within ongoing relational systems” (2007:1).

You spoke about a wide theoretical arc

Stolorow draws on Heidegger, his notion of ‘being-in-the-world’, which is intrinsically imbued with relationality and context, and in particular on *Befindlichkeit*.

Befindlichkeit?

Befindlichkeit is the Heideggerian term for affectivity. Gendlin (1978/79) suggests that the German verb '*sich befinden*' alludes to "the reflexivity of finding oneself; feeling; and being situated". Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit* shuttles between intra- and interpsychic experiences, the finding oneself, or sensing oneself in the context of our situatedness. It denotes "both how one feels and the situation within which one is feeling" (Stolorow, 2007:2). *Befindlichkeit*, for Stolorow, undergirds one of the philosophical arguments of intersubjective interdependency.

And affect is primarily regulated within child/caregiver situations... And, coming back to my question I was asked to put on hold, I cannot but wonder what happens when the experiential context is lacking, when the situatedness forecloses a stable relational benchmark?

Did we not earlier consider the repercussions of curtailment, the 'agonies' as Winnicott (1974:106) argues, "the awfulness of emptiness", or Bacon's (2010) "endless torment of the unsaid and the unsayable"? The levees break, leaving in their wake a child in an "unbearable, overwhelmed, disorganized state" (Stolorow, 2007:3). Trauma arises not because of said flooding, but because the painful emotional states are not met sufficiently by an other. It is, if you will, the persistent lack of attuned interrelationality which leads to developmental trauma. In order to maintain the relationship, however fractious it might be, overwhelming and unbearable affective states need to be defended against.

Because the caregiver is insufficiently attuned to regulate those affects?

Precisely. Repetitive experiences of malattunement arouse in the child the belief that she is bad or unlovable, leading in turn, so Stolorow (2007:4) argues to "a defensive self-ideal [...], representing a self-image purified of the

offending affect states". These restrictions undoubtedly narrow the scope within which affect can be integrated or assimilated. The traumatized child's prevailing experience is one of absence, absence of an other who validates her experiences and aides their assimilation. "Trauma", says Stolorow (2007:10) "is constituted in an intersubjective context in which severe emotional pain cannot find a relational home in which it can be held".

And so the young girl in the photo looks to a beyond... (Pause). If trauma cannot find a home, it cannot be spoken.

It cannot be brought into dialogue. Trauma is mute, isolated and isolating, not solely because of its intensity, but because it lacks the intersubjective context within which it can be spoken. It fails in what Coburn (2001:304) calls the "ubiquitous emotional resonance process", and lingers, "inchoate, diffuse and largely bodily" (Stolorow, 2007:29). If emotional experience falls outwith the communicable matrix, it "remain[s] outside the horizon of symbolized experience" (Stolorow, 2007:30)...

It remains unnameable.

And what cannot be named foreshortens emotionality.

What do you mean?

Our emotional life diminishes, is less vivid or alive... The need to split off what cannot be named impoverishes our potentiality. We are closed off to the breadth of our experiences, because they remain unnameable and unsymbolizable. (Pause) What Stolorow clearly seems to argue for is the foregrounding of intersubjective processes and linguistic representations thereof. In doing so, he attends to, or undermines notions of self-articulating

subjectivity. Such intersubjectivity stretches itself towards a beyond of that which can be known. Butler's argument puts it succinctly thus: "I speak as an 'I' but do not make the mistake that I know precisely all that I am doing when I speak in that way. I find that my very formation implicates the other in me" (2005:84). Stolorow attends to the unnameability of trauma through its banishment from intersubjective dialogue. Butler (2005:23) interweaves and hence extends the trajectory slightly further and moves Stolorow out of the dyadic setting into an overarching one which recognizes the "social workings of normativity that condition both subject production and intersubjective exchange". What is visible, nameable, recognizable is subjected to and subject of normative frames or matrices.

And trauma?

Good question. (Pause) Would it be appropriate to suggest that trauma has been subjected to a process akin to colonialism? That feelings, experiences, were 'colonised', rendered mute and voiceless, become unnameable, because they fall outwith the ratified discourse? That ghosts hint at such reductive accounts of loss and repression? That ghosts are mere spectres, "just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place" (Gordon, 2008:8)? That notions pertaining to mourning are insufficiently supported by our normative frames?

So many questions... (Pause)

Ghosts, spectres, hauntings, mourning. Mourning. Mourning and Melancholia, as Freud would have it.

Hmmm

How could we possibly side-line *'Trauer und Melancholie'*, where Freud (1916/1946) develops a theory of mourning? And yes, it's back to the German original publication – and the English translation, of course! Here goes: The libidinal attachment of the Ego to a no-more existent object can ultimately be relinquished, so Freud suggests, through a process whereby *"jede einzelne der Erinnerungen und Erwartungen, in denen die Libido an das Objekt geknüpft war, wird eingestellt, überbesetzt und an ihr die Lösung der Libido vollzogen"* (1916/1946:430). My own translation of the preceding sentence reads thus: Each single one of the memories and expectations with which the libido was tied to the object will be adjusted, hypercatheted, and through it, the detachment from the libido will be accomplished. Strachey's (1917/1964:245) translation: "Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercatheted, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" seems to capture the sequential process of mourning Freud proposed; where the translation fails, in my view, is in its attention to the specificity of *'wird eingestellt'* – a rather peculiar passive verb, which 'brought up' serves inadequately. My choice of the term 'adjusted', similarly to Shaun Whiteside's (Freud, 2005:205) recent translation, evokes processes of calibrations, and seems much closer to its German original.

And?

What Freud develops in his paper is a theory whereby a freed libido, through the timely and time-consuming process of mourning, can ultimately be directed towards another object. "The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud,

1917/1964:245) barely addresses the minutiae of processes, apart from “demand[ing] that the libido as a whole sever its bonds with the object” (Freud, 2005:204). I am certainly not in favour of Freud’s categorical view, which seems to align itself too smoothly with my critique of autoethnographies of trauma and their central tenet of ‘moving on’, or ‘healing’, rather than an iterative process of ‘working through’ towards a goal that is always already out of reach; but let us not forget that Freud’s theories are deeply “committed to the Enlightenment ideals of reason’s power” (Tauber, 2012:46) and the scientisation of psychoanalysis. Let us further not forget that he posits the process of mourning in contrast to that of melancholia, both of which are responses to irrevocable losses.

And what are the differences between either processes?

While both, melancholia and mourning can, according to Freud (1917/1964:244), be characterized in “profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity”, one crucial element is missing in mourning.

Go on...

What is missing is “the reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults, intensifying into the delusory expectation of punishment” (Freud, 2005:204).

Melancholia become pathological because of some sort of propensity towards self-denial?

That’s how I read him. Freud’s exploration of the dissimilarity leads Ogden (2007:126f) to introduce “the simultaneity and interdependence of two

unconscious aspects of loss in melancholia. One involves the nature of the melancholic's tie to the object, and the other involves an alteration of the self in response to the loss of the object." In contrast to mourning, so the argument goes, the melancholic is unable to be fully aware of what she has lost.

To acknowledge loss of an other implies a careful recalibration not only of the other as other, but also of our intersubjectivity. (Pause)

Undoubtedly melancholia attends to that which cannot be clearly delineated. Yet, I think Freud's considerations in respect of melancholia bear on a slightly different aspect of self-other relationality. His (1917/1964:245) argument that "melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" underpins its vicarious aspect. Relegated to the unconscious, the melancholic abandons the process that distinguishes her from the mourner: hence instead of "withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement on to a new one" the libido "was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any specific way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object" (Freud, 1917/1964:249 italics in original).

The shadow of the object... I have often thought about what this might mean – to cauterize oneself against the experiences of loss, or, rather, to remain in some sense of symbiosis to the object. (Pause). What a thoroughly isolated and isolating experience.

Weiss and Lang (2000) certainly think so, and draw on Freud to hone in on loss and depression. But let us for a moment return directly to Freud. The ego, to paraphrase him, is sucked dry; object loss is equated with ego loss and goes

hand-in-hand with abandoning of object-cathexis. “The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, [...], and empt[ies] the ego until it is totally impoverished” (Freud, 1917/1964:253).

What I read into the last sentence is an unstillable pain which the melancholic is unable to ameliorate.

I would not easily concur with your interpretation here! Could it not be argued that the wound is a signifier that something is at a loss without attending to **the** loss? In that sense it functions, if you will, as simulacrum. Melancholia is unable to mourn loss...

Because the reality of it has not been acknowledged?

Precisely. The “(shadow-like) relationship to an internal object [...] exists in a psychological domain outside time” (Ogden, 2007:135). And if it is outside of any temporal matrix it remains perpetually present. Maybe that is the crux in melancholia: there is no escape, no freeing from the object, in what (Gerson, 2009:4) calls “the enduring presence of an absence”. The ego, by identifying with the lost object, attempts to bear what is unbearable. “Object loss”, says Roth (2007:38) “means that something catastrophic has happened to the subject’s internal connection with his object”.

And in order to avert catastrophe to the sense of self, attachment to the internal object must be maintained at all costs? The melancholic would circuitously avoid loss... (Pause).

Because “there is no loss; an external object (the abandoned object) is omnipotently replaced by an internal one (the ego-identified-with-the-object)” (Ogden, 2007:131)! Furthermore, were we to follow Roth, such internal object

constancy allows for any substitution of the external object, and become “variations on the same theme – repeated examples of an unchanging original” (2007:39).

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose?

It makes sense to think of Roth's quotation in the context of repetition compulsion and the return of the repressed. Any repetitive attachment to a substitution hooks onto the 'shadow of the object', and the libido turns once again into itself.

The libidinal position which, as Freud (1917/1964:244) observes “people never willingly abandon [...], not even, indeed, when [...] a substitute is already beckoning to them”, retains its affective ties to the lost object. I think Freud's 'substitute' (1917/1964, 2005), which incidentally seems to be an adequate translation of the German original 'Ersatz' (1916/1946), hints at a different external object which the ego, freed from the libidinal attachment to the lost object, can seek. It has, as it were, procedurally severed its cathexis to the lost object. The allure of the 'beckoning' substitute brings to mind Freud's emphatic stance on pleasure – after all, the libido is pleasure-seeking!

But what, frankly, has all this got to do with trauma? And why do we continuously come back to Freud?

We are drawing tentative lines between trauma and its reverberations, that is, phenomena like ghosts, hauntings, or silenced voices, which have its origins in a past that continuously shapes the present. And when Frosh (2013:38) suggests that “there is a lot in psychoanalysis that falls under the heading of 'haunting',” it is not without reason that an episodic return to its founder is often called for. Something has absented itself from language, from conscious

awareness, has been pushed into marginalia, has not been given its place, has not been mourned – and yet, it is perpetually present in its absence. ‘What on earth happened’ speaks to such places, speaks to the ambivalence in relation to knowledge that falls beyond the margins of signification. (Pause). Where were we?

Libidinal attachment and object-loss.

You do pay attention, after all! According to Ogden, the lost object survives, in part because its loss has not been ‘reality-tested’; it is “preserved in the form of an identification with it” (2007:130). In melancholia, the libidinal attachment to the now internalized object not only avoids the experience of loss, but it equally throws its shadow onto “the three-dimensional emotional life lived in the world of real external objects” (Ogden, 2007:131). Whether the internalized object serves as blueprint for a substitution, which inevitably will fail to deliver on its transference request, as Roth implies, or whether it serves as guardian to a deeply shaded ego, which “renders the melancholic endlessly captive to it” (Ogden, 2007:131) – suffice to say that either interpretation imparts a sense of restriction and doom in negotiating the contemporaneity and spontaneity of life. The melancholic is, by foregrounding avoidance of loss, perpetually caught in its grasp. This position, I would argue, has an important bearing on reverberations of trauma.

Say a bit more?

The melancholic permanently unconsciously displaces the inevitability of loss, in contrast to those processes which underpin mourning and by which loss is tethered into temporality. Ghosts, hauntings, absence - these notions hint at a “dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the

apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible [...] makes itself known or apparent to us" (Gordon, 2008:8). Hence the argument could be upheld that the ghost is a constant reminder of a loss lived out in the present and in that sense 're-presents' its perpetual loss. The ghost is tied into temporality on account of its sequential collapse: not only is the past continually present, but it functions as a haunting reminder that something is lost, or at a loss.

In trauma, language is lost, at a loss...

Trauma, loss, hauntings, ghosts, melancholia – something permeates all those frames within which I find myself now, but does it suffice to subsume it under the mantle of 'unspeakability'? Is it enough to narrate? "Ghosts cannot be removed just by being spoken about; they can only be set free by some kind of action to bring them the justice they deserve" says Frosh (2013:4). And I ask myself if the issue at stake here alludes to unbearable otherness, and the 'speaking about' is a denial of their alterity.

What do you mean?

When I narrate ghosts, I do so from the position of intersubjective experience. When I speak about them, I fear that I cannot but fail them in their otherness. Is the 'justice they deserve' akin to processes described by O'Loughlin as 'decolonising mindsets' (2009)? Decolonization upends what has been marginalized, rendered mute or voiceless. Trauma, ghosts, hauntings all pertain to something unnameable, having been subjected to what Stolorow (2007) calls 'banishment from human dialogue'. That such banishment is largely dependent on the particulars of what is visible and speakable prompts Butler (2010:xiii) to suggest that "when versions of reality are excluded or

jettisoned to a domain of unreality, then spectres are produced that haunt the ratified version of reality”.

I am lost.

Maybe this is what happens when we deal with ghosts, when we lose ourselves amongst them. (Pause). Ghosts are reminders that something is amiss in the social ‘materiality’, and ‘speaking about’ does not attend to what has been collectively marginalized. However, and undoubtedly, “what is left unresolved in history works its way into the present as traumatic haunting that is profoundly social, yet is lived out in the deepest recesses of individuals’ lives” (Frosh, 2013:44). The ghosts itself is never just an individuated entity but embedded into a societal matrix.

And what about ‘justice’?

Avery Gordon’s (2008:64 original in italics) argument rests on the tenet that the “ghost is alive, so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice.*” A ‘hospitable’ memory opens up spaces for what has been muted, excluded, unvoiced. Remember the melancholic who unconsciously maintains her hold on loss by denying its very existence and forecloses any ‘gracious’ reparative rituals or gestures. I suggest that something akin to the complexities around trauma, ghosts and melancholia arise in relation to reverberations within which the vicissitudes of trauma can be theorized.

Finally?

Maybe? Yes finally, though not finitely! Generational reverberations speak to a liminal intersubjective space of barely existing yet tangible experiences, inhabited by what Abraham and Torok (1975/1994:140f original in italics) call 'phantoms', and which they proceed to define loosely as "an occasion for torment [...] – a memory [...] buried *without legal burial place.*" Shame underpins such torment, the shame of a "concealed secret [which] always does return to haunt. To exorcise it one must *express it in words.* But how are we to accomplish this when the phantoms inhabiting our minds do so without our knowledge, embodying the unspeakable secret of . . . *an other?*" (1975/1994b:188 italics in original)

And who might this 'other' be?

The other is someone we love, argues Abraham (1975/1994a:171f), whose "concealment of some part of [his] life" is captured in the phantom. And because the phantom is an embodiment of 'something unspeakable' transmitted in its unspokenness, it remains linguistically unrepresentable - without justice. It hints, in its etherealness, at a gap or fissure.

And what has love got to do with it?

A fair point! I think that what Abraham calls 'love' is an indication of the psychosocial and affective relationships between, for example, mother and child, older and younger siblings, grandparents and grandchildren. Frosh's (2013:39) 'protective factor' underpins the argument that "something is being preserved, some precious idealisation or maintenance of a bond." The 'haunted' is caught in a paradox: how to protect the unconscious secret which vies for symbolisation, and, given that any denouement bears on relationality, how to remain ignorant of one's unconscious knowledge. Bollas' 'unthought

known' comes to mind, or knowledge pre symbolization. "Something speaks", suggests Frosh (2013:39), "but even as we hear it we pretend that we do not know what it is."

Because to know?

We cannot know, I think. To know would somehow violate the familial or parental secret. The shuttling between what Abraham calls 'awareness-unawareness' gives at best rise to processes which show and hide "that which, in the depths of the unconscious, dwells as the living-dead knowledge of *someone else's secret.*" (1975/1994b:188 italics in original).

Living-dead - deadened, depleted, silenced – the realm of zombies, it seems. (Pause)

But what is the significance of the secret?

Torok's (1968/1994:109) suggestion that the correlations of loss of love-object with libidinal increase arouses "shame, astonishment, hesitation" needs to be read against Freud's libidinal pleasure theory. Increase in libido, so Torok (1968/1994:117) argues, can be understood as "a desperate and final attempt at introjection, a sudden amorous fulfilment with the object."

At the point of death of the other I feel desire?

Precisely. The experience is however, as argued by Torok, (1968/1994:117) "struck with explicit condemnation and immediate repression, [and] its link to a desire for the dying or dead object is always severely censored."

And what is censored defies signification... (Pause).

(Pause). It defies signification to the extent that the 'lost object' is denied its rightful and just place. Unspoken, marginalized, these tombs shelter encrypted familial secrets: "Nothing at all must filter to the outside world. The

ego is given the task of cemetery guard. It stands fast there, keeping an eye on the comings and goings of the members of its immediate family who – for various reasons – might claim access to the tomb” (Nicolas Abraham & Torok, 1971/1994:159). In short, it is not the loss or death of the object, but the secrecy within which loss occurred, which enforces unassimilated libidinal desires into the ‘psychic tomb’. The language connected to such pleasures or desires in relation to the object are similarly entombed, silenced, for the pleasures themselves cannot be introjected.

I am not entirely sure if I can follow Abraham and Torok’s argument. ‘Nothing must filter to the outside world’ assumes a hermetically-guarded closedness.

Could we agree on the tomb as metaphor? The crypt guards whatever falls outwith normative frames of reference. If the interdependent and intersubjective socio-cultural field is prohibitive of narratives pertaining to alterity, or subsumed under a cloak that favours a certain hegemony, then the issue at stake is less concerned with ‘intrapsychic secrecy’ but with conditional shifts which give words to those secrets. “The creation of cryptic enclaves in language marks the traces of refused mourning. They appear, so to speak, as the linguistic scars of trauma” suggests Schwab (2010:4).

And the task of voicing the unnameable falls to subsequent generations. (Pause). Maybe it can only ever be attempted on the death of the previous one? Maybe the rendition into language is somewhat akin to the process of mourning?

Maybe. (Pause). And ghosts, those voiceless hauntings of a previous, other generation, are reminders of an immense task – “to be haunted in the name of a will to heal is to allow the ghost to help you imagine what was lost that never even existed, really” (Gordon, 2008:57). ‘In the name of’ – is this not a demand

towards recognition of an other whose voice has been hidden or excluded, a demand made to those of us who perpetually live in the presence of ghosts? And, irrespective of my contentions around the notion of 'healing', could it stand for nothing other than an engagement with the conditions that perpetuate ghosts' seclusion? "I am invariably transformed by the encounters I undergo; recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was" says Butler (2005:26f). Encounters with ghosts recalibrate an extended intersubjectivity through offering them their due: they have a right to a place in the present, in the absence of their being, in my memory. (Pause). I think that ghosts have something important to say. I do not yet know what they tell me, but I imagine. There needs to be more listening into silences or gaps or fissures.

Listening to the whispers of ghosts?

Maybe – but how can I ever know? (Pause). And yet, do I stretch myself too far? But how far is too far? Is talking to ghosts too far? Are there not ghosts 'in every nursery' (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975)? Is an investigation into reparative gestures towards those who have been silenced too far? Is the representation of a world I barely know about but carry intuitive knowledge of too far? (Pause). Is this where we end up when we follow Freud (1916/1946, 1917/1964, 2005) into 'Mourning and Melancholia'? What does he mean when he postulates "that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (1917/1964:245)? Completion "after a certain period of time" (2005:204) does not encapsulate the processes that lead to recognition of object loss and its introjection into the ego. Abraham and Torok (1972/1994:125) argue, on the other hand, a critical distinction between

introjection and incorporation, where “incorporation denotes a fantasy, introjection a process.” Fantasy is set against the reality principle, through which loss of the object is acknowledged and finally introjected. In contrast, incorporation is an attempt to ingest ‘into the body’ (in + corpus) the whole or part of the object in order to repudiate its loss – encrypted the object remains unassimilated and ‘alive’ in death. To swallow the object contests the very reality of its loss, which “if recognized as such, would effectively transform us” (Nicolas Abraham & Torok, 1972/1994:127). Introjection, to follow Abraham and Torok, leads to psychic growth, whereas incorporation perpetuates encrypted deadening silence: “Swallowed and preserved. Inexpressible mourning erects a tomb inside the subject” (1972/1994:130).

A tomb you became witness to?

How can I possibly answer you? Is there an answer that pays attention to precarious and ambiguous knowledge? Abraham and Torok seem categorical, mechanistical even, and, while arguing for an enlarged temporal and spatial matrix within which they attempt to locate transgenerational transmission of trauma, they overemphasize the specificity of ‘transmission’, with the singularity of a sender, the one whose onus it is to ‘transmit’, so to speak, and the receiver/s of said transmission. In suggesting that unconscious processes are transmitted from parent to child, Abraham and Torok operate from the premise of bounded individuated subjectivities – a foreign presence, passing on to the child the parents’ original trauma. Advancing along those lines, what ‘transmission’ equally fails to describe, I suggest, is the intersubjective reciprocity by which sender and receiver are enmeshed in processes relating to trauma. And, furthermore, is there not also that in us which has never been

in or of either of us? The Other as wholly Other? Butler's (2005:83f) 'enigma', which "abide[s] with me as my own familiar alterity, my own private, or not so private, opacity"? Derrida, as quoted by Kirkby (2006:466) drives this very point home: "If I succeed 'normally' in the process of introjection then I am untrue to the Other, the Other simply becomes myself, and it's a way of remembering the Other by forgetting the Other. The Other becomes part of myself and I have a narcissistic relation to the Other inside myself".

Can we conceive of a way of mourning where the Other is not lost?

Against the one where "each single one of the memories [...] is brought up [...], and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" (Freud, 1917/1964:245)? And does Freud's trajectory not run counter to the one we developed before, the one which gives the lost their unmitigated due? We seem to circle endlessly around a theme which has defiance of certitude written into its very fabric. "In Derridean mourning we honour the otherness of the dead and our attachment to them; we do not abandon them and substitute another in their place" argues Kirkby (2006:464). Derrida seems to layer loss of the other, pentimento-like, by keeping the other inside without appropriation – they shine through in their otherness - without falling prey to the seeming reductionism of Freudian theory.

The interweave of loss and otherness... (Pause).

Are the words we speak in the wake of someone's loss not always already given over to an engagement with alterity? The death of an other bears witness to an insurmountable relational shift, because the other becomes Other through her death, an unimaginable finitude. "One must always go before the other. [...] One friend must always go before the other; one friend must always

die first. There is no friendship without the possibility that one friend will die before the other [...], their friendship will have been structured from the very beginning by the possibility that one of the two would see the other die, and so, surviving, would be left to bury, to commemorate, to mourn" (Derrida, Brault, & Naas, 2001). Loss and mourning is written into our relationality. Absence is written into the very fabric of our subjectivity. 'Loss and otherness' you say. The other is always already there. Derrida (2001:217), in his eulogy to, or about, Lyotard asks this very question: "But how can the survivor speak in friendship of the friend without a "we" indecently settling in, without an "us" incessantly slipping in?" And yet, does such pronunciation suffice in the name of 'justice'? And whose justice does it serve? And is the abolition of a 'we' not equally unjust?

And ghosts, what are the ghosts? Are ghosts the reminders that there is something rotten...

In the state of Denmark? The ghost of the king appears to Hamlet – the apparition of ghosts could be considered "a breaking through of that which was occluded in history" (Frosh, 2013:52). Despite all marginalization and foreclosing, the ghost is a timely reminder that we are unequivocally connected to and with death and the dead. They are, if you will, forceful yet ephemeral prompts of our own historicity, and hence our socio-cultural embeddedness.

So we mourn ghosts?

No, ghosts are signs; they make visible a gap, a fissure; they point their fingers at ungrieved loss, "sustained by no regard, no testimony" says Butler (2010:15). She continues: "Grievability precedes and makes possible the

apprehension of the living being as living, exposed to non-life from the start.” Our finitude is written into our being, and needs an intersubjective testimonial framing for our life to matter.

And for the loss of life to matter?

Yes, and for the loss of life to matter. “Mourning” says Leader (2009:8) “requires other people.” It is inscribed into an unconscious social codex which privileges an overt registration of absence, through rituals or eulogies, for example. A ‘testimony’, as Butler would say. Derrida’s (2001:214) exemplary collection of texts marking the deaths of his friends inevitably contain references to his difficulties in speaking death: “I feel at such a loss, unable to find public words for what is happening to us, for what has left speechless all those who had the good fortune to come near this great thinker” he declares in the wake, or maybe at the wake of Lyotard’s death. ‘Public’ words! Silence is the antithesis to what needs to take place, irrespective of whether we favour orthodox Freudian or post-Freudian theories or locate ourselves closer to intersubjective relationality. Articulations of loss bring me closer to *what* I have lost in the one I have lost, without either losing myself in the other or losing the other.

And how would one achieve such delicate differentiation?

Kirkby (2006:469) suggests a model drawn from Derrida which “offers respect for the (dead) Other as Other; it allows agency to the mourner in the possibility of an ongoing creative encounter with the Other in an externalising, productive, future-oriented memory.” Mourning could hence be read not as an iterative attachment to a past but as an iterative evocation of a past made visible in the present (Frosh, 2013). And maybe that is the nub – that our

attachment to what is lost should prevent a complete appropriation, or introjection, to an extent that the gaps, which loss inevitably leaves behind, are smoothed over and become untraceable. Khanna (2008:51) warns us “of not putting trauma to rest, but allowing it to become something critical: to acknowledge the impossibility of mourning it or working through it, to not justify anything through it but to allow for a stance without alibi, and indeed without dignity to open up possibilities of critical agency and perhaps of trenchant critique.” (Pause).

A stance without alibi (Pause).

I read Khanna as a warning against those processes that foreclose further investment into our contextualized historicity. Does it suffice to call upon marginalized voices, ghosts even, given that in calling upon their voices we have already begun a process of re-appropriation? Without alibi, we stand defenceless, ethically naked – is this the position from which we can begin to engage with what needs to remain uncalibrated? And are we not always already implicated? “Colonialism not only oppressed its victims; it also stole their past, making it unmournable. The consequence is an encrypted thing that acts like a hole in history; something imagined and felt as absent, but denied being, a never-have-been that continues to haunt the present” (Frosh, 2013:54). I would suggest that the ‘hole’ could be seen as an ever present reminder of loss, a perpetual frame against which notions of postcolonization could be gauged: whose agency is evoked in the prefix *post-* or, is this the alibi which obscures critical agency? I am in no doubt that colonialism attempted to obliterate the basis from which oppressed peoples could ‘give an account’ (Butler, 2005) of themselves, by subjugating their subjectivity into a hegemonic

canon of colonized/colonizer. What was lost in the process remained at a loss, “wiped out so thoroughly that even its loss cannot be known” (Frosh, 2013:55). Postcolonial hauntings attest to those gaps, which, I suggest, cannot be filled by calling upon empty rhetoric.

Why do you assume that commemorative gestures are empty?

Because they mostly are. They are, as you rightly say, *gestures*, or ‘manner of deportment’ (Oka) and have little bearing on a relationality that is not predicated upon a binary polarity. Are these gestures not often expressions of shame or guilt, which rarely challenge the contextual framework within which colonization took place? Do such practices not somehow legitimize rather than problematize the given of a social reality? And, before you ask, no, I do not know how to mitigate the pervasive undercurrents running through notions of post-colonialism or post-imperialism. Suffice to say, however, that the processes by which we externalize loss do not need to foreclose iteration, on the understanding that “certain violent histories, individual or collective, will forever remain beyond repair and unforgivable” (Schwab, 2010:105).

There is that which can never be forgiven. (Pause) I am thinking of our shared history. (Pause).

(Pause). What is ‘that which’ but “the most perniciously inhuman form of the enactment of the myth of Western civilization’s superiority”(Schwab, 2010:72)? (Pause). And should the enormity of Germany’s atrocities not impose an obligation on us - an obligation towards collective grief, an ethical commitment without ‘alibi’ towards those violated in its context? In that sense, the pervasive silence in Germany following the Shoah could be understood as a defensive mechanism not only to the trauma of insurmountable losses, but

also to shame, to be called to account to a 'collective responsibility'. "Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear. Thus, grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters" attests Butler (2010:14). Loss...

Can be theoretically held between various, at times paradoxical, positions. Let me see if I can recall most of them: mourning as severance of libidinal attachment to lost object, mourning through introjection of the lost object, mourning in recognition of the lost object's ultimate alterity, melancholia as unassimilated libidinal desire, melancholia as preserved attachment to lost object, melancholia as encrypted lost object, melancholia as refusal by the lost object, melancholia as troubling the colonizing subject...

Enough! What we can possibly surmise is the complex heterogeneity that inflects the field within which loss, trauma, mourning, melancholia and ghosts can be theorized. Loss, as Leader (2009:56f) argues needs another to become mournable, "some kind of recognition, some sense that it has been witnessed." Such articulations or 'dialogues of mourning' enable a process whereby loss becomes not only mournable, but also re-presentable. Unmourned losses, on the other hand, foreclose symbolization, and return, so Leader (2009:81) "to haunt the next generation." The entry under *spectrality* in Lucy's (2004:111) Derrida Dictionary reads as follows: "**spectrality** You don't have to believe in ghosts to be affected by them. The ghost is a powerful figure, regardless of whether or not you credit it with some kind of actual presence." I have been left a legacy "of unbearable violence" (Schwab, 2010:3). Do you know what it is like to grow up in the wake of trauma and its vicissitudes? (Pause). Do you

know what it is like to shy away from the gaze of the onlooker, to appear lost to the world, to look towards a beyond?

(Pause)

When Leader (2009:72) asks, in reference to the enormity of losses in WW I, that “the surplus of the dead – and bereaved – was far more extreme and concentrated than in earlier warfare, and so profound changes were forced onto society. What sense would it make for a community to mourn each dead soldier when the corpses were hardly even countable?” my answer is unequivocal: How can ‘surplus’ be contained, without mourning and hence ‘containing’ individual loss? A death is a death is a death, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein. *(Pause)*. Ghosts continue to rupture the thin membrane covering my “own involvement in and transferential relationship to a history of genocide – even if it is from the distance of a second generation” (Schwab, 2010:10). Growing up has left indelible marks on me, growing up in the eradicated heartland of perverse and pervasive atrocities has defined my very being. I lived in exemplary silence, interrupted by utter mundaneness.

A collective silence?

A collective as well as an individual, or rather familial silence. Imagine a cauldron which bubbles ferociously yet whose surface belies its very nature, where the exposure or rupture would touch indiscriminately anything and anybody in its wake. The war generation attempted what was ultimately impossible: the fundamental repression of what it means to be accountable for more than six million deaths. Six million. On top of Germany’s own fundamental losses incurred through rapacious expansion warfare. “How, after all, can one mourn the loss of a few lives in one’s own family if your

people were guilty of trying to exterminate a whole other people?" asks Schwab (2010:75). Her question, similarly to the one posed by Leader, cannot mitigate the unbearable burden imposed on those who follow. Whose deaths haunt me? Those who have been left in gaps, without justice, without their rightful place, nameless. These legacies haunt me, irrespective of whether they pertain to collective or private trauma and losses – as “the processing of trauma and transgenerational haunting, even after collective histories of war and genocide, is always mediated through intensely private individual histories.” (Schwab, 2010:13). (Pause). I am reminded of Butler’s (2005:78) narration, that the “prehistory interrupts the story I have to give of myself, makes every account of myself partial.” And maybe this is it, maybe the growing unease I sense in all those evocative first-person accounts and deliberations into ghosts and hauntings, into trauma and mourning is that they often seem to be too categorical, too cohesive and coherent.

Even if they speak uncertainty?

I am aware of the paradox in attempting to write myself into trauma which, by its very nature, is barely graspable. But more than that, I am concerned that the voices I hear in those narratives belie their intrinsic messiness: “What we're talking about sure is awful but our narrative voice seems to have it all worked out” says Tamas (2009:3). But how can I work out what ghosts tell me, if I don't even know which voices I hear? Maybe I need to go back to the beginning – I need to go into the cracks and fissures, and begin to experiment with ways of listening to the ghosts, the hauntings of previous generations.

How do you do that?

That is, indeed, the question.

Three. Dear Departed: Knowing (about) Trauma

Edinburgh, sometime in the Spring of 2014

My Dear Departed

I recall with deep fondness the times we spent together in the kitchen. Latterly, I found myself often opening the door to your room, half-expecting to discover an almost imperceptible change in the way the curtains were drawn, for example, to the side, tied with the ribbon you had brought back from one of your journeys, but was never recompensed with the jolt that such marginal difference evokes. Entering your room now reminds me of loss, loss of immediacy in the way we spun stories together, and reminds me of stories I told myself, for I did not yet know who could be called upon to listen. Not yet – a temporal shift between what had been and what was to be calls up a gap, into which a different kind of knowledge slips. And it is maybe in those marginal spaces, those fissures, barely perceptible, that I begin to locate what turned out to be your last question. *How do you do that?* you asked me last time we saw each other, which I took as an inquiry into the ‘howness’, for is it not the pragmatic nature of any inquiry that we attempt to satisfy with the ominous question of ‘how’, rather than a shift marginally further along the brief question, arresting the emphasis on ‘you’?

I cannot say for certain if, what I consider at best a sleight of hearing, in the way that sentences always call for an act of interpretation, was caught by my inner ears, their hollow chambers suspended in the densest of bones, in a similar way to crypts guarding a past laid-to-rest, which, however, fails to be

tethered to a definitive past, and furthermore, in a laying-to-rest, or if, strangely attracted by the consequences such hearing might entail, I followed my unconscious desire to hear, yet possibly 'mishear' the intention of your question.

Were I to follow the latter, in the way that any academic investigation should not immediately foreclose conjectures on account of some 'mishearing', I would begin with a story about an 'I-ness' layered like gossamer filaments in and through what turns out to be but a possibility. When I narrate mere-ness, in the sense that what I purport to investigate is ultimately a supposition, albeit one which, were I to account for various analytical or psycho-social theories, has inflected those of us who have had the fortune (or maybe its opposite) to find ourselves in its grip, I do so under the proviso that what can be assigned to purported 'knowledge-claims' is ultimately of limited significance. The consideration under which an inquiry into ghostly hauntings could yield significant paradigmatic shifts is barely imaginable, yet to speak to a 'barely', in addition to 'mere-ness' and 'I-ness', sets in motion fleeting trains of thought, which pass, unencumbered by rigours of timetabling, each other, and change, in doing so, the topology of what is thinkable and unthinkable. So let me begin a tale already premised by an absence, which, by relative appearances, might well be considered almost irrelevant, yet which, for me, brought about the fragmentation of whatever I considered certain and secure.

Silence.

Silence. There exists a quality to the word which, depending on which side of an imagined binary I locate myself, has the propensity to arouse a gentle smoothing of troughs and peaks, a mellowing even, which Sarah Maitland

(2009:26) describes as “a sort of stillness of heart and mind which is not a void but a rich space.” I remain of the opinion that silence can arrest me in my mundaneness through interrupting the dovetailing of experience and meaning-making. When silence forges itself into the interstices, it allows for spatial and temporal expansion, a panoramic view, taking in adjacent vistas and forgotten demarcations.

And then, there is another silence, a different silence, in whose wake, and the signification of wake is less than incidental, darkness and despair condense significance to a tiny dot, invisible and unnoticeable even to those whose fate has planted them in its midst. Now you could argue, and I think you might not be alone in following such trajectory, that any investigation into the perfidious nature of silence needs to be carefully considered and attuned, an interjection to which I would most wholeheartedly agree. To do something in knowledge of its potentially detrimental outcome seems not only foolhardy, but plainly absurd.

Yet, what is the knowledge I call upon to draw me to this conclusion other than a means to curtail a curiosity of such intensity that **not** to act on it could only be regarded as foolish? What I ask for now is really just a suspension of judgement, which should, or maybe rather could, be passed after you have familiarized yourself with the impossibility of a story left untold.

My story is a story of silence, which, come to think of it, makes for an interesting opening, bearing in mind that such a story is ‘of’ silence, and not ‘about’ silence, yet is by no means a silent story. What I believe you can surmise from my amblings is the difficulty I had, and continue to have, in marking the terrain I seek to lay bare. Informed by an image, you might recall,

a haunting image, making a claim for attention, or rather, for attending to the striking significance in the way the little girl's head was turned outside the frame. There she was. There I was, but, if truth be told, I was really somewhere else. It is from this terrain that I gather the various strands that have so far informed my endeavour, under the proviso that anytime we gather strands in a fashion, such gatherings are but one of the multitudes of narratives, of sometimes contradictory or contra-linear nature, bound to a spatial and temporal contextuality. I take consolation in Arendt's (1998:97) suggestion that "action and speech [...] are indeed the two activities whose end result will always be a story with enough coherence to be told, no matter how accidental or haphazard the single events and their causation may appear to be." A ghostly story, laid before you through keystrokes executed in a particular way, at a particular time, discloses, to follow Arendt's (1998:179) argument "the 'who' in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is - his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide - [which] is implicit in everything somebody says and does. It can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity."

The impossibility of a story left untold - a story of silences, of mere-ness, I-ness, bare-ness, a story of trauma, of ghosts and hauntings, of gaps and fissures, of imagined whispers, cannot easily be condensed into the gleam of a singularly coherent structure, shining bright in a world which is more often than not utterly "vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct" (Law, 2008:2). I speak of gleam, as it were, in relation to research that strives for a neatly packaged verifiable, independent, rigorous end product, one that ultimately seeks to represent a slice of 'objective reality' (Alvesson, 2009) - devoid of those who dared to leave marks on its shiny

surface – in an endeavour of avoidance: polished to perfection by hands whose very imprint is a sign warranting erasure.

'I-ness' leaves marks, hand marks, affective marks, displays, what Bochner (2000:270) calls "the self on the page, taking a measure of life's limitations, of the cultural scripts that resist transformation, of contradictory feelings, ambivalence, and layers of subjectivity". Could you, in all honesty, imagine a text moving itself along, for is that not really the implication of research which is "not interpreted, deciphered, or translated" (Bondi, 2012; Koro-Ljungberg & Barko, 2012:256; Richardson, 2008)? And if we dismiss such stance on the understanding that texts, of which research texts are but one example, not only implicate a writer in her affective embodiment, but equally implicate her in a wider socio-cultural locatedness, it seems that what is dovetailed into such descriptions is an inherent heterogeneity.

Were you here, I imagine the question uppermost on your mind (!) might well be the one which concerns itself with clarity and linearity, a question I begin to cherish with something akin to glee, because in its immediacy I recognize joyful disobedience, or failure to comply. Do I run before I can walk? Maybe. Will I stumble? Possibly. But is that not partially the nature of research in which 'methodological cleanliness' (Law, 2008) encounters its own nemesis in that the field's topology cannot ever be charted in its entirety? What avails itself is to a large extent dependent on a 'seeking out' and utilizing a variety of tropes through which the 'it' under investigation could be – apprehended, ascertained, made substantive meaning of, re-presented... You might gather through my hesitancy that I fail to subscribe to the possibility of a comprehensive and definitive mapping, a mapping devoid of palimpsests, of

layered meanings, of contradictions, of absences, without wanting to evoke the black hole of relativism.

How do you do that, you asked me, how do you begin to listen to ghosts? While on first reading a linkage of spectres with linearity seems oxymoronic, in the sense that ghosts and hauntings rarely avail themselves in clearly defined spaces, on closer inspection, if 'inspection' is the term with which a questionable presence can be apprehended, an ambiguity can be felt in silenced spaces or places pertaining, as Derrida would have it, to a power whose very existence "comes precisely from not being able to choose between 'whether or not' – whether or not it is, for example" (Lucy, 2004:111). Writing into opacity undoubtedly creates sets of difficulties of which I am not yet aware. There it is, again – the 'not yet', as if I need to know before the act, the act of writing into a methodology which seeks to 'know' without knowing what can or cannot be known. "Writing" as Richardson (2008:1) says "is itself a method of inquiry that leads to new ideas—new concepts, maybe even theories. To engage this method one need only be willing to accept uncertainty for awhile (sic), and then take the risk of finding out things one didn't know – or even want to know."

Where to begin? In consideration to your question, may I suggest opening this methodological treasure trove to discover what, if anything, lies upmost? Through returning to what might have been an ambiguous 'mishearing', and in full awareness of an interpretive act called upon in the process of hearing, I commence in taking off the lid, so to speak, and slide myself into the methodology which favours unequivocally my own situated locatedness (Day, 2002; Reed-Danahay, 2002, 1997; Richardson, 2008; Spry, 2001). When

Arendt's (1998) 'hiding in complete silence' is not an option, what avails itself foremost is what Wall (2006:146) describes as "an emergent qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style, drawing on his or her experience to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon", a method, I would like to add, which aims to attend to the reciprocity of writings as carriers of/ carried by socio-cultural inflections. Such writings have been at the forefront of texts which value the contextuality of the researcher leaving her aforementioned marks, and hail its 'potentially provocative' (Gannon, 2006) way of thinking in social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ellis et al., 2011). Denzin's (2006:422) evocative stance that "ethnography is not an innocent practice. [...] Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study" pays attention to our situated agency. But is Denzin's addendum enough, does it suffice to 'enact the worlds' without due considerations of who is included in such enactments, and what might ultimately be exposed in or of the 'worlds' within which we are located? To carry the thought further, and in alignment with Della Pollock (1998:75), who wants "to explore some of the ways what we have come to call 'performative writing' [...] by not recovering reference to a given or 'old' world but by writing into a new one", can autoethnography deliver on Pollock's accounts? Can autoethnography truly extend beyond the solipsism of an 'auto', even in its minimal form, as *auto*-ethnography, so to speak, (linking the post-classical Latin term of 'self, oneself, one's own' framed within the 'ethno' – the study of peoples, cultures (Oka)), and begin not only to trouble the very premise on which such research is based, but equally challenge "routine representations of social/performative life" (Pollock, 1998:75)? Of course, I do hear Rolling's (2004:549) definition of autoethnography as "a methodology that questions the

authenticity of the voice that tells of an essential self", but fail to be persuaded of its value as overarching methodological panacea.

What is so deeply troublesome about the 'auto', you might ask, apart from what can often be taken as a presumption of an unambiguous subjectivity, rather than one which is iteratively performed and intersubjectively constructed? Furthermore, is it enough to declare a decentring of the authorial 'I' without attending to the sedimented ground made up of densely-layered further reductive assumptions? It stands to reason that an unambiguous subjectivity pays heed to the privileging of a particular situatedness which locates me (ethnographically) at the interstices of academies, their prevailing normative research hegemonies, and the troublesome notion of context-independency in the search for true and objective knowledge. But is the notion of 'auto' sufficiently implicated in what it shies away from, the Other, if you will, in all its heterogeneous serendipity: in my case, a first generation post-war German woman, living in a country considered 'enemy' during her parents' pivotal years, whose ghostly hauntings and residual trauma transmitted through previously silent or silenced generations yield to an embodied need to write not in order to know but in order to inquire into a possibility? It, frankly, does not suffice to be assured – on my limited understanding that in the end all assurances are nothing more than placatory and, dare I say, futile gestures – of autoethnography's procedural sense of a subjectivity and its iterative attempt to extend towards a beyond, without bearing its own solipsistic foreclosure. And if assurances do not suffice, where do I go to from here?

Furthermore, where do I go to in my search for writings which do immediately contest themselves in their claims to knowledge as foregone conclusion? Hamera's (2011:318) notion that knowledge is 'unfinalizable', "that there can never be a last word, only penultimate ones," articulates something around the idealized finitude of discrete claims. Nothing, nothing can be foreclosed, after all, because "the limit of experience and self-understanding subverts any attempt of narrative unity and coherence", so Jackson and Mazzei (2008a:303) contend. But, I ask you, how does one square the circle of writing continuously ambiguous subject positions invested in inconsistencies, paradoxes, shifts and failings without succumbing to the lure of tidiness and certitude, or similar ways of reductive representations; how does one write texts "wrapping themselves around each other in conflict, need, passion, necessity" (Pollock, 1998:94), if not as "writing that unfolds with an insistent fear of its own representations, [that] often moves 'nervously' on the page, slips around" as Pelias (2013:400) reminds me? May it be in such 'wrappings' that I seek barely audible traces into narratives marked by absence, criss-crossing shifts in perspective between those who are, who have or had been, and those who were never to be; that I begin to seek a performatively-imbricated methodological possibility, as a way of attending to the 'betweenness' (McKenzie, 1998) rather than the discreteness of trauma, silence and ghosts?

How do you do that, you asked me, how do you listen to ghosts? How do I, indeed, begin to listen to them? Were you here now, you would have heard by my intonation the ambiguity around which I continuously hesitate to position the declaration of an 'I', so aptly described by Butler (2005:74) as "besieged from the start by an enigmatic alterity that makes the elaboration of an 'I' a persistently difficult achievement." The difficulty arises partially out of what

Tamas (2009) calls 'loss of certainties', which, like Gannon (2006:477) suggests, "destabilize[s] the authority of the self who writes and knows himself or herself as a discreet and autonomous subject". What Gannon attests to is the inherent paradox of demanding an authorial subject position, the 'I', say, who stories "the body and memories of the autoethnographic writer at the scene of lived experience" (2006:475). Such temporal and spatial divergences trouble a linearly constructed continuity of an authorial definitiveness, or what Atkinson calls the "subject of interior subjectivity" (2013:28), in laying bare the necessary disjuncture between experience and re-presentation. The necessity arises, I suggest, not solely by reframing an immediacy into a linguistically mediated and contextualized text, but also by attending to the discourses available to invest myself into such frameworks. To speak an 'I' is, in short, nothing but contentious, yet, equally paradoxically, speaks to an inherent experiential perpetuity – as subject engaged in moving her fingers along the keyboard right now, constructing words and sentences, attempting to attend to certain questions, moving in a linear fashion from the left to the right side of a computer screen, all the while almost obliterating ghosts from view.

Can you forgive me for being vague, for attempting to tether my thesis-writing subjectivity onto the possibility of becoming, rather than onto a binding proposition? The adjusting shift from the supposed rigour of methodological certitude towards a mere nuance might appear foolish, and, possibly - even likely - unnecessary. And yet, the dictate of the deeply troublesome *auto* does rub against this text, rubs against me in its demand to pay heed to articulations around a self, premised on an 'I' irrespective of its instability or inchoateness, rather than a 'we' with its inflection of 'more than' in all its relational complexities. The sentiment aligns itself easily with Spry's (2011:506)

suggestion, that “in writing this chapter [...] I find a multiplicity and accountability in the performative-I, and a felt sense of liminality, of circularity, of in-betweenness [...]. Different from an ethnographic-I, this is a troubled, sensual, contingent embodiment of *communitas*.” After all, where else but in the littoral space can I begin to engage with those who speak “in the interstices of the visible and the invisible” (Gordon, 2008:24)?

The proverbial methodological chest has been partially unpacked and yields, on closer inspection, not only other layers warranting attention, but leakages into and out of aforementioned fields, for ghosts and hauntings rarely avail themselves without opaqueness. Such is the nature of my inquiry that at present nothing seems to be easily containable, and frankly, I would not want it any other way. ‘And how do you intend to proceed’, I hear you ask, urgency clenching your lips tight. ‘Easy, easy’, I would answer, not easy as in effortless, but with ease, in awareness of the impossibility of knowing where to arrive at: “I don’t know where this is taking me” says Wyatt (2013:167). I, too, begin this inquiry out of an embodied knowledge, a photographic catalyst, as it were, straining to speak and/or be heard against the grain of what needed to be kept at bay or, simply, repressed. I make attempts, many attempts, to grasp onto stories that bind “the space between two worlds, between love and loss” (Holman Jones, 2011:323), only to shy away from holding too tightly, from squeezing too firmly. Yet I know, if I ever know anything, that, in a similar fashion to Spry (2001:708), performative writings (and autoethnographies) are informed by “the body as the site from which the story is generated.” The ‘body’, my body, is hence not solely the locus through which I “recognize[e] and interpret[...] the residue traces of culture inscribed on [my] hide” (Spry, 2001:711), but locates me viscerally on a point in a particular temporal and

spatial matrix. So far, so very autoethnographic, you may well muse, and I would smile and almost silently mutter that I told you so. Yet is what I propose as a 'performatively-imbricated methodological possibility' not similarly bound, and in that sense nothing more than a convoluted way of guaranteeing the inscription of alterity into the text? Can I tether the bindings onto what has been lost, what has become intangible, barely imaginable, only to surface again through "securing absence with the substitutional presence of words" (Pollock, 1998:82)? I don't know. Of course, "not knowing does not stop you from looking for who and what is gone, for writing in and over lost texts" (Holman Jones, 2011:331). I am trying to understand, you see, in how far the very text you read right now does not already herald some sort of foreclosure of curiosity, even if, or possibly because it presents itself as a continuous move between relative imponderables, or shifting reconfigurations of uncertainty. And if that were so, have you slipped through my fingers, have I lost you as well?

I alluded in the beginning of my letter to a curiosity of such intensity that not to follow its trail would be impossible. You could rightly argue, of course, that the term 'trail' implies an a priori, in that there has been something/someone whose marks have been left 'on my hide', and whose traces I am only just beginning to recognize as such, let alone make sense of (yet!). Ghosts do leave trails, ask something of me, I think, if only to follow them and see where they take me. Listening, hearing, speaking, looking – trails become the means by which I begin to recognize ghostly presences, but, paradoxically, it is in the absence of any noise that their presence becomes most apparent. Ghosts appear in silence. In silence. What methodological device can I conjure up to

grasp at fleeting hauntings through the silences with which they seem to make themselves known?

What appeared at the onset as a methodological chest seems to disappear in front of my eyes, as if the way the walls of said chest are held upright is solely determined by what is contained within, and as soon as I apply a specific methodological framework to the investigation, I fail in adhering to its parameters, so that I, ultimately, end up with a deconstructed mess! Is my suggestion read as willfully arbitrary when I argue that it does not suffice any more to embed myself wholeheartedly in autoethnography, even if, as Gannon suggests, in “autoethnography the subject and object of research collapse into the body/thoughts/feelings of the (auto)ethnographer located in his or her particular space and time” (2006:475)? I long for words and writings which trouble clear-cut demarcations between subject/object, between body/thought/feeling, despite Gannon’s reassurance of collapsing dichotomies. But, I hear you ask, tell me about ways in which these ‘troubles’ could be re-presented, and I would answer with a slow rise of my shoulders as if to say – See? I told you its complex, complicated and confusing, isn’t it?

And yet, to follow Pollock (1998:86), “performative writing does not project a self, even a radically destabilized one, as much as a relation of being and knowing that cuts back and forth across multiple ‘divisions’ among selves, contexts, affiliations”... Back and forth – akin to one of the paradoxical positions I continuously encounter in that the way I write myself into a text is enmeshed in otherness – a ‘knowledge’ arising from particular feelings, thoughts, always situated, always embodied, always socio-culturally contextualized, and through that very token always imbued with what is not

mine. And yet, this is also the site through which I continuously re-configure myself, and by doing so, re-configure what is other. Butler (1997:28) puts it so eloquently when she argues that “the desire to persist in one’s own being requires submitting to a world of others that is fundamentally not one’s own. [...] Only by persisting in alterity does one persist in one’s ‘own’ being.”

What I am at pains to offer is related to the problematic ways with which our emerging subjectivities are continuously undercut, a pain not unlike the one I encounter in negotiating, and sometimes failing, complex interrelationalities, because the pronunciation of ‘I am’ becomes contested territory as soon as it is uttered. Were you to ask me if my query on the notion of self with as much coherence as necessary to write a thesis on trauma, ghosts and silence is not really also a distracting device, I would vehemently shake my head and ask you to concede that the idea of writing spectres from a questionable or troublesome subject position would challenge anybody. Any body. My body - and with it a return to an embodied sense of unease in relation to a “notion of the self which often goes unexamined”(de Freitas & Paton, 2009:484). This is, in the words of St Pierre (1997), a ‘dilemma that will not go away’.

In circling round what cannot be overarchingly premised, I give way to a process without an immediate set of resolutions. My circling is a substantive part of my inquiry, a way of writing and shifting without a definitive endpoint in sight. St Pierre (1997:408) calls it ‘nomadic inquiry’ (with a nod to Deleuze), as a way of “deterritorializ[ing] spaces in which to travel in the thinking that writing produces.” Writing in this way is as much product as process, and follows St Pierre’s meanderings into the text. But does such inquiry not extend itself beyond the demarcation of ‘thinking’? What I suggest now could be read

as an overarching premise with which a fluid subjectivity iteratively performs herself, so that the written text can function as a temporary 'resting place', a refuge, say, a con-figuration amongst the myriad of other ones available at any given time. The function of writing is hence also always a means of becoming subject, in the way I attempt myself on this page, this 'fabrication', to follow Butler (1999:173 italics in original) who argues that "such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means."

My 'methodological' chest has broken its boundary, collapsed around the impossibility of containing or restraining. What started off as an inquiry into mere possibilities has turned into a topological evaluation of ruins – the "ruins of traditional epistemology and methodology, [...] and sometimes paralyzing complications that have no easy resolution" (St.Pierre, 1997:404f) The appropriateness of the term 'ruins' runs like bitter-sweet liquor through my thoughts, seeps out of the story which cannot be left untold, and dissolves the margins of my so-called treasure trove of methodological wonders. And so my fingers continue the keyboard-dance, its rhythm dictated by the slowness or fastness of processes I barely, or maybe, rarely capture in the words which appear right now. Writing continues to be the sustenance through which I negotiate ruins, even methodological ones; I am impelled towards the practice of writing not solely because I don't know any other way, but because I don't know.

What knowledge can be gained from such unknowable position, you might ask, to which I would answer that your question is questionable on account of its dismissal of what cannot yet be known. I fail to recognize the relevance in locating myself on the trajectory between the Scylla of overarching knowledge claims and the Charybdis of nebulous muddling without attention to the complex processes which underpin my practice. My practice, identified as a “moving labile event” by Gannon (2003:2). I imagine your smile right now, as if Gannon’s description puts your hesitancy at rest through offering sufficient stability in the possibility of an ‘event’ without falling prey to any pre-determined fixicity. The tangibility of such event, in my case a thesis, is arising out of creative writing practices, subjected to and becoming subject through discourses and relationalities. In short: without writing as inquiry there will be no thesis. Is such a premise not breathtakingly beautiful?

Were I to describe the elation I feel now, it would be akin to reaching a summit after a climb through clouds. I trust my self sufficiently to carry on climbing higher on a path which, at times, is barely visible. Boulders jut out, pose menacingly like guardians and resist any pushes. I squeeze myself into and through marginal gaps, one foot in front of the other, and find resting plateaus. Small stone circles draw me in, charcoal grey against the whiteness of the fog. I notice those circles not for the first time, but begin to take them in, make them my own, they “lodged [...] in my very bones” as St. Pierre (1997:410) says, and I begin to imagine people, engaged with each other, in thoughts, hands passing to hands, next to next to next, stones next to stones, stones on top of stones, gathering, building: building a matrix of theoretical constructs which trouble a unitary and unifying path to a supposed grail. Those who came before smoothed over some of the margins on positivist boulders, standing

erect and solid in the way of the ones who seek different, fluid, marginal, non-essentialist regimes of truths. Smoothly I can slip thereby through and into margins and fissures, into gaps in knowledge previously discarded as below standardized value quotient.

An investigation into something that has yet to be found. How distant is such a premise from what Kvale (1995:20) calls the “THE TRINITY OF RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, AND GENERALIZATION”? Capitalized it stands in its glory, an evocation of times when social science adhered unquestioningly to theories laid down by its positivist’s cohort, and while hegemonic declarations have somewhat abated now, a substantial contingent of social science research continues to be invested in “verification of knowledge as reflection of an objective reality” (Kvale, 1995:37). Does it suffice to refer you back to preceding paragraphs in my letter, where I briefly debated the complexities arising out of our procedural “space of plurality, a space-between-agents” as Dunne (2005:380) would have it, with its challenge to incontestable knowledge situated in ‘objective reality’? It might come as no surprise now to hear me speak about such contestation in almost categorical terms – besides, the irony is not lost on me, given that the term ‘categorical’ is premised on the Kantian imperative of reason as arbiter in all judgements. And yet, I do not want to dismiss outright notions of ‘knowledge’ and ‘validity’ only because the terms have been appropriated by what Gergen (2013) terms ‘empiricist foundationalism’. Lather (1993:674) calls on the notion of validity as “incitement to discourse”, as investigation into the construction – and deconstruction - of “both hegemonic and oppositional codes”, in order to ‘reframe’ or invent “counter discourse/practices of legitimation” (1993:676). How far are investigations into ghostly whispers, silences, hauntings

considered “counter-practices of authority” (Lather, 1993:677), I hear you ask, and, like before, I would almost shrug off your inquiry by asking you in turn if such counter-practices would not eventually assume their own normative hegemonies. We are always already implicated, or, as Lather argues, “it is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing – spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see what constitute power/knowledge” (1993:675). ‘Looking harder or more closely’ would transfer, I suggest, the emphasis back onto the dichotomies of viewer/viewed with its implied binary demarcations. When Richardson (2008:1) argues that her lens “is more like a crystal than an eye-glass, thereby inviting refraction upon refraction”, she disrupts not only any assumptions about irreducible knowledge claims, but offers shifting, fluid and contextualized possibilities “for categorizing, conceptualizing, and revisioning.”

Where have we got to, you may ask, as this question is never far from your mind, and, maybe more pressing, where do you need to go with your methodological framework in tatters and a thesis to write? Again, as before, the answer seems so blatantly obvious: not to be disheartened by a supposed lack of criteria which extensively drive hegemonic research, but to trust in practices which problematize the very conditions which grant them authority. And so I continue to repeat St. Pierre’s ‘circling’ of my methodological aftermath with its contested epistemological premises, and return to the opening of this letter, into the how-ness, into the ‘how do you do that’, and would like to begin with an address to you:

You are a fabrication, a stylistic in(ter)vention. You are as ‘unreal’ in our dialogic encounter as you are here, on this page, in this particular thesis.

Forgive me if my words shock you to what is often colloquially referred as the core, as if our subjectivity is densely compacted around a central more or less foundational or fixed part, and not, as I argue, continuously and fleetingly performed, constituted and contested through discursive practices. You might view me with suspicion now, consider me an 'unreliable narrator' (T. Murphy, 2012), as if my contestations come as a surprise: were I to tell you that my in(ter)vention of you is driven by an overarching desire to give space (and voice) to the Other, the gap and its re-conciliation between subjectivities, would you feel less wounded? You might reject the significance by which I write you onto these pages in order to articulate the "performative process of critical narration that resists notions of individual coherency" (Spry, 2011:503); you might consider my practice patronizing and insulting. Nevertheless, I call upon you as the literary device through which I commit myself to alterity.

We are all, as Britzman (1995:230) says, "textualized identities. [Our] voices create a cacophony and dialogic display of contradictory desires, fears, and literary tropes that, if carefully 'read', suggest just how slippery speaking, writing, and desiring subjectivity really are." Research that attends to such inconsistencies, incoherences, heterogeneities makes visible the "dialogic processes involved in making meaningful connections with what is studied," hence "the use of imagination as part of these dialectic processes is key in qualitative research" (Bresler, 2006:58). My imaginings of a 'you' as interlocutor become the means whereby I shuttle between various refractions or reflections, in search of phantoms, spectres, and hauntings. You are, if you will, my tenuous link to what or who has been absented, silenced.

You might have guessed by now that your appearance is also an indicator for some of the methodological complexities which overarch the collapse of any epistemic certainties, in particular around the 'subject/object dichotomy' (Butler, 1999) with its ensuing knowledge claims. While I do not wish to propose that the evocation of the/a 'you' in this text necessarily and fully interrupts the hegemony of authorial voice, it nevertheless troubles its coherence and legitimacy; I suggest to think of it as part of the previously-mentioned 'wrappings' by which homogeneity and certitude are destabilized and articulated. After all, "the goal of a dialectical interaction is not a greater understanding of existing meanings and interpretations. Rather, it is the actual reconceptualization of those meanings" (Sawyer & Norris, 2009:129f). Who is feeling, thinking, speaking, and writing – these questions invite us to query "our own premises [...]. What can I know? How do I know what I know?" (Bochner & Ellis, 2003:508). Without doubt writings which paradoxically ground themselves in uncertainty shift the "borders of research orthodoxy [by] using explicit transgressive modes of expression and representation to question the exclusion of art, performance, and aesthetics in the constellation of knowledge" (Bochner & Ellis, 2003:507). Your evocation here on this page hence not only attends to familial and intimate silencing, but also to methodological absences, in that it speaks performatively to performative intersubjectivity.

If I can remember correctly, ruins have an insidious way of germinating seeds long held tight in compacted soil, and why should, what I above called my methodological aftermath, be any different? Whether what I propose is called 'arts-based inquiry' (Estrella & Forinash, 2007) or 'art as inquiry' (Bochner & Ellis, 2003) or 'aesthetically based research' (Bresler, 2006; White, 2011) or

'research at the boundaries between social science and the arts' (Davidson, 2012) or 'critical arts-based research' (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012), the diverse nomenclature articulates the importance of art as a specific research-driving component.

Imagine:

1997. The doors into the small sculpture studio of the Edinburgh College of Art in Lauriston Place open silently, I enter hesitantly, glance furtively along the lines of art students. The waiting crowd is sufficiently dense for me to slide into. I shuffle to the back.

2001. I touch the doors to the studio, run my fingers over almost imperceptible grooves left by the many who came before me and who indubitably will come after. This place, these people, these materials, stone, iron, lead, graphite, have become as much home as any one I have known. I learn to speak another tongue, caress through visceral materiality what I cannot say in words, draw myself into mad frenzies and let ghosts fly. I leave with a smile.

I have always held on to a language that offered flights of signification, of which this thesis is one example. Granted, the linearity of letters on this page, the carefully placed margins, commas, full stops (which I try to learn to be fond of but often fail to consider fully, intrusive as I find them, interruptive even, stopping me in my tracks, setting boundaries!) offers a different kind of tactility to the one I drew, and drew on. Would it be apt to describe my word-lines in terms of artistic production, as drawings even, "artistic renderings [which] generate imaginative possibilities" (Pelias, 2013:398)?

When White (2011:150) says that "the point of any writing, after all, is to be convincing", I counter his proclamation with a bold '?'. Irrespective of ethical

implications and of what might be gained, how could I 'convince' you of being a fabrication without turning my argument back to the contentious formulation of the subject, any subject. Are we not all, in that sense, fabrications? I shy away from acts of writing that might appropriate otherness. When unutterable experiences collapse under the burden of words, will you come to my aid in calling up ghosts without the supposed rigour of 'convincing' rites of writing?

Where does that leave me/you/us/this thesis? What have I not yet (!) spoken about, not because it is by no means irrelevant but because it has not yet appeared on the margins of thinking through the implications of performatively-imbricated writing as inquiry, writing that is "filled with longing for a lost subject/object that has disappeared into history and time" as Pollock (1998:84) suggests?

Allow me to unravel a thread which has become more noticeable while rereading the last paragraphs, in fact, its absence thus far is all the more astounding as it infuses my argument of fluid intersubjectivity. When I shocked you above in the harsh proclamation that you were but a mere fabrication, I followed some of Butler's (2005:81f italics in original) compelling writings into the nature of an 'I' coming into being, the 'founding scene' as she would have it, in the sense that "in the beginning *I am my relation to you*, ambiguously addressed and addressing, given over to a 'you' without whom I cannot be and upon whom I depend to survive." I depend on you to survive. "I am mired, given over, and even the word *dependency* cannot do the job here." You might hear through my words another kind of urgency, one that slides along towards an ethical interpellation of a 'self' in relation to 'other'.

My writings, or my words, sentences, here on this page, are never complete, or completed, because in order to tell them, I give over to what is not of me, or as Butler would have it, reconcile myself to be “haunted by that for which I have no definitive story” (Butler, 2001:27). Do you hear the murmurs of ghosts, the registration of something or someone at large, the tenuous link to a theme which I cannot let go of? I imagine you smiling right now, knowing enough of me to make allowances for my inability of letting go, another tedious ‘dog-and-bone-story’, which has played its very own part in our relationship with each other. There is no letting go of you, for how could I configure a ‘self’ without a ‘you’ in whose presence such configuration finds its ethical inscription?

Pressing for attention in the methodological pentimento of my writings is the ethical frame through which I ground myself, knowing that the proverbial ground is rarely more than an intersection on the forever changing temporal and spatial matrices. And yet, despite or maybe because of such an inconclusive subject position, I feel drawn towards an ethics which extends beyond the one that can be traced back to the Enlightenment and its reverence for universal truths, one that searches beyond “guidelines, practices, [...], politics, protocols, proformas” (Halse & Honey, 2007:339f). How can I possibly make claims grounded in essentialism or pure reason when I fear their heavy weight would conflate any flights my ghosts and hauntings might make? And what about you, the one who has never left me, can you be slotted into a quantifiable codex? What kind of ethical framework might begin to address this complex interplay between various subjectivities?

I want to call on another 'You' now, one whose 'Y' is capitalized, and hence stands somewhat apart from the familiarity of my primary addressee. I call on You, the reader of these words, these sentences, this thesis, towards whom I bear responsibilities. Levinas (1984:194) understands "responsibility as the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity," where the very notion of subjectivity can only ever be considered in an a priori of responsibility. Responsibility for the Other seems to be, in Levinas' terms, an ontological presupposition; Other hence precedes being. Who is this 'Other', if not ultimately reconcilable to a slightly different version of a self, a subjectivity intended as 'Same', if you so wish? Against Davis'(1996:3) "otherness, or alterity, [which] appears as a temporary interruption to be eliminated as it is incorporated into or reduced to sameness", Levinas' Other is irreducibly Other. It is an Other in singularity and uniqueness, non-appropriable, because "such a reduction amounts to a kind of subjective colonialism, where all the other's desires are reduced to the desires of the "home country", the self" (Nealon, 1997:129). What is it about Levinas' Other that renounces such solipsistic concerns?

I grapple around Levinasian notions of subjectivity, responsibility, ethics and the Other without concrete beginnings with which to unravel the threads informing his body of work; how infuriatingly appropriate in view of my methodological aftermath, you might well think! And yet, I am inclined to persevere with fragments which attend to the fragility of my ghostly writings, modes of thinking through what it means to consider "subjectivity [...] not for itself" (Levinas, 1984:194). In any case, is the very notion of a subjectivity 'for itself' not oxymoronic, given that it is always embedded into what is not of me? The possibility of the subject can only ever be located in the matrix of what

Butler (2005:8) calls “a social temporality”, in the interweave of the subject and its subjection to the Other.

“Die Welt des Daseins ist Mitsein”³ proposes Heidegger (1993:118), and it is in the impossibility of being - without existentially being-with - that Levinas locates his ethics. I am because I am with - you, the other, another, the Other; and hence, to *be* is always already a carrier of ethical interpellation. “We share the world,” says Bauman (2000:84), “and so we willy-nilly affect each other’s lives; what we do or abstain from doing is not indifferent to the lives of others. That circumstance has already made us responsible for each other”. How can I take on what Levinas so astutely demands of me in his implications of responsibility for the Other, irrespective of any reciprocity? To whom am I responsible, if not to all and everyone? And are there not more, I hear you ask, those whose tangential flights have led to hauntings and ghosts, without whom this thesis would not even be written? How can I possibly foretell if my responsibility will be bearable? There you have it, questions over questions without inklings of a definitive nature, let alone resolution, as if I could possibly draw a tight boundary around ethical considerations, when fleeting subjectivities are anything but demarcated.

I continue to circle, in St. Pierre’s words, around ethics in the wake of a decentred and incohesive subject position, in the knowledge that any *wake* follows on from a loss, a loss of what I can ever know, or of what I might have known, yet “registered at levels that are not fully recoverable by consciousness” as Butler (2005:99) would have it. This, I assume, is part of the on-going dilemma around proclamations of a self in all her glorious

³ The world of being is being-with.

heterogeneity, let alone in consideration of, and responsibility to, Other's ultimate alterity. I imagine you here now, brows slightly contracted, as if what I have said so far leaves you bewildered, as if, in your puzzlement, you ask me to reframe those neat binary notions which set self against O/other. I cannot but bow my head slightly, and with a rather sheepish grin concede that you have a point, and yet, how can I not begin to think through ethical implications towards the O/other without its stranglehold on practices of dispossession and marginalization? The fundamental shift, from the O/other as subject to be rendered same, say, into the one which remains outwith the possibility of appropriation, marks my iterative indebtedness, irrespective of whether I take on such responsibility.

What, you may ask, can one make of these reflections, without addressing the implications of their meanings in the context of living and writing this life, my life, through such embedded interrelationality – as performative self, performing her dynamic relational engagement, or as the contested and contestable *auto* in ethno? To whom, to quote Speedy (2008:52) do “I consider myself permanently accountable”? Speedy's question sits uneasily: her *permanence* rubs against my post-structural base (the irony of liminality!) and fleeting, fluid subjectivities, let alone ghostly hauntings. And yet, what is readable here on the page is interlaced with permanence, because, unless I delete all and everything (and even then it is somehow retrievable), this text is text because of its permanence. I am, by the very process of writing, accountable, or in Levinasian terms *responsible*, regardless. Regardless of a subject position “inscribed and re-inscribed with discourses that the subject did not produce and that always remain, at least in part, opaque” (Davies et al., 2006:88). What a quagmire! I brood on relentless permanence in full view

of its paradox, as if my life depended on it, as if my writing is weighted with the yoke of desolation and ultimate failure.

When Levinasian parameters operate from what Butler (2005:86) calls the “primary scene, since it precedes and even conditions the spatio-temporal coordinates that circumscribe the ontological domain”, I remain wary of its incontestable, essentialist principles. And yet, by the same argument Levinas contests any assumptions which arise out of a primacy of sameness with its ubiquitous urge to denigrate unbridgeable difference. His Other falls outwith thought with its appropriation into the order of consciousness (Ziarek, 1993). As soon as I think Other, I fail Other. The yoke tightens...

In thinking through my failings, my inabilities of resisting the pull of appropriation - Other, other, You, you - I rub against other pulls - intrinsic moral principles, apprehended through reasoning and universal truth(s), or other matrices which could serve as blueprints for “ethical self-constitution” (Hofmeyr, 2006:114), in full knowledge (?) that the very notions of ethic and self are imploding. I feel disillusioned, harbour inappropriate positivist thoughts, wish for you and a magic wand, while writing ethics in the only way I know: fleeting, unsure, disruptive.

How can I indeed write myself into an ethics of auto-ethnographic performativity which problematizes and destabilizes its authorial construction, yet offer more than mere lip-service to deconstructive gestures? In marking my language in such critical terms – *mere* lip-service – I immediately seem to betray my own contestations around the fallacy of seeking veracity and certainty, while the above mentioned Scylla of universality teases the Charybdis of nebulous muddling. What I am left with

are messy feelings, straying around the imperatives of a *should* and the inability to do just so. "The ethical obligation of researchers [...], then, is to practice a form of inquiry as circumscription, drawing the uncertain contours of what we *do not* know without filling in those spaces with the litany of things that we *do*" (Burdick & Sandlin, 2010:354 italics in original). Were I to consider ethics under such proviso, I would not necessarily berate myself for my inability of constructing coherent arguments, given that as soon as I think, or speak, or write, residual matter seeks what Deleuze calls "line of flight" (1996), or what Freud might define as "return of the repressed" (1923/1961), those remnants of instability with allusions to what cannot easily be slotted into definite boundaries. I am rather inclined to think about ethics in terms of interruptions, contestations, and means of pushing and being pushed to the margins of what is known, unknown, unknowable, maybe never to be known. To write is always already a transgression into alterity, a colonizing act which demands more than proscriptive and prescriptive procedures; in writing you I write me, in writing ghosts I write parents, family, lives lived and to be lived, and death.

You were there, and now, now you are gone. My writing of you on these pages has been eclipsed by what shall never be again. Drawn into a relationship with other relationships, performed in accordance to a codex that spun as much on an axis of absence as of haunting presence. Never again? How I can speak to a 'never' even if I had a penny for every full-stop? Even if I could avert my ears, batten down the hatches, how could I abandon the little child whose image is branded into my cells? Always already other - long before I grasped what such sentiments really mean. Always other. And yet...

The winter you left behind has withdrawn its fierce claws, and a more lenient wind begins to breathe into open windows. I still miss you – even after all this time. When I open the door to your room now, it is without expectation: a glance, a smile, a closing. But - and here is the thing that keeps a flame alight - but when I walk on the red carpet, the ruby-red carpet, I imagine your toes burrowing into soft wool, remain and reminder in absence. 23rd September. A significant anniversary, a remarkable day, to be marked by, what do you think? - A celebratory glass of red wine? A stir around cooking pots? A chat over the kitchen table?

Four. Monday: Trauma, Silence, Words

Beginnings

There comes a moment in the process of writing, when various disparate forms should come together, not necessarily to cohere as a whole, but nevertheless align themselves with or link into the possibility of thematic containment. I re-read the sentence. I halt, feel torn between what I know of the conventions of academic writing with its implicit demand of a *'should'*, positioned in contrast to the ubiquitous nature of what Benozzo, Bell, and Koro-Ljungberg (2013:309) identify as the “flow of (dis)connected thoughts, relationships, interactions, and events in the context of research”, and the disjuncture of rendering “the unknown, deviant, and impossible” (2013:310) into a seemingly (causally?) defined concept. Familiar with the implications of tearing myself between demand and latent desire, I seek solace of sorts in what Richardson (2002:923) calls “writing as a method of inquiry” with its unpredictable and performative nature of becoming. I do so, in parts, because I am unsure in how far I can hold on to writings which, by their very nature, seem mercurial, and wedge them into a distinct conceptual frame. And I have been thinking of how to introduce the next chapter. How would it be, I imagine, to go back into the preceding chapters, resurrect the interlocutor, the wilful yet willing narrative partner I had fabricated, and try out a beginning like this:

Welcome back (Pause) - I have really missed you, you know.

(Pause) I feel slightly awkward now, sitting here with you again, as if we could just slip –

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- of course we cannot! Time has passed, and while I have been here working at my thesis, you have -

- hang on a minute. You seem to begrudge me my absence! Who was it, who did not take me into her methodology chapter? Not only did you barely acknowledge me, but then you tell me that I am "a fabrication, a stylistic intervention". How do you think I feel right now? And then you tell me you missed me?

I thought you could help me

Hmm

Please

Hmm. I think you evoke me only when you're stuck.

Please (Pause). You know, you might have a point. But stuckness or stickiness enforces a different kind of engagement, a waiting of what might or might not happen, without knowing its possible outcome.

I know that I don't know?

The dialogic form flows easily, almost too easily. It attaches itself onto a way of writing which gives poignancy to an overarching argument of intersubjective narrativity, not dissimilar to the way Tamas (2011; 2013) writes herself into a dialogic intersubjective frame. Her texts are evocative performative renderings, mainly drawing on genres like theatre or radio plays, and offer a creative polyphony of theoretical articulations. But the re-insertion of the interlocutor here seems somewhat clunky and unnecessary. "Form and content are inseparable" says Richardson (2002:923) and I wholeheartedly agree. It might be better, on reflection, to retain the dialogic form, yet to posit two characters in a therapy session (Tamas & Wyatt, 2013), and relink the psychoanalytic intersubjective ground back into the material of my thesis.

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Beginning No Two

Monday morning

(The sound of a door bell. A woman appears and opens a door)

Good morning (She smiles and shows Dagmar into a consulting room)

Oh hi, hi. Thank you. (Dagmar removes coat, scarf, shoes and lies down on a couch. The woman sits down in a chair)

So (Pause) *how are you?* (Pause)

For ages I would have said 'fine, fine' but now (Pause) it's much more complex, no, I am aware that everything ripples into further circles and I am muddled. You know that most of my days are spent writing this thesis, which needs to be contained somehow, and I have given myself 60 weeks to finish, and I still have so much to do and write and

Hmmm

And I know that I struggle, because I never think I can do it all, and this does not work either because what I need to address is method and the way I generate material and the concomitant task of letting the reader in to the way of how my stories came into being and I have barely breathed now and feel as if I deflate before I ever begin. So that's how I am (Pause).

Would it help to acknowledge that I am also a stylistic intervention? That I operate out of a frame which attends not only to the contestable notion of singular voice, but also to intersubjectivity?

Oh, for sure. I can barely maintain the fiction of coherence

And hence where we are at is really right in the middle

Muddle more likely

Right in the middle of your epistemological groundings and your theoretical underpinnings.

Quite funny, really, to fabricate a situation that positions you in an analyst's session, as if I had all the answers!

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Nothing funny about that, or do you see me laughing? I am somehow stuck between where I am and where I have to be.

What comes to mind?

Frustration, data, explanation, data, linearity, uncertainty, data, data, data... you might not know it, but I let you in on a secret: I have a memory stick. Isn't that funny? A tiny oddly-shaped plastic device, retaining photos, documents, writings, right at my fingertips, an aide-memoire to my increasingly fractured sense of what it is I need to do now. And then I read Delamont (2006) that "our duty is to go out and research the classic texts of 2050 or 2090 not sit in our homes focusing on ourselves" and I begin to think about the imponderable data I have been accruing and what Delamont calls lazy methodology, and I am anything but lazy and

And I stumble. The dialogic form has become superfluous; it has somehow run its course, I think. In the beginning of my thesis, I needed the inscription of the fictional interlocutor as relational other, who helped me bring my theoretical underpinnings alive; in dialogue, the continuous reflexive voice pushed me into the margins, interrogated me and the texts I drew on. It brought form to my ontological base in that it unceasingly interwove subjectivities. In the subsequent chapter, written in the form of a letter, I withdrew from the immediacy of dialogic voices. While I evoked the interlocutor's presence in that I commented on her absence, I made the choice of not giving her a definitive voice, not to let her speak overtly. By making the shift from the immediacy of direct speech into the more calibrated form of indirect dialogue, I sought to open myself to a way of writing which left spaces or gaps.

This is where I am now. I familiarize myself again with those gaps, fissures. I sit at my desk, sun streaming through skylights. It is a clear autumnal day.

Yesterday was different. I slept badly, waking during the hours of the wolf, those troubling hours which occupy the liminal space in between wakefulness and sleep, the phase of more death and births than at any other time. "I work the writer's graveyard shift" says Lee (2005:934). "Three a.m., I wake [...]. My mind buzzes with thought". The next day I am good for nothing. And then I wait, almost lie in wait. I wait some more. Because I somehow know that what is around me shies away from the cacophony, from the polyvocality of thoughts – ghosts show themselves not in what is obvious but in or through what is hidden, secreted away, silenced. "Silence is an opaque zone made of broken words, phrases just mentioned, disjointed speech, no words" (Benozzo et al., 2013:312). In writing into silence, I tap into what I know, have known for a long time: there were not many around who bore those silences with me. On reflection, I don't think there was anyone.

Ghosts appear in aloneness. They have an uncanny knack of disrupting the mundaneness of domesticity, like the photo of the little girl I rediscovered while folding laundry, the photo whose absent presence I evoke on these pages, that I cannot/will not let go off, even if it pulls me into a direction I barely want to re-familiarize my self with. Demand and desire – I cannot for the life of me figure out who demands what of whom. Mercury, that's what this amalgam is, seductive in its simplicity and treacherously deadly. Frosh (2013:17) soothes my angst-ridden explications: "There is something that we can relate to in it that is genuinely of ourselves and yet we cannot quite get there" he says, " – there is always something a bit wrong." I am not sure if this is really what lies at the heart of my inquiry, given the subliminal relationship I have with/to hauntings which somehow, almost, demand a due, possibly their due. Almost – a tease, a slippage into and out of liminality, the in betwixt.

Ripples and intersections. Ghosts appear when I don't think about them, when I 'cannot quite get there', they rise up on the wave of the return of what has been lying dormant in the unconscious.

The paradox in writing ghosts is that they seem to shy away from conscious thought, are elusive to language which begins to pin them down. I settle back into my chair, in awareness of the irony of dedicating a substantial part of my thesis to silences and ghosts, who, by their very fabric defy linguistic calibrations!

Let me begin *again*. *Again* – there it is, the four-letter word which offers itself out of kindness to my stammerings and stutterings. *Again*.

Ghosts

I am sitting at my desk, open a book, and begin to read.

OSWALD. But it wasn't. I soon realized that. I couldn't work any more. I wanted to start on a big new picture. But my skill seemed to desert me, I felt paralysed, I couldn't concentrate, I felt giddy, everything went round and round. Oh, I was in a terrible state! In the end I sent for the doctor... and I learnt the truth from him.

MRS. ALVING. What do you mean?

OSWALD. He was one of the leading doctors over there. I had to tell him how I felt. And then he started asking me a whole lot of questions that did not seem to have anything at all to do with it. I couldn't understand what the man was getting at...

MRS. ALVING. Well!

OSWALD. At last he said: there's been something worm-eaten about you since birth. He used that very word; 'vermoulu'.

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MRS ALVING [*tense*]. What did he mean by that?

OSWALD. I couldn't understand it either, and I asked him for a more detailed explanation. And then he said, the old cynic... [*Clenches his fist.*] Oh...!

MRS ALVING. What did he say?

OSWALD. He said: the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children.

MRS ALVING [*rising slowly*]. The sins of the fathers...!

OSWALD. I very nearly hit him in the face...

MRS. ALVING [*walks across the floor*]. The sins of the fathers...

I close the book; what I have just read calls me to attention, as in attending to the strata running through my thesis: the appearance of ghosts is dovetailed into silences which are interlinked with or born out of trauma's vicissitudes. These terms are interknotted to the extent that I cannot disentangle them, speak to them as if they were separable. I admit to failing to see them in their separateness. I admit to fail. I smile.

On returning to the brief extract of Ibsen's (2008:138) play *Ghosts*, written in 1881, I am reminded that ghosts re-present, as calling to presence, my forefathers' deeds, whose sins, I am inclined to think, have been to silence what Schwab (2010:1) calls "ineradicable legacies". This is not a jury sitting in judgement over the nature of sin. I do not want to sit in judgement over my father's sin(s), whatever it/they may have been, or indeed my mother's – I am writing this in acknowledgement of a barely tangible trajectory that began long before I was born, and whose endpoint remains, and will continue to remain uncharted.

I am struck by the ubiquity of experiences which would much later be held in terms of intergenerational trauma. “The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children” as Oswald declares can be made sense of in terms of Fraiberg et al’s (1975:387) ‘Ghosts in the nursery’, those pervasive “visitors from the unremembered past of the parents; the uninvited guests at the christening”. Psychoanalytic theory supports the argument that the ‘visits’ upon Oswald and the subsequent ‘terrible state’ can be understood in terms of traumatic reverberations, as Akhtar (2009:293) suggests: “The parental inability to mourn, coupled with a desire to protect the offspring from the dark shadow of persecution, results in all sorts of subtle and gross avenues for a transgenerational transmission of trauma”.

Might it be spurious to begin to think of Oswald’s description of his ailments or affliction in terms of what Breuer and Freud (1893/1956:6) conceptualized as early as 1895 thus: “Any experience which calls up distressing affects – such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain – may operate as a trauma of this kind”? And is such conceptualization not very similar to Oswald’s inability to work, ensuing paralysis, and lack of concentration? Was Ibsen merely tapping into the Zeitgeist of the late 19th century with its budding explorations into the nature of the mind? If the doctor Oswald sent for aligns himself with what later would be called psychoanalytic approach, the questions, on first reading, which “did not seem to have anything at all to do with it”, had everything to do with it, and add further layerings to narratives of trauma, silences, and ghosts. “I had to tell him how I felt” Oswald confides in his mother, in resonance of the more colloquial question of ‘*So, how are you?*’ in the therapy scenario above.

So, how am I? I wish I could say that I am fine, that I am not befuddled by something that keeps on pinching my ‘performative, poststructural’ murmurings. What did my angst-ridden analysand shout out of sheer desperation? *Frustration, data, explanation, data, linearity, uncertainty, data, data, data*, which, on first hearing, might poke fun at the difficulties I encounter at the moment. I concede that the alignment of data with linearity and explanation falls into a specific bracket which is rarely disputed in much of science, even social science, or what St. Pierre (2013:223 italics in original) calls the “*conventional humanist qualitative inquiry*.” She goes on: “The meaning and function of data depend on the meaning and function of a constellation of other concepts with which it is imbricated, for example, the concepts *reality, evidence, warrants, claims, reason, knowledge*, and, of course, *truth*.”

In speaking *data*, I intend to make a case in this thesis for knowledge which troubles classification and systemization, and, in doing so, refuses to yield to the dominancy of foundational epistemologies. My offerings are smaller, but by no means less relevant, and are identified, in the words of St. Pierre (1997:175) as “transgressive data – emotional data, dream data, sensual data”, to which I add ‘fictitious, that is, imaginative accounts, fictionalized accounts, and other flights of imagination’. My encounter with the photograph of the little girl, my re-encountering my self in the photograph, which was, and I would agree with Poulos (2009:47), ‘accidental’, demanded “a willingness to surrender to the creative, imaginative, spontaneous, apparently accidental signs and impulses that surge up and, from time to time, really grip us, take hold of us, call us out and throw us down, sweep us away, and carry us to places we may not have even imagined if we had tried to lay out a straight line to our eventual discoveries.”

I am 'taken hold of' by an image I am loath to curtail in processes whereby a Eureka moment of signification leads – possibly? ... necessarily? - to a significant foreclosure, a shutting down of curiosity, perhaps, or of inklings pertaining to the insidious ways ghosts seem to haunt. And so I remain, chose to remain in an almost indescribable and fragile enmeshment of memory and imagination, where feats of creativity are anchored in a methodology which favours possible and uncertain performative articulations over structure and coherence, working, in the words of St. Pierre (1997:176), "on the verge of intelligibility with no guarantee of liberation."

No guarantee of liberation – "This is the stuff of night mares", I wrote into my research diary more than a year ago, "of tearing into raw flesh which I had so carefully and laboriously tended to, in order not to feel what I felt as a young child. When I finally began to take in the image of the little girl, I did so bit by bit, with stolen glances like one looks at someone in the street whose appearance arrests one sufficiently in their unfamiliarity. And is it not in the brevity of those glances that the uncanny finds its foothold, and further lingering only cuts into deeply entrenched grooves? 'She looks so odd, so strange' one might think but never say. Her image is similar to those thousands of refugees whose faces bore witness to unspeakable atrocities.

I look unlike a four-year-old child, unlike the images I took of my own children. I can barely describe the photo now; eyes open yet vacant, staring out of the frame into space, head slightly tilted downwards. I hold a doll whose painted face draws in the viewer. It is the doll which makes contact, which looks at the camera, as if this is really her photo and the little girl is just an accessory. The doll's mouth extends into the rictus of an eerie semi-smile,

as if to say, 'see I told you so'. The juxtaposition could not be more capturing: a girl who by her very expression is deeply troubled, yet whose refuge out of the frame is pulled back by her creepy doll. I am unsure, and maybe never will know for sure, if my trouble arose out of the unavailability of my mother, whose life's trajectory has not been easy to trace.

And maybe this is the dilemma I continuously come up against, in that there is no clear line of flight I can chart in relation to my mother, no genealogical maternal provenances I can claim to belong to."

The process by which I feel myself enthralled by an image is accidental and unintentional; yet I seem to 'know' of a particular enfoldment into familial and historiographical matrices whose layers, I assume, have been instrumental in shaping my subjectivity. The use of data, like the entry into my research diary above, just adds another layer onto processes of ambiguous narrativization. What, after all, is data but a means of containing fluctuating accounts rendered into figurative language, imbricated with accident as much as with intent, imagination and narration of what can be considered real, intertwined with material in an enmeshment of subjectivities whose desire to fill and be filled speaks as much to absence as it does to presence?

And so I feel (smugly) safe in contesting the calculability of what often appear to be foregone conclusions in the "effort to separate, tidy up, cut, classify, contain, clean up, and simplify data" (Benozzo et al., 2013:311). Intrigued and beguiled by what Barad (2012:208) calls "stepping out into the void, opening to possibilities, straying, going out of bounds, off the beaten path – diverging and touching down again, swerving and returning, not as consecutive moves but as experiments in in/determinacy", I begin to feel slightly adrift, as if I

could/ should not stray too far. When data are the supposed bedrock on which research locates its exemplary base, the 'given' underpinning through which I construct my argument, the site of my deliberations, interpretations, analyses, into what void do I step if I foreclose conventionality, forego the "inherent limitation implied in a conventional understanding of the doing of research" (Mazzei, 2003:357)?

While I am quietly convinced of a certain righteousness with which I slide around and in between binaries, I cannot but notice the perpetual shifts between notions pertaining to steadfast interpretations and abject horror of their very implications. How fast do I "slip back into the comfort of spaces already arranged, secure, and coded" (Hofsess & Sonenberg, 2013:300). And, in consideration of such thoughts, what did I just do with/to Ibsen? Are my tentative interpretations not appropriations, drawing on 'data' fragments, "digging behind or beyond or beneath it" (MacLure, 2013:660)? I concede that psychoanalytic theory values and problematizes that which cannot be 'kept in bounds', that which 'strays', or 'extends beyond the margins'. Mindful of the paradox of critiquing the seeming fixicity of interpretative practices on the one hand while simultaneously buttressing my interpretation with a specific and defined theory, I take recourse in its own paradox, given that psychoanalytic theory is firmly grounded in what remains elusive to any theorization, namely the unconscious.

When words float, they are "so full of meaning that a single meaning cannot be self-evident, *given*" says St.Pierre (2013:224 italics in original). Of course, there is always more, always other, different, intangible – an abundance of words, meanings, resisting the primacy of representational certainty. But –

and there is always a *but* - is this text, or indeed any text, not also implicated in the notion of what new materialist writers critique as “‘representationalism’ that has rendered material realities inaccessible behind linguistic or discourse systems that purportedly construct or ‘represent’ them” (MacLure, 2013:659)? Is my writing here, on this screen, not in and of itself a means of re-presenting, as making linguistically available, what drives me, and my thesis, today, now? How else would I attempt to declare or perform myself in the perpetual foldings, unfoldings, and refoldings of embodied writing? I share in some of Lather and St.Pierre’s (2013:629) pleasures of being “able to turn to what has become possible in the sense of ‘lines of flight’ that open up in not having to over-attend to external pressures and developments”, yet I feel somewhat vexed in corralling my imaginations into such an ubiquitous frame of reference. If anything goes, does anything go?

Taking Flight

Today the sky stretches a blue tablecloth from horizon to horizon. The sun reminds me of a hole I burnt through my finest dress when I still wore best dresses. Yellow it is, I think, or maybe red. I am not sure any more. I am playing with matches: strike it, light it, hold it for as long as you can, take the charred bit and let the flame run its length, smell the sulphur, the almost burned skin, let the piece of wood nestle in your hand. That’s the idea. Who came up with it I cannot say. I guess it was H. There we are, the two, hunched over. Ok, watch me, I say, as the sparkle of the first strike fizzles, and the yellow flame slowly gnaws at the woody sliver. Little fingers, I have,

little hands holding fire, little fingers losing fire. A perfectly circular hole appears where the bulbous head of the match meets my dress. Oh no, I say, because - what can I say? I fold the dress into pleats, keep the holey bit tucked between my knees. No one will know, I tell myself, no one will know.

What is St. Pierre's '*given*', but that which is contained in my awe, wonderment, frustration, my want to escape from the confines of space, my hums and coughs, surreptitious glances upwards, smiles, my sniffles because I have come down with a stinking cold, my moving a few digits over the keyboard, forming words into sentences, in order to speak to some of what is '*given*' and to more of what is left out. Entangled in my body, through my body, with slices of memory, with the noise of my neighbour's keyboard, the elliptical way of writing, which, for the time being, has become my *modus operandi*, the smoothness of the desk and the slight indentations of wooden grooves, the smell of coffee, the rumble of my stomach, the footsteps on the carpeted floor, the low humming noise, entangled in what Lather and St. Pierre (2013:630) consider "language, the human, and the material not as separate entities mixed together but as completely imbricated '*on the surface*'". *On the surface* suggests a denial of depth, of hierarchical ordering, of arboreal genealogy and operates in what Deleuze and Guattari (1996:9 italics in original) call multiplicities: "All multiplicities are flat," they say, "in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions: we will therefore speak of a *plane of consistency* of multiplicities, even though the dimensions of this '*plane*' increase with the number of connections that are made on it."

The way in which Deleuzian thought has problematized the continuous entanglement, as Barad (2003) would have it, or the embodied material imbrications as suggested by St.Pierre, leaves me thinking about other ways that “ask questions about the limits of our research practices and the kinds of knowledge production enabled and disabled by them” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010:503). I concur with St. Pierre (2013:225 italics by author) in her suggestion that “ontological approaches in [Deleuzian] philosophy do not assume there is a *given*, a real world (data) that can be gathered together (collected) and described (analyzed and known) as in logical positivism/empiricism *nor do they assume, as in interpretive theories like phenomenology, that there is an underlying meaning in an already existing lifeworld that interpretation can bring to light and describe*”. The trouble is that to engage in a **not** ‘looking behind/beyond’ feels risky, even if “interpretation is carried to infinity and never encounters anything to interpret that is not already itself an interpretation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996:114). Is this the point where the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept falls short? Language is always already embedded in iteration without finite interpretation – there is always more, always other – and contemporary psychoanalysis is firmly invested in challenging the reductive beliefs of interpretations as assumption of a ‘pre-given underneath’. As Cheshire (2010:112) would have it, “everything is always breaking up to allow new trains of thought to emerge.”

November (i)

“So what about data?” asks St.Pierre (2013:226), and, in recognition of my methodological entanglement, the question of data has equally no finite

answer, or, rather, its supposed finitude only ever rubs against what spills out, leaks, breaches boundaries. When “something called *data* cannot be separate from me” (St. Pierre, 2013:226 original in italics), the spell to remain trapped in binary territory is broken, and data “may be lived, sensed and done” as Benozzo, Bell, and Koro-Ljungberg (2013:309) would have it. Instead of the either/or dichotomy I contended with above, I find myself in the ‘in-between’, in what Deleuze and Guattari (1996:25 original in italics) would consider a rhizome “always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. [...] the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and...and...and...’”

And...and...and... - I am captivated in thinking through the possibilities such conceptual re-alignments can offer. “To continue a multiplicity is to move into a zone that is not logically predetermined but rather ‘invented by differentiating.’” (Rajchman, 2000:59). Research which invests itself in a modus of iterative differentiation and of entanglements, of always more, always other, carries a momentum which appears infinite, one that is “affirmative, experimental, idiosyncratic, nonreplicable [...] that emerges in the doing” (St. Pierre, 2013:226). And what else would/should/can/do I possibly do but continue in what has been a way of becoming – rather than being – a means of moving with and into and through what is uncalibrated, unstable, uncertain – “a process ontology that privileges change and motion over stability” as Braidotti (2013:344) suggests.

And yet I am unsettled by the and...and...and... because it aligns itself maybe too easily with more...more...more and, I fear, smoothly slips into a territory implicated in appropriation and colonization. The metaphor of the rhizome is infused with a materiality which marginalizes any organisms that stand in its

way. It spreads out, grows perpendicularly to gravitational force: “Increase your territory by deterritorialization” Deleuze and Guattari recommend (1996:11). The trouble is that the term signifies more than the contextual unclaspings from a previously held set of beliefs, or means of knowledge production. There is always *other* calling for attention, and, in the context of my historical locatedness, I cannot and will not forego Germany’s insidious means of expanding into neighbouring countries for the sake of the Deleuzo-Guattarian argument. This is where I draw a line, draw **the** line.

I sense a growing unease with conceptual frameworks which fail to attend to the specificity of signifiers. “We’ve no use for signifiers. [...] Everything comes to turn on the letter” Deleuze and Guattari proclaim (1995:21). And yet, is language not always a means of conveyance, and hence an interplay between signs, signifiers and significations, and to deny its significance forecloses any further argument? It is in or through writing, speaking, thinking, we embed ourselves into “an act – situated within a larger practice of acts – that one performs for, to, even *on* an other, an allocutory deed, an acting for, in the face of, the other and sometimes by virtue of the language provided by the other” as Butler (2005:130 italics in original) so aptly puts it. This my line: while I contest reductive finitude, and agree with St.Pierre (2013:226) in “thinking connections rather than oppositions, movement rather than categorization”, Deleuzian concepts are, by their very terms, equally undergirded by linguistic, social, cultural and contextual calibrations. As Haraway (1988b:581) attests, the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” is a fallacy. We are always already caught in the act of signification.

November (ii)

Freud, as early as 1895, describes psychic life in terms of “not only [...] a zig-zag, twisted line, but rather [...] a ramifying system of lines and more particularly [...] a converging one. It contains nodal points at which two or more threads meet and thereafter proceed as one; and as a rule several threads which run independently, or which are connected at various points by side-paths, debouch into the nucleus” (1893-1895/1965:290). It would seem that his terminology, situated as it is in the biological concept of nodal points (rhizomes have nodes...), as well as in lines, or threads, is not too dissimilar from those who followed on a hundred years later, and serves as counterpoint to views which contest the unconscious’ highly unbounded nature.

And what is ‘nomadic thought’ but an enmeshment into what psychoanalysis would call free association, or, as Bollas (2009:10) suggests, the place of “disseminating possibilities that open to infinity.” *Open to infinity* contests notions of definitiveness, of certitude, and instead attaches itself rather effortlessly to what is ceaselessly propagative in the unconscious. Framed in such way, psychoanalytic interpretations are tracings, markings of potential, threads, like a fine woollen line I see falling on the ground, crimson now, adrift...

Can my drifting be understood in terms of a process which I can only describe as continuous becoming, imbricated in a continuous entanglement of in-betweenness, enmeshed with what is and what is not of me? I concur with Cixous (1974/2000:27) that “I ask of writing what I ask of desire: that it have no relation to the logic which puts desire on the side of possession, of acquisition, or even of that consumption-consummation”, and I shy away from demands which reign in, or curtail on the grounds of the reductive

normativity of positivism which devalues leakages, fluidity, liminality, and favours “the building of arguments on the basis of empirical evidence, a systemizable given, and an observable object” (Kristeva, 1984:14). And yet, I am aware that any shying *away from* articulates a movement *towards* which is equally delineated, even if its normative marks are less stratified.

On further reflection, I am inclined to think intensities without restrictions as uncalibrated ground, which, in order to *become* needs that by which it can be calibrated. “The self that I am yet to be (at the point where grammar does not yet permit an ‘I’) is at the outset enthralled, even if to a scene of violence, an abandonment, a destitution, a mechanism of life support without which I cannot be, upon which my very being depends, which my very being, fundamentally and with an irreducible ambiguity *is*.” (Butler, 2005:81 italics in original). There is something in me which is not of me, and *without which I cannot be*. This is the calibration by which I become, or, I cannot *become without* that which ultimately contains me.

I declare myself in need for calibration, in full knowledge that what creeps in by such practices is a possible re-centring into a more coherent subject position, the ‘I’ that speaks and writes these words on the pages just now. To locate myself in my restrictions, to say – this is the line I draw today, now, for now - in order to disclose part of myself, to disclose myself through a heterogeneity that underpins what Kristeva (1984:16) might call “the sum of unconscious, subjective, and social relations in gestures of confrontation and appropriation”, I wage and weigh, tighten, let go, more, less, and...and...and... These processes, while intense, are a far cry from the “intense quantities in their pure state, to a point that is almost unbearable – a

celibate misery and glory experienced to the fullest, like a cry suspended between life and death, an intense feeling of transition, states of pure naked intensity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013:30). Such inchoateness not only fills me with existential fear, but it assumes an unutterable position, being as it is "stripped of all shape and form". It is here that I challenge the Deleuzo-Guattarian premise: for what do Deleuze and Guattari do but draw on linguistic structures in order to locate themselves in their amorphous maelstrom, and hence make use of 'signification'? In short: their argument exists only by the very principles they contest.

November (iii)

At the beginning of this chapter I declared myself unable to find an entry into thinking conceptually about the intricacies of data within an ambiguous poststructural frame. I consider writing, to follow Richardson (2002), as invitation to imaginings. And while I pay heed to Behun's (2010:132) warning that "there are many opportunities for the process to go wrong", I take solace from Richardson's (2002:923f) suggestion that "when we view writing as a method, we experience 'language-in-use', how we word the world [...]. Writing as method of inquiry honors and encourages the trying, recognizing it as embryonic to the full-fledged attention to the significance of language"

I would like to say that my need for tethering, for locating myself within a space whose margins are somewhat demarcated is unfamiliar, but I am not so sure any more. Given the ambivalent nature of my mother's relationship to me, and my relationship to my mother, whose absence, even when she was

present, foreclosed any articulation around loss, or death, need, want, desire, it stands to reason (sic) to seek out a ground, to seek differentiation, even if only in barely-readable yet nevertheless enabling traces through “this unlimited and unbound generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives towards, in, and through language” as Kristeva (1984:17) so aptly puts it.

A ceaseless operation – within the embodied materiality of language I remind myself of the trinity of mute presence which is at the heart of this inquiry: trauma, ghosts and silence are entangled and intertwined not as inseparable alterity, but as palimpsests situated within heterogeneous matrices invested in the process of becoming. As such, attention needs to be paid, for example, to connectives including “geography, family, [...], gender norms, aspirations, disappointments, hopes” (Mazzei, 2013:736), or to an interlinking inquiry into who silences whom by what means, to what effect. I equally remind myself of the impossibility of writing into silenced gaps with any modicum of certainty, apart from “seek[ing] the trace always already present” (Mazzei, 2003:360).

Brief Encounters, or The Trace Always Already Present

He sits on a bench. His hands, folded into the uneven weave of an overcoat. Dark, the coat is, a colour that swallows light. The spotted cravat nestles into his beard. By his feet rests a briefcase, its edges curling furtively against its content. He waits, barely moves. Trains pass.

He glances up, slowly draws one hand to his pocket and takes out a cigar. The edge of his upper lip curves into smile: “Pleased to meet you, at last.” He lights his cigar, blows wisps of grey smoke into the air, extends his arm in a gesture that is as much convention as the crease in his impeccably

pressed trousers. His grip is firm, uncompromising even, as he takes the other man's hand in a swift movement and raises himself off the seat.

The man is in his late 50, early 60s. He stops mid-track, looks unencumbered, uprighted. A thin smile cracks tightly pressed lips, fissures the horizontal line: "*Heureux de vous rencontrer, Monsieur.*" His voice is husky, following the raspy inhalation as he draws on his cigarette. "*Me voila.*" He wipes at a filament of tobacco, hunches his left shoulder.

What more is there to say? To speak Deleuzian schizoanalysis is to speak psychoanalysis. To speak Anti-Oedipus is to speak Oedipus. To speak denial of signifier is to not speak at all. To speak is to mean, even if meaning is fluid, uncertain, folded and unfolded, pushed to the furthest margins and retracted. Infinite in its finitude.

To speak is, maybe, already to love, though I am hovering over this sentence in case I feel too shy to let it stand. To speak is to love -

To speak is to love - "I have to be a little bit in love with myself to write, exuberantly and excessively so for the writing to flow freely across the page" (Speedy, 2013:32). I cannot say for certain if, when my writings dry up, I love myself less, but what I can say is that in the moments, arbitrary as they may be, when my fingers fly over the keyboard, I experience a profound sense of wellbeing and contentment.

To speak is to love – born into language, from the ambiguity of drives, "oriented and structured around the mother's body" (Kristeva, 1984:27), who

in turn mediates “the symbolic law organizing social relations”. My mother’s trace is present, even if it is ephemeral and barely registerable.

To speak is to love – even if words fail at times, and ghosts take their place at the table of absence.

How do ghosts speak?

Five. Ghost Talk: Writing Reverberations of Trauma

Imaginations and Memories

Imagine. And listen. Listen attentively, without assumptions. It isn't easy, is it? To listen without prior knowledge of what it is you are meant to listen to. Trust me. That's even more difficult, you say? I know, oh, how I know... But imagine, could you begin to imagine trusting me? What, after all, have you got to lose?

What is there to lose? I am sitting at my desk in the office; the cold sun barely reaches the corners of the small office into which I have withdrawn. I sit at my computer, let my fingers rest on the keyboard. Nothing, nothing so far. Withdrawal – from what I cannot say for certain – maybe from extraneous interruptions, maybe from a cacophony of internal voices vying for attention. Who knows? I give myself over to their undistinguishable noise, until, one by one, they seem to die away, become silent, silenced. Nothing. An eternity of nothing. And then, a faint staccato of inhalation and exhalation, barely audible, whispers against my hair, my face. *Imagine*. Breathing, the “reciprocal exposure that precedes any initiative” (Cavarero, 2005:31), carrier of the inflection that I am always already caught in an enmeshment of subjectivity and alterity, an entanglement, as it were, of memory and imagination, of accountable and unaccountable traces, incomplete and fragmented. Ghost talk.

Imagine.

My fingers move across the keys now, erase preceding sentences, hover, curl back on themselves, only to engage anew. Finite beginnings, they are, as if not

all beginnings expose their inherent paradoxes: for what are beginnings but caesura on temporal and spatial trajectories? Beginnings arrest the breathing inferences of a past which perpetually casts itself into my stumbling narrative and offer an illusion of iterative coherence. They are, as Poulos suggests, responses, “a link in the chain of story-utterances that bind us through the ages” (2009:135), a rekindling of that which has been calling for attention, a grasp of something that makes itself known despite, or maybe because of overwhelming and deafening silences. Ghost talk.

Imagine.

I ‘began’ my imaginings many months ago when I stumbled upon the photo of the little girl, the photo that would not go away, no matter how hard I tried to ignore it, the photo that called me, that called on me to listen without assumptions, that asked me to trust in a process of unfolding and refolding and within the crevices and fissures of doing just so I found further gaps and silences and secrets, and still I feel bereft, stumble over words, cannot find the ones I need in order to narrate this little girl, as if her story is simply tellable, as if she could assuage my growing unease in narrating that which perpetually resists narration, as if coherent narration is not in itself illusory.

I take hold of the photograph, “the evidence, after all” so Kuhn (2002:13) suggests, “material for interpretation – evidence in that sense: to be solved, like a riddle; read and decoded, like clues left behind at the scene of the crime. Evidence of this sort, though, can conceal, even as it purports to reveal, what it is evidence of. A photograph can certainly throw you off the scent.”

Imagine. And listen.

I am drawn back to the image, in what Hultman and Taguchi (2010:526) describe as “an anthropocentric gaze, a gaze that puts humans above other matter [...], a kind of human supremacy or humanocentrism”, and, rather candidly, reign in what could be described as dissecting scrutiny. My view shifts to the doll, the plastic doll, whose forehead touches the little girl’s cheek. They sit close, warm human skin to cool plastic, a tableau of surreptitious surrender to the fantasy of maternal closeness, which sets the scene for a particular reading. In a touching image evocative of Madonna and Child, the doll, nestled in the arms of the girl, is turned towards the viewer; her plastic mouth, lips slightly upturned in an expression which hovers between mockery and pride, serves as underpinning to what can too easily be read as perfidious rendering of the primary relationship between mother and infant: for in this photo, it is the little girl, as mother, whose immutable gaze is directed outside the frame, who does not find it in her to look adoringly at her doll, her baby. It is the doll, in all her plastic rigidity which seems uncannily alive, and which claims attention against a maternal illusion, or, in Cain’s (2013:408) words, against “the phantom between life and death.”

Imagine. And listen.

The mother between life and death.

Imagine. And listen.

I do, I want to say, but I am caught, caught in the contradictions of in-betweenness of recollection, of memory, of imagination, of what is elusive to the light of the day and of what withdraws into deep shadows.

Imagine. And listen. Between life and death.

I need some guidance, I say, some way of making sense of what I know of the girl, and what I *think* I know of her. "As the veils of forgetfulness are drawn aside, layer upon layer of meaning and association peel away" says Kuhn (2002:6). To shed the membrane with which I have contained what, in the past, I thought of as utterly incomprehensible, carries the risk of exposing rawness, fissures, and gaps, shows up silences where language was often unwittingly, but sometimes purposefully obliterated. So, for the time being, I follow a scent laid out in the materiality of the photograph, in the brittleness of the wooden frame, which I know to be more than 50 years old. I turn it over, notice a deep gash in the faded paper covering the back, another wound of sorts, with slightly frayed edges, unstitchable. And regardless of what seems to be so readily available on the front of the photograph, the laceration on its reverse slips into yet another kind of knowledge, attaches itself as contrapuntal emphasis to the visible imagery, which intersects with an embodied and embedded sense of sadness, a hopeless tristesse, compacted through all-pervasive silence.

Imagine. And listen. Listen attentively.

I do... I think I do.

You imagine.

I think I do more than that. I know and yet. And yet...

What do you know of me? What do you know of those who are lost, whose low murmurs are barely audible?

What can I do? What would you like me to do?

Lend me your voice, "that still, small voice that lives within us and that knows, in the end, the right thing to do" (Poulos, 2009:139)

Ghosts talk?

Ghost talk.

In the Beginning, or Ghost Talk No.1

In the photograph I am three years old, maybe four. I grow up in Bottrop, a small town on the periphery of an industry instrumental in the behemoth of war machinery. Steel works and mines should have been my playing fields, as the ruinous shards of factories attest to. But the course of history does not run smoothly like the molten iron ore cast by the many exhausted workers who keep the ovens burning in order for other ovens to do their devilish deeds. Unimaginable deeds.

The Wirtschaftswunder⁴ brings the economic boom on which my father rides into prosperity. Germany's rise from darkness and desolation, from starvation and hunger, stretches the grip of its own history to breaking point: I grow up in the time of Stunde

⁴The *Wirtschaftswunder*, or economic miracle, refers to the decades under Konrad Adenauer's chancellorship in the wake of World War II, which saw West Germany engaged in an unprecedented stimulation of rebuilding its devastated landscapes and the restitution of its economy. As the period of increased prosperity was simultaneously characterized by a deep amnesia regarding the barbaric nature and scale of the atrocities committed during the Third Reich (Weiner, 2009), the suggestion stands to reason that to a large extent the efforts were of a compensatory nature in order to ward off feelings of guilt and shame (Schwab, 2010). The Mitscherlichs (1990) consider the explosive industrial development as displaced libidinal energy, by repressing and encapsulating any processes which had the potential to shatter the denial of responsibility. The seemingly seamless move from a belief in the 'final solution' towards a system based on democratic principles necessitated a psychic splitting in the population which sought to blame solely the NS and SS elite for the barbaric murder of millions. Jarausch's (2010) observation, that hand-in-hand with the shift towards a more prosperous life, narratives in West Germany emerged whose focus was directed towards their own sufferings without attributing the essential linkage to its underlying cause, is a further example of such splitting.

Null⁵, the fatally-flawed notion that life can continue as if nothing had happened. As if bomb craters are mere cracks in the pavement. As if the void can be plastered over. As if.

My father's lawyer's practice grows from the small accountancy firm he inherited from his father into a much larger one. He works all hours, leaves the house before I wake and often comes home past my bedtime. My mother is the home-maker in our picture-perfect little family: father, mother, and one daughter. I am left in the care of Regina, my nanny.

Many years later we move from the flat I grow up in to an architect-designed house in the outskirts. For now, two bedrooms, a kitchen, a sitting room, a bathroom – and a yard where my dad parks his car – are the perimeters of my knowledge about the world. I play with neighbours' children downstairs in front of the garage; we dig holes, shift small stones which derail our marbles. Glassy, the marbles are, slightly etched from their encounters with the dusty ground.

I make friends with H. who has three siblings. We go to the same catholic primary school, sit at the same desk. We are inseparable, stay over at each other's' houses. She shares my bed, we giggle. I cannot fall asleep for a long time.

I am five or six years old now. "Shall we dance?" my father asks me. He holds out his arm, bend slightly so I can touch his pointed elbow. My hand finds the hollow into which I slip my fingers and feel his starched shirt. We walk on to the dance floor, and begin our shimmy to the fast rhythms played by a band. I have become quite a mover,

⁵ The *Stunde Null*, or Zero Hour is a term widely used by the military and denotes the exact timing at which an operation is meant to commence. Zero Hour in this context indicates the beginnings of a new epoch, which sought to declare its irrevocable truncation from the ideology of National Socialism and the turn towards a new German state. The split, as observed by the Mitscherlichs (1990), is backed by a change in cathexis from the rapturous elation for the Third Reich and the Führer into a fervent denial of any responsibility for the atrocities committed.

since my introduction to ballroom dancing during our winter holidays. I am allowed to skip school, ostensibly to recuperate from the mysterious illness that has befallen me and continues to play havoc. We drive to the Black Forest, draw pine scented air into our sooty lungs; I am rosy-cheeked when I dance with my dad. My mum tilts her head, looks approvingly at father and daughter, and smiles knowingly. Little girls playing at adults.

I turn 12. I outgrow my body but have not yet found the body I can grow into. Neither fish nor meat, we say in German. I fall into the in-between, the neither/nor which by now has become strangely familiar. I become unmanageable, don't want to play but don't not want to play either. I am sent away to a catholic boarding school, solemn reminder of what happens to little girls who won't do as they are told. A Kinderheim for the recalcitrant. But this time there is no cake at the end of my stay, but breakfasts, lunches, and suppers in the dining hall, supervised by Mater Superior, whose eyes watch over all her charges.

September 1978

The flight to London is booked. My father drives me to the airport, his small and delicate hands tightened around the steering wheel. The little finger on his right hand is slightly crooked, carries a subcutaneous metal fragment from an incident sometime around the early 1940s, thousands of miles to the east. He barely looks across, keeps his eyes on the motorway. "Let us know when you arrive" he says. I nod. He glances at me. "Yeah, sure."

What can I say about my flights? With hindsight, I cannot even tell if the initial forays into borderlands were not in some way precursors to what by now feels like an irrevocable exile. The finitude with which I declare myself in those terms has been hard fought over. For a long time I did not know if I would eventually return to Germany, if the draw of the familiar, of the contested notion of a home (italicized), would endanger my tentative attachment to a landscape which I declined to acknowledge as such for many years. Home.

“Questions without answers must be asked very slowly” (2009:159) says Michaels; despite all that I know, or that I think I know, what eludes me is that which can rarely be given over to words. The irrecoverable sadness of the little girl seems to break through compacted sedimentations of grief in a longing that is as heartbreakingly futile as it is utterly vital. For many years I did not know that I had questions in me, that in order to make sense of feelings I had no words for, I had relied on a language which had left me speechless.

November 2013

I am sitting at my desk, night has fallen and the slightly nausea-inducing strip lights in the office barely cast shadows. It is late, maybe too late, to do more, yet it is in and through the process of writing, of casting words on the screen that I find some sense of solidity. Sentences appear sequentially in spite of what I can only describe as the erratic nature of thought, in a process not dissimilar to Deleuzian and Guattarian (1996:3f) lines of flight, where “comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture”. These squiggly little lines, which, come to think of it, I only know as letters through

imbricated cultural conventions (German is only marginally different from English) move across the whiteness of the computer screen and offer a perfunctory means of rendering into language what had previously been surreptitiously silenced.

Mother and Father, or Ghost Talk No.2

More, please...

Please

Again, I imagine I can hear a plea, spoken in such a small voice that I fail to register for how long it has been hiding in the fissures on the threshold of speech. Are the words *more, please* not already “pregnant with ancient meanings that might need to be broken down in order to find the piece of history trapped inside” (Lopez-Corvo, 2006:15)? What is contained in the *more*, but an overwhelming desire to be given over to language in an act that speaks as much to shards of memory as it does to concealment? “Nothing erases the immoral act. Not forgiveness. Not confession” (Michaels, 2009). Such unquestionable foreclosure, to which I deeply bow my head, leaves me not only with a sense of inevitability because it does not offer any absolution, but it propels me to repeat, ad absurdum, that which has been thrown to the wolves of silence. And so I ruminate, seek out words which flesh out skeletal remains even, yes, even if evil is ineradicable.

More, please...

My parents rarely spoke to me about the time of their youth and young adolescence, and if, on occasion, they did so, it was never with any clear sense

of reflective condemnation I had wished for. They both belonged to the Hitler Youth, the organization through which the majority of what became known as 'cannon fodder' was recruited. It pains me to think of my father in those material terms, as 'fodder', one hands out to animals, to be consumed and excreted. He was to become an officer candidate, called to fight Russia at the Eastern Front aged 17, maybe 18, one of one hundred young men in his squadron of which two returned. Two returned! He was wounded, from then on carried shrapnel as others carry reliquaries, embedded in his finger, elbow, buttock. I would often glance at those marks, but never put my fingers into the furrowed grooves – I somehow shied away from what they might have yielded, what kind of deed they might have exposed of which I knew so very little at the time. Much later on, my father would occasionally speak about the day he was shot, about the hours crawling back to behind enemy lines and the way his boot retained all the blood until it flooded the floor of the field hospital. Deemed too ill to continue warfare, he was sent back to Germany to an institution for the treatment of invalids. Factually, he spoke, then this, then this, then this, even after all these years. I say *even* but by then I knew enough about him to recognize that in order to continue living the way he did, it was facts not affects he clung to. And, of course, that is not the way our lives pan out. Surreptitiously, remnants of what needed to be forgotten creep back. "All people experience affects – and it is hard to imagine a human being who would not have at least something of an emotional life" says Bollas (2009:42). My father's reluctance or more likely repression in the face of such devastating experiences, the processes by which he sustained and contained himself, was through what I now recognize as searing, or cauterizing of wounds: to speak *feeling* had become utterly alien.

I cannot say with any conviction if that had not always been so, if his emotional paucity was not always already embedded in a family matrix which guarded against feelings with iron railings, but I have my suspicions: I have faint memories of my paternal grandparents, born in the last decade of the 19th Century, faint, in part because time washes memory into opacity, but maybe also because I am unable to reconcile their presence with an emotive response. I cannot grasp them, get hold of them, however fleetingly. It is as if their presence calls forth a great absence.

In contrast, my maternal grandparents retain a vividness I recall with pleasure: endless games of *Mühle*⁶ with my grandfather, who taught me to lose well until one day I beat him. We'd sit in the sitting room, bent over the board, the smell of his cigar hovering until my granny would chide him by looks alone, muttering something about *the child and had he thought about the filthy air and how could he smoke something so vile*. Her sandwiches were infinitely superior to the ones I got at home, because she spread them with margarine, not butter as my mother used to...

This young asthmatic man, who would become my father, met and fell in love with my mother at a time when talk of dark shadows began to be considered treason. When Hitler rose to power in 1933 my parents were seven and nine years old. They were eight and ten when Hitler annexed the Rhineland with the aim of gaining *Lebensraum*⁷ and occupied Austria, followed by Poland. By

⁶ Nine Men Morris – a strategic board game whose history dates back to the Roman Empire. The board consists of 24 points on a vertically and horizontally aligned grid. The game is played by two players, placing nine black and white pieces, or 'men', on vacant points in order to connect three of their own men in a line – the mill. Any successful mill allows for one of the opponent's piece to be taken off the board. The player who is reduced to only two of his own pieces loses the game.

⁷ The term *Lebensraum*, as 'living environment', or habitat, needs be considered initially in the context of a growing imperialism, through which the exodus overseas was meant to be stemmed,

the time they were sweethearts and in secondary school, Hitler had invaded Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and part of France. Their formative years were lived under a regime that usurped, appropriated, occupied, greedily seized whatever stood in its way, driven by the hyperbole of unlimited expansionism for the sake of annihilation of otherness, domination, and 'Aryan purity'. Both parents followed, together with their peers and friends, the national-socialist youth movement, which "for the majority of young Germans [...] was synonymous with freedom and adventure, not dictatorship, speaking-ban and oppression" (Aly, 2005:12 translation by author).

More, please

Even now?

Even now

What can I speak of with some sense of certainty? That neither my paternal nor my maternal grandparents were members of the NSDAP ⁸, that their family homes were not caught in the homogenizing grip of Nazi propaganda? That my father's father forbade any photo of Hitler to be hung in the house, that my mother's father aroused sufficient suspicion to be incarcerated for failing to greet his secondary class with the obligatory *Heil Hitler* salute? That even now, after all these years, I cannot bring myself to write these two italicized words without hovering over the keyboard, tightening my lips, that

and to which the appropriation of colonies seemed to offer a solution. The term is thus from the beginning embedded in a territorial claim and is offered as justification for Germany's expansion at the beginning of the 20th Century into Central Europe. Hitler's Lebensraum myth is underpinned by a drive towards unfettered annexation and 'Germanization' of all eastern territories down to the Black Sea and the Caucasus.

⁸ National Socialist German Workers Party, the Nazi party

my repulsion is so deep that I fear being tainted by those words, that all evil pivots around their pronunciation, that I want to flee?

But are these declarations, no matter how earnest, or good-willing, or heartfelt they might be, not also arbiters of what still cannot be declared? Because it will never be declared? Because behind all that is spoken of lies that which cannot be spoken of, not because it is unspeakable but because it would shatter a phantasy? Denial, in the form of a “defence against collectively-held guilt – be it the guilt of action or the guilt of acquiescence- has left traces” argue the Mitscherlichs (1990:24 translation by author). Traces are all I have, slippages, scattered through a language which is intend on severing the relational attachment to its past - the *Stunde Null* of a phantasmagorical disavowal of lived lives.

Little is available to render fragmentary shards into a more cohesive narrative, to write with some sense of conviction. But, of course, in St.Pierre’s (1997:175) terms, I am continuously on shaky grounds, where “nothing is innocent and [...] everything is dangerous.” Nothing is innocent – the story of culpability runs through my people’s historicity like a varicose vein, visible, painful, and it has left indelible marks.

... and Children, or Ghost Talk No.3

And we, how are we written into those stains or slivers?

“One can look deeply for meaning or one can invent it” (Michaels, 2009:136). I cannot say with an iota of certainty if, ultimately, we are not always caught in between what we know, what we think we know and what we wish we know,

and maybe also what we wish we didn't know. Can I even begin to make proclamations which are prefaced by the solidity of an *I know...*, without giving over to what is continually slipping through my fingers like mercury? I am unable to fathom my self in the sweeping expanse of a familial 'we', yet I know enough of my mother's surreptitious absences to recognize a perfidious slope into a world which is as much populated by the living as it is by the dead.

And we...

Little one, I want to say, 'we' have a place in imagination, through the vicissitudes I carry on me, in me, undeclared and undeclarable. These marks are remnants of some sort of antecedent, of something that has etched itself on to and through the fabric of what it means to live, to live through times like those, and times like these. They don't stay still, those marks, but wander across and find other resting places, other lives on which to leave inscriptions. The difficulty is that there is no clear way, no certain way to decipher these indelible marks. All one can do, I think, is proceed with grace, and caution, and care. And a willingness to err into territory that has almost but vanished... where nothing is at it seems, where feelings are kept in hibernation, and where talk is sparse.

Nothing is as it seems

No, I say, and yet, have I not known from a young age that what was put on show - mother, father and child - is only a fragment of the story? I say I know, but I don't think that articulations around knowledge are particularly meaningful here. What I *know* feeds shifting proclamations of self and not-self, the 'subject-in-process' enmeshed in a multiplicity of layerings where

meanings are continuously “on the move in the thresholds” (Alecia Jackson & Mazzei, 2013:265).

Nothing is as it seems.

Nothing is as it seems. I let the sentence run through me like an electrifying current. I tingle. Because what I have taken to be part of **the** story might have just been part of **a** story. I say *just* not in order to denigrate the importance of the former, but to give myself over to what has not been scripted into the familial narrative. What has been omitted. What has been invisible to others, or, more likely, what has been rendered invisible. What frightens the hell out of me, and keeps on pulling at my heartstrings in equal measures.

Is there more?

More, always more.

When my parents married in June 1951, they were 27 and 25 years old. I see a picture of a beaming bride, dressed in a shiny wedding dress made from curtain materials, smiling for the camera. Within a few months, my mother would be pregnant with their first baby.

In the spring of 1978, during a passionate affair with a Dane, my gynaecologist asks me the question: Could you be pregnant, Dagmar? 25 I am, a student in Aachen, with a busy social life, friends and lovers, and the word hovers like an intrusion into the world I know. And yet, I also feel somewhat thrilled that my body might be receptive, that conception is not impossible. Without definitive diagnosis and after a quick injection (What for? Oh, just some hormones to aide you on your way), I am dismissed.

A few days later I call emergency services and schlepp myself to the nearest A&E. Blood runs into my mattress, unstoppably. Dane lover hurries back from a birthday party, we drive to hospital, confirmation of pregnancy, Dilation & Curettage, in and out in a day. An attempt of a little ghost, a few cells, not yet formed, but.

When my mother spontaneously aborted, her daughters' sex was already determinable. Abort – etymologically connected to Latin *abortio* disappear, be lost, miscarry. I'm not sure if any term is kinder - maybe kindness is missing from the disappearance and loss of her firstborn; three more were to follow.

My own miscarriage remains invisible – heavy blood loss precipitates the passing of the small sac of matter – and I am none the wiser. My pregnancy is confirmed after the affirmation of its spontaneous termination. Finished, before I have time to acquaint myself, what would I mourn for? How can I fantasize myself into foetal sacs and what ifs, when all that connects me to her/him is the liminal moment of a terminated possibility?

An attempt

Of a little ghost

A few cells

Not yet formed

But

But?

And more

After all these times, she said, and now. She turned to him, her eyes alight with a longing she had no longer thought possible. Hans put his hand on her shoulder, let it lie there for a further few seconds. Come sit down Hannelore, he said. She sat down on a kitchen chair, stretched her arms along the yellow embroidery on the cloth, her breasts touching the hard edge of the table. Yes, she said, he is quite sure, it is early days but he is, he is sure. She looked up and smiled. He sat down opposite her, cupped his hand around the tips of her fingers. So what do we, I mean, and what? His voice was hesitant, unbelieving. I should be fine this time, she said, and you know, we have done. She looked across to a pair of red children's shoes drying by the range. I know, he said, but remember. How could she have forgotten? Three times it had happened before, joy to be followed by aches which took more than time to dull. This time, she said, this time it will be. In the end it was not so. She was admitted to hospital. Another girl they told her. It would have been their fifth. How often can a heart break before it breaks for good?

Resurrection, or Ghost Talk No 4

"What kind of case is the case of a ghost?" asks Gordon (2008:24f), and fashions an answer by suggesting it as "a case of inarticulate experiences, of symptoms and screen memories, of spiralling affects, of more than one story at a time, of the traffic in domains of experience that are anything but transparent and referential." For a long time I have been enmeshed in stories whose voices shy away from the obvious, but they speak, nevertheless, into my body with an intensity that I have begun to understand as haunting. What they have to say, I suggest, needs not only a place to be spoken into, but a space where the

possibility of imagination can offer itself up as antidote to the foreclosure through silence.

Nothing is as it seems.

And yet, such is the nature of ghosts and hauntings that I can neither be sure of their provenances, nor of their motives, and the readiness with which I proclaim some sort of embodied resonance might be an insidious way of inveiglement, a callous way of appropriation. Then I close the doors, so to speak, but the knockings continue, louder, louder, and no matter how much I yearn for the habitual silences, I feel myself caught on the perpetual threshold of whispers and screams. What to do, little one, what to do?

Nothing is as it seems.

And so I imagine, and write my imaginations here on this screen, at this stage in my life, and the words don't abate, they come fast, and then I erase them only to pick others, other words, other sentences, and I cannot configure who speaks what, or who speaks through whom, as if the voices running through me or away with me need to come to the end of their exhalation, as if careful syphoning is all that is needed, as if I only have to provide the hands and language would appear, miracle-like, in front of me, and I would be able to say, yup, that's it, that's definitely it, I have found the way to write intergenerational reverberations of trauma, and look, how neatly it all appears, and sure, it all makes sense, doesn't it. It all makes sense. Doesn't it. It doesn't.

Nothing is as it seems.

Nothing is as it seems. Because tidiness and control and neatness rests on the premise of a confined authorial voice, one who orchestrates her own

confinement through a fictitious and futile autonomy, an erasure, if you will, of intersubjectivity and intertextuality (Wilson & Oberg, 2002). Ghosts seek articulations in conferment of the 'inter' into an 'intra', into a space of temporal articulations.

9th May 2012

Dear sisters

I do not know your names, but have thought about writing to you for a while now. You might indeed have not been named, but I reckon they talked about you all a lot. Maybe they even talked to you, growing imperceptibly and then noticeably. I need to address you first, you, the eldest child of Hannelore and Hans -you must have been so wanted after the terror of our parents' war. This sounds all terribly formal, doesn't it? I imagine you now with Mum's light blond hair; maybe you have her bright blue eyes as well, hopefully her sense of humour and compassion. At the moment I feel closest to you, more so than to our other sisters. You were the forerunner, and then you stopped in your track.

I feel odd speaking about an 'our', our sisters, have never needed to use either word. I am really not sure what to say, apart from letting you appear now here on this page. How to be with close and intimate others, siblings, sisters – I have never had the privilege to negotiate these complexities. Hey, I know about those things from friends with siblings, and my own children! Sure I had Mammi and Papa, but that's a somewhat different minefield indeed, isn't it?

Echoes of Silence: Writing into Reverberations of Trauma

Gosh, I write to you in English – now that's truly a surprise! Speaking to ghosts is slightly crazy... irrespective of the language I use.

Got to go, this is just too odd

Dagmar

Nothing is as it seems

14th May 2012

Dear oldest sister

I wanted to let you know that writing to you feels less odd, though I would prefer it if I knew how to address you. 'Oldest sister' is insufficient, and does not offer the kind of projective hook onto which I can attach my desire to know you better. So here I'm writing to a ghost and puzzle how to address her!

You have come closer, or maybe I have allowed myself to open up to the possibility of having had siblings... In any case, irrespective of name or not, I encounter a paradox I find quite perplexing: you were born more than one year before me, we have always been spatially and temporally separated by a substantial period, and yet I feel a close pull towards you, possibly more than to our sisters who have come after me. I have not shared time with you, have never been in close proximity – as I have with our younger sisters. I was alive while they were alive too. It seems as if that thought is too big to think at the moment, as if by refusing to think it, I can keep the others at bay. And so I talk to you, who has always been absent.

But fantasies have a funny way of inhabiting vacant spaces. There is just no way of unthinking a thought, and thus a possibility. I don't know any more how to close the lid on those delicious and frightful imaginings, keep myself from fantasising what it is like for my small voice to travel into the amniotic fluid. Did they hear me? Do they hear me?

I am the only surviving girl with one older and three younger sisters. I am one of five.

I have prized open a cold tomb of silence.

With love Dagmar

Nothing is as it seems

I am three, four years old. I sit with my mummy. She strokes my hair, gently, her fingers smoothing the stray wisps which escape the clasp. She does this often, mummy, carefully arranging me in a fashion that makes her eyes shine. Sometimes her eyes shine so bright that she looks away.

I can never know if the silence surrounding my parent's still born daughters is imposed, in that they did not find a receptive other – in each other – who could bear further loss. Whether recent communal trauma had been of a magnitude that any surplus could not be absorbed into the dominant cultural narrative of Germany in the 1950s, or whether my father's recent return from the unimaginable horrors on the Russian front disabled any attempt to validate what had happened on his return – these considerations add another strand into the intertextuality with which I narrate fragmented memories.

Mummy does not speak much to me. Her bright-red lips move but I cannot hear any sound. I watch her carefully, just in case. Just in case some words escape.

To give birth to death, simultaneously, is a threshold experience the influence of which on “degree, range and intensity of [...] emotional angst and long-term psychological outcomes” can be abated, so Cacciatore (2011:204) suggests through “ritualization”. The deaths of my siblings remained unvalidated by our immediate families, silenced into a non-event, “an intangible loss with no visible object to mourn and no public acknowledgement of the loss” (F. Murphy & Philpin, 2010:535). Silence surrounded my mother’s passage from pregnancy to non-pregnancy (Frost, Bradley, Levitas, Smith, & Garcia, 2007): without processes by which losses could be externalized, without a frame by which her relational loss could have been socially acknowledged (Doka, 2002), might she have carried within her an unspoken script of blame which spoke as much to anxiety of a mother-not-to-be as to the ideological base shaping her adolescence when Aryan doctrines permeated intimate relationships? Was what happened to her only to be expected, given that her bloodline was considered tainted long before she was born? And is this very line not equally disenfranchised, barely traceable now, after more than a Century of carefully guarding against exposure? Hearsay has made surreptitious connections to Ravenna, Rabbinical ancestry, conversion to Catholicism in order to fight in wars, clandestinely told from uncle to nieces, mothers to daughters. I cannot say when these beans began to be spilled, so to speak, when it was almost

alright again to speak into the imago of Aryan purity with its fallacious attempts to cleanse itself of European inflections.⁹

Sometimes she leaves me, and I cry. When she returns, the whites of her eyes are not as white as before. I never ask why and she never tells.

25th February 2014

Dear Dagmar

This is us, even though the proclamation of an 'us' in relation to ghosts is somewhat fraught. What can we say that has not yet been said? When you found something of us in you, you opened yourself to the possibility of siblingship and kinship, and brought your fantasies to bear on how to write us into your thesis. You gave us space, despite tacit constraints that sought to foreclose the insertion of trauma's descendants into narrativizable forms. We were given a voice, we were

⁹ My grandmother's genealogical documents omit that she would have been considered a Second Degree *Mischling*, a mongrel (of mixed race with one Jewish grandparent), by the Nazi party. Through crucial omission of her maternal lineage, the Advenas, she was able to hide her non-Aryan descent, and was not subject, to my knowledge, to infamous discriminations. The term first or second degree Mischling, initially used by racial theorist in the nineteenth century (Gelbin & Fersterer, 2005), was employed by the Nazi party as indicator of a skewed origin in relation to racial purity criteria.

The construction of the German Aryan myth in the lead-up to and during the Third Reich is countered by a rising number of mixed marriages, i.e. marriages between Christians and Jews (Monteath, 2008). An argument could hence be upheld which posits the ideology of Nazism and its preponderance of racial purity in substantive tension with the effects of such increase, so much so that narratives pertaining to the racial purity codex were continuously inflected with what was not considered pure, or Aryan.

given breath, in order “to feel *possibility*” (Poulos, 2006:103 italics in original).

You too, breathed into the possibility of life after loss - your life, not ours.

Farewell, little one

Nothing is as it seems

When nothing is as it seems, I find myself afloat among the possibility of inhabiting places whose inscriptions carried different names, irrespective of whether articulations around narrativizability of loss were foreclosed from the onset. With no overt gestures to account for what must have been traumatic or haunting experiences, hidden traces were carried, subterfuge-like, to be left at the door of those who came after, after the events.

Let me tell you a dream now, I say, a dream I had on the 17th January 2012, about a house I used to live in. The kitchen is full of people I don't know very well. There is a lot going on, folk passing each other, talking animatedly and loudly, and I notice my ex-husband amongst the crowd. I am by myself. My attention is taken up by a crumbling wall, and the brickwork underneath. On closer inspection I notice small caves, similar to the ones I have seen of cave dwellers. Something moves; it is a small creature which I initially take for a bird. It is a shrivelled up, dark and horrible little manikin, which moves slowly. I am utterly dismayed, more so because no one else seems to pay any attention or think its presence weird. My ex-husband passes by with two more creatures, this time they have grown to the size of a doll. I flee into my

bedroom and find myself in a similar scene: one wall is dismantled and in chaos, inhabited by these golems. "But where can I sleep?" I cry and awake.

Nothing is as it seems

The pronouncement of an 'us', of siblingship and sisterhood, had only entered my awareness once I began to write my sisters into a script. The dream that finds me scared of little black golems could be representative, in Freud's (1916:211) terms, of "not always actual wishes. They may also be dead, discarded, covered, and repressed wishes, which we must nevertheless credit with a sort of continuous existence on account of their reappearance in the dream."

What, after all, are the golems, exposed to the world in the broken bricks, but an inference from the unconscious, the interpretation of which finds some resonance with aspects of lived experiences? Bondi's (2014:335) suggestion that "in a psychoanalytic register, the centrality of the unconscious means that what any of us might say about ourselves is always a cover story that disassembles, perhaps seeking to conceal other, potentially more significant truths" problematizes the covert/overt aspects which become apparent in my dream. The put-together nature of the dream, the "conglomeration of psychic images", as Freud (1916:87) would have it, is grounded in the familiarity of a known setting and its evocations of joyful, horrendous, happy, painful, and often rather ordinary memories. It offers a space for the known relationality I lived as mother to my children, as wife to my then husband, operating from the central premise that we are, from the start, deeply embedded in relationality. "We are so in the thick of relationality that it is almost impossible to appreciate fully its contours and inner workings" says Mitchell (2003:xiii).

And yet, I am alone, or possibly, and rather more accurately, I feel alone. Any speculation as to the genealogy of such intrinsic aloneness must surely be offered in relation to my parents, and the echoes of their own traumatic experiences they were at pains to keep at bay.

Trauma remains at an unassimilable loss – a loss of words, of language, of experience and its affective corollary, tainting, as van de Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (2007:4) suggest, “all other experiences”. It speaks to an intra- and subsequent interpsychic collapse, the reverberations of which remain palpable in subsequent generations. My sense of loneliness, amongst the melee of known and unknown visitors, could be thought of as an indicator to a prior relational rupture, the blue-print, as it were, to any and all relationships that were to follow.

If, as Sklar (2011:92) suggests, and with which I would concur, “the dream acts as a specific observation platform into the internal world”, my internal world was certainly peopled, but I failed to grasp the significance of their reciprocal relational availability. They were, as it were, simply the background against which I felt alone, or maybe, al(l) one..., the Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit* that Stolorow (2007:2) defines as “both how one feels and the situation within which one is feeling – a felt sense of oneself in a situation.”

It might indeed be considered too reductive to lay the origins of my fragmented and rather underdeveloped interrelationality solely at the door of my parents, who were caught, I imagine, in a turmoil which far exceeded their own meaning-making; to gauge in how far their parents, my grandparents, who lived through the First World War, passed on some of their own interrelational idiosyncrasies must necessarily remain the scope of

speculations. Fraiberg et al's 'Ghosts in the Nursery' (1975:390) do not make any clear-cut generational distinctions, presenting, as they do "pathways into understanding the repetitions of the past in the present" - from such standpoint the enormity of living through, and surviving two World Wars surely must have had a bearing on intersubjective interdependency.

I cannot say if my mother's experiences in the wake of the non-wake for her stillborn babies became the benchmarks which foreclosed a generative attunement towards me, her sole surviving daughter. Bollas (2011:60) argues that "the trauma-evolving child is already a self developing along very particular lines, such as those conceptualized by Fairbairn in his theory of the infant's internalization of the bad object, where the aim is to control the negative effect of bad parenting by taking the negating objects into oneself", and I find myself caught in the trap of assuaging my dead mother in her inability to parent any differently. The split between what I am able to assign to cognition, in the sense of 'mum couldn't do any better, because...' is interlaced by the need to find traits inscribed with the 'good enough, the good enough mother', yet such notions fail to grasp the complex and perplexing affective responses I continue to reconcile myself with.

The utter mundaneness of the dream's location in a kitchen (which rather uncannily is taken up again in the setting of my opening chapter), is the background to what Bollas (1987:280) called 'the unthought known', "a term to stand for that which is known but has not yet been thought, if by thought we mean that which has been mentally processed accurately." While I shy away from the finitudes of accuracy, what Bollas speaks to is a lived, embodied knowledge which has, so far, not yet been breached by language, but is

registered as unconscious inscription nevertheless. Am I, in my dream, the only one who sees what had been hidden in the fabric of the building, or is the exposure of the golems for the others a mere *fait accompli*, nothing to get worked up about because they had known all along? Is what I have always already 'known' finally being known?

The crumbling wall with its revelation of black shrivelled golems calls to mind Torok's (1975/1994:181 italics in original) crypt inhabited by the phantom, "a formation in the dynamic unconscious that is found there not because of the subject's own repression but on account of *a direct empathy with the unconscious or the rejected psychic matter of a parental object.*" I would not, as Torok seems to argue, categorically rule out that unconscious attunement to parental legacies does not instigate further unconscious shifts, not because the encrypted material cannot easily slide into an a priori vacancy, but because it does it so readily. What I suggest is that the processes, whereby 'direct empathy' can become un/known are always already embedded in our psychosocial and affective relationships. The account whereby my mother failed to give her account needs to be placed in its wider intersubjective framing which foreclosed, for familial and socio-cultural reasons, I imagine, the necessary testimonials, in the form of eulogies, or other rituals to take place. She, simply, had to give up on mourning...

I re-read the last sentence, a brutal reminder of a thin membrane of in-betweenness: I envisage my mother holding her baby daughter, holding me, alive, lively, and with each embrace she is reminded of the one who came before and those who come after – steeped in deaths which had no place amongst the living. In that sense, the suggestion that the crypt, or tomb, can

be thought of as metaphor of “live burials of sorts, [which] contain the secrets of violent histories, the losses, violations and atrocities that must be denied” (Schwab, 2010:4), extends the parameters within which the ‘crumbling walls’ in my dream can be made meaning of: the golems mark an investiture, a return, to follow Freud (1923-1925/ 1961) of what needed to be repressed within the interpsychic frame of the family dyad, which was, in no small way, supported by the collective failure to speak to an overarching and suffocating Germanic denial. It might be indeed too reductive to think of the golems solely in respect of my mother’s stillbirths, but to begin a foregrounding of sorts which addresses what Schwab (2010:79) calls “traumatic amnesia [...] inscribed as cultural practice.” Might it be so, that the extensions by which the denial of private mourning practices dovetailed smoothly into a collective taboo vis-à-vis any public acknowledgement thereof, laid the bedrock where, collectively, “memories of an immoral past and atrocious acts” (Karstedt, 2009:28) were assigned to silence? That such entombment would not only foreclose possible acts of remembrance but, by virtue of the very foreclosure, provide the perfect frame for keeping at bay what should never be exposed? “The process of mourning”, as proposed by the Mitscherlichs (1990:83 translation by author) “can only be achieved when we know what it is we need to let go of,” through an act of “empathic opening of our whole beings so that we recognize ourselves in those horrific scenes where 100, 500, 1000 corpses lay in front of us, corpses of those we have killed.”

The discovery of the uncovered golems, grotesque as they are, may hence hint at what is now overtly at stake: “Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you,” warns Gordon (2008:22), “and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a

vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look." In my dream, I not only bothered to look, but I could not avert my eyes. Freud's (1916:183) suggestion that essential element of dreams can be understood as "trains of thought reaching back into childhood" seems to be in support of what I have been covertly privy to from my very early years: that the insight into a different numerical ordering as second of five, versus the lived experience as first with no equal brought about a slide into less defined locatedness should not astonish me. And yet, I am unsure of how I feel about the recalibration, or rather, if what I feel as hovering in the liminality between elation, joy, reticence, anger, grief, guilt, is sufficiently defined to be of value. The weave with which I find myself enmeshed has been laced with what Barad (2010:244) calls "heterogeneous iterations all: past, present, and future, not in a relation of linear unfolding, but threaded through one another in a nonlinear enfolding." To be enfolded in a wish to be one amongst others calls forth the possibility at the same time as its censorship; such 'what if...' scenarios, hovering at the edge of consciousness, irrespective of their wretched or exciting nature, leave marks in the fold.

It is, possibly, the nature of marks that some of the most obvious ones seem to slip out of sight, to the extent that the more I attempt to trace them in their entirety, the more they seem to be bent on avoidance. To speak sisterhood, or siblings, remains unavailable to significant tracings – I know but I don't know – until the dream awakens me in abject horror: what has been put under erasure through clenching concealment finds its apotheosis in humanoid golems, comes for me with such a force that even now the imagery remains as vivid as the night I dreamt. It might be too simplistic to consider the horrific figures in the context of usurpation, in the narcissistic inflection of eternal

prima, not secunda inter pares, but I am willing to admit that such thoughts had crossed my mind. Yet, on the heel of such trajectory follows one whose articulations are more treacherous to bear.

Nothing is as it seems

Replacement child. I am left with traces of inscriptions, traces, which I see in the photo of the little girl who I should know intimately and who evades me at every turn. It makes sense to begin to think in terms of a double-bind, a bind that links my creative aliveness irrevocably into a matrix of death. I am the one, if you will, who got away, who defied the tacit rule laid down by my older sister and those three others who were to follow. While, in “the narrowest sense, a replacement child is a child born to parents who have experienced the death of a child and then conceived a second child in order to fill the void left by the loss of the first” (Anisfeld & Richards, 2000:303), I am fearful to be swept along the undercurrent running through the substitutional proficiency such mathematical equation evokes. And yet, would I not easily shrug off the implication of such definition if something did not stick, did not find a place to do its deeds? Indeed, do my writings not tell of different stories, in that they trouble what has been secreted away in ambiguities and silences, trouble the little girl who would avert her eyes at all costs, trouble me in my sense of who I am/was (Schellinski, 2014), but also in the sense of who I was for my mother?

Nothing is as it seems

On further, and possibly rather speculative reflection, in how far could my mother’s repetitive investiture in becoming pregnant at least another three times be read as indictment of insufficiency, my insufficiency, to replace their first-born, the one who can and could never be replaced, no matter at what

costs? Schellinski (2014:198) suggests that the diversion from loss towards hope “often condemned another human being to a life akin to death – destined to live the life of another human being whom she or he was not”; and irrespective of how often my parents tried, I was the only one they were able to bear...

The overarching ambivalence I feel in respect of my mother and of my sisters needs to find a place on these pages, an ambivalence that, surprisingly, speaks equally, and in no uncertain terms, about guilt: I am, after all, guilty of surviving, and continue to this day, but increasingly less so, to feel the dampening effect such considerations evoke. Survivor guilt, researched initially in the wake of the Shoah, “the key modern trauma for Jews” as Frosh (2013:119) puts it, makes linkages between the direct survivors as well as the descendants of those whose fate was sealed in the gas chambers. “Survivors and their children often had to fill the void of entire families replacing whole generations” (Schellinski, 2014). How could I possibly recognize myself in such exceptional terminology, if what I offer is a mere smudge on Germany’s deeply stained slate? But could it inform some of the vacillations I experience specifically in relation to my mother, who would be ever so close only to quickly absent herself again? After all, so Schwab (2010:121) assures us, “the replacement child confronts the bitter irony that the ideal child is a dead child.” And yet, interlayered with refrains of guilt is a deepening sense of purposive aliveness, of stoic tenacity even, and I recognize something of that nature when I think about my early childhood years. I seem to have held on for dear life, despite, and at times struggling with, the silent battlefield within which I found myself. *Eros* and *Thanatos*, indeed.

An argument could easily be made that posits the surviving child, for the very fact of her survival, in a conflictual relationship with her dead sibling/s. "There is probably no nursery without violent conflicts between the inhabitants, actuated by rivalry for the love of the parents" suggests Freud (1922:173). It stands to reason that the complexities, and questions, arising out of such observations are further accentuated in the case of dead siblings. While the proximity of love and hate between siblings has been psychoanalytically explored and the ensuing feelings of guilt posited in early infancy, "with harmonious development" so argues Jaffe (1970:312), "these impulses are overcome and, so, too, are the guilt feelings they aroused." But, in the case of sibling death, the very trajectory is truncated, and the Freudian 'reality principle', in the sense that wishes do generally not kill, is foreclosed.

What am I left with, little one, what am I left with?

Nothing is as it seems

I am sitting at my desk, re-read myself back into the perfidious trajectory of replacement, as if all that was required was an exchange, of sorts, a slipping out of one into another... what?... skin, perhaps? And what sort of skin was I meant to slip into, if not the one whose colour was opaque, barely visible against the backdrop of mundane familiarity? And is this process of slipping, or zipping, not altogether another one, one I recognize as 'dis-placement', an estrangement of sorts, or exposé of the conflictual ground I continued to find myself on? I could not be, but I could not not be either.

The maelstrom of melancholic attachment to the past is taking hold, inveigles itself into the midst of my writings, seems to caress me with carefully calibrated sentences. And, possibly, this is another strand in the weave of

trauma's reverberations, exposed in the hide-and-seek of this inquiry, as if all I needed to do is dismantle the walls, expose what has been hidden behind or in the cladding, narrate the show-and-tell, and all would make sense...But, as Sklar (2011:9 italics by author) so astutely reminds me, "the symptoms are there *as a covering structure* to enable some sense of not fragmenting." Were I to extrapolate further, is the estrangement I have felt in relation to my self a necessity, say, a safeguarding against the draw of joining those who came before and after me, the extent of which I could never be aware of? Could the suggestion hold that, as much as I tried to negotiate my place at the table of death in the form of childhood anorexia, I ultimately sought not to join in their danse macabre, yet carried within me embodied fragments of their songs?

Nothing is as it seems

I take Frosh's (2013:39) warning to heart: "One thing to note" he says, "is that we should probably be cautious about how much we can understand." And I am unsure if what has been running through my writings with such unerring constancy is not contained in Frosh's words, in the way that the almost intangible collapses around proclamations of certainty. What I have begun to reconcile myself to is possibility – or rather, a recognition of possibility rather than of verity, which accounts for untied and untie-able strands in stories for which I have no story. And any attempt, in Butler's (2001:27) words "to give a sequential account for that which cannot, finally, be grasped in sequential terms" is but 'provisional'.

I am not sure if these days, the predictability of the office with the low hum of tepid radiators does not act as such a provisional space, a repository, of sorts, within which I can begin to become.... I say 'become' because under all that is

humming to be known, in Sklar's (2011:27) words the "domain captured by living and partly living" lies that which will be elusive to any processes of signification. It is, as Butler (2005:54) suggests, the nature of the unconscious that "to understand the unconscious [...] is to understand what cannot belong, properly speaking, to me, precisely because it defies the rhetoric of belonging, is a way of being dispossessed through the address of the other from the start." And just as in my dream which found me at the brink of despair on seeing the mannikins speak in their abject Otherness to my subjective alterity, and where, uncannily, a reminder is imbricated into the dream's fabric which forecloses the possibility of blissful ignorance – sleep – I cannot but know that what I only ever know are mere further condensations, traces, strands.

Ghosts talk, indeed.

Ghost talk.

Tales Untold, or Ghost Talk No.5

I.

The woman moves over slowly, takes the child by the hand. Take off your coat, she says, and your scarf. It is warm here, she says, see, I lit a fire. The child looks at the flames, turns away. Come, she says, sit on my knee. She extends her arms. Sit with me, she says, close, close. The child sits down, folds her small hands into her lap. Together they watch the sparks. The embers cast a soft red glow.

Once upon a time, the woman says, there was a little girl who had woken from a sleep so deep that it had lasted many moons. She looked around her room

and did not recognize it any more. And when she looked into her mirror, she did not know the girl who looked back. "Will someone know who I am?" she asked the girl in the mirror. Alas, there was no answer. So, without further ado, she took her only treasure, a golden net, and began on her journey. She asked anyone who passed her way, but try as she might, no one knew who she was. The little girl sat down and began to cry.

Now an old man had watched her from his window. "Why do you cry?" he enquired, and the girl told him her story. "Can you help me find me?" she asked. The old man looked at her, took her hand, and answered: "Little girls who are lost do not need to search on their own. I will go with you until you find what you are looking for".

And so they set off and soon came to a shore, where a boat was tethered to a post. They got in and cast themselves off. For many days and many nights they crossed a dark sea. They fought storms and high waves. The little girl would get giddy and reach for the old man's hand. "Hold me", she would say, "the shaky dark frightens me". And he would hold her until night turned into day and the little girl feared less. In this way, they continued on their voyage, until, one day, the colour of the sea turned light blue. When the little girl and the old man viewed the horizon, they saw land in the far distance. "That is where I want to go", she said. Alas, when they reached the shore, they saw that all was wasteland. Wherever they turned, all was rubble. Every house had been burnt to cinders, and gaping holes opened to more ruins. They found not one soul. All was quiet, not even the birds sang. "I am scared of the silence", the little girl said, and the old man reached out to hold her hand. "Fear not", he said, "I am with you. You are not alone". And so they walked on. The journey took

them to the tops of mountains and into valleys, where springs turned into burns and burns into rivers which fed the oceans, but still they did not encounter anyone. Silence was everywhere.

While they were walking, through valleys and fields, through rubble and ruined towns, theirs were the only sounds you could hear. Then, one day, they stopped in their tracks, for in the distance they saw a house, a proper house. It was not too big and not too small, but it stood upright amongst all the ruins. "That is where I want to go", the little girl said. And so they walked on until they could see that right in the middle of the house was an entrance. A lock hung outside. The old man took out a key; it fitted the lock perfectly. They heaved and shoved, until, finally, the door gave way with an almighty groan. And my, what a sight beckoned them! As far as their eyes could see, the house was filled to the brim with every word imaginable, long and large words, teeny tiny ones were jumbled on shelves upon shelves which were bending under the heavy weight. Imagine her delight! Here, in the midst of silence, was a house filled to the brim with every word that had ever been thought, and some that had yet been unthought. "I have never seen so many words in my life", the little girl said, her eyes shining. With outstretched arms she raced along the shelves, her small fingers drawing fine lines in the settled dust. The old man looked at her kindly. "Shall we play with them?" he suggested, smilingly. "Play with them?" the little girl laughed out loud, but then asked shyly: "But, but how can I possibly play?" So the old man raised himself onto tiptoes, reached up to the highest shelf and carefully placed a word into her small hands. "Here", he said, "and mind that you don't drop it". In her palm the little girl held a teeny tiny word which weighed more than she had ever carried in her life. Carefully she placed it onto the floor. There it sat in its shiny

blackness. "RAW" she read aloud. "Look at it upside down and back to front", the old man suggested. The little girl did a handstand and flipped sideways. "Oh my" she exclaimed "now I know why it weighs more than I have ever known. Why, such a teeny, tiny, mighty word". She sat down on her heels, her lips quivering. Gently the old man touched her shoulder. "Shall we place it in your net?" he asked.

And so the old man and the little girl began their game. They dusted the cobwebs off many words, or washed them in warm water – my, how those words shone like magic lanterns! All the while, they would carefully gather words in her golden net. Often she would climb up to the highest shelves, nimbly easing long words out of the jumble of tinsy-tiny ones, some heavy as lead, or sharp as razors, others light as feathers, or squishy as marshmallows. Imagine her joy when sunlight would appear through the walls and dust would dance like shooting stars! "Here I come" she would shout happily, sitting astride words so light that she could float down to the ground, bathed in warming sunshine. And the old man would smile at her antics. Imagine, some words were so soft that they used them as blankets, and others were round as balls, which caused no end of fun. At other times, the old man would ease heavy words from the little girl's grasp, fists opening into his old hands, and the word would land on the floor with a loud 'thump'. Such days were not filled with smiles, but with drops, which would glisten on the girl's cheeks. In this way, they would spend many, many days. And while the net grew wider and wider with more and more words, it grew lighter and lighter, and began to hover like a golden cloud.

One day, while taking a rest, the little girl looked longingly at her golden net which was by now filled with almost every word imaginable. How lightly it floated above the highest shelves! With the greatest of care, she eased it through the large entrance. And, do you know, with an almighty swish, words upon words upon words jostled and bumped and shoved and pushed until they rose high above the house. Up and down they drifted, spreading far and further into the distance. Well, imagine the little girl's amazement! Open-mouthed she stood, watching in awe and wonder. Never had she seen such spectacle! "Come, come" she shouted excitedly, "watch our words float out." But no one answered, no one heeded her call. "Where are you? Are you playing hide-and-seek?" the little girl asked in a much smaller voice. Hurriedly she turned round and began her search. "Where are you?" she pleaded, "Answer me, please. I cannot hear you." Into the furthest and darkest corners of the house the girl ventured, alas, the old man was nowhere to be found.

The sun was beginning to set, casting a soft glow over all it touched. "Whatever have I done?" the little girl cried desperately, "Not only have I released all the words we have ever gathered together, but now my one and only friend is gone forever." She clutched her golden net, which had lain rather dishevelled in the doorway, and curled up beside it. She tossed and turned, yet sleep evaded her. Being drenched in tiredness, her body eventually succumbed. But no sooner had she closed her eyes when she felt a warm draft caressing her tired body. "Endlich," a voice breathed, "endlich haben wir dich gefunden."¹⁰

¹⁰ Finally, finally we have found you

With an almighty startle, the little girl sat up straight. Up she bolted, fearing the worst of the worst. Against the encroaching darkness she was able to discern figures, four female figures, whose smiles set the little girl alight. Her heart skipped a few beats. For in their faces the little girl recognized a face that had looked back from her own mirror many, many moons ago. "But," she whispered, "aber..." The eldest drew the little girl into her arms, cheek to cheek they held each other and did not let go.

And yet...

... And yet, the longer the four women sit close to the little girl, the more she feels an encroaching coldness creeping stealthily into the core of her very being. Her heart skips more beats, and each beat becomes fainter, like an echo which responds until there is no more to answer. Her rosy wiggly toes feel numb and seem to turn into bluish-white shards of bone right in front of her eyes. Against her fading strength, the little girl clutches the golden net tightly, but to no avail; it slips slowly through her grasp.

By now the moon has risen like a silver shaving in the night sky, casting a dim light onto the world. And, you know, by its eerie glow the scene is unremarkable, for what is so special about a few women and a child sitting closely together? But, look carefully, ever so carefully, can you see? In the midst of nearness there are deaths, four deaths, many deaths, with a very particular claim on the little girl: for had they not each turned into bare vestiges of what it means to be alive? Their skin shines translucent against darkness, as if lit by a tiny, icy quivering flame. Rigid they sit, mouths agape, breathless. Soundless. Slowly, ever so slowly, they tense their grip, tighter and tighter they shift until the little girl is interwoven right into their indiscernible

midst. How easy it would be to surrender, the girl thinks, to give in to blackness beyond anything she has ever known.

Try as she might to keep her eyes open, her lids become steel shutters whose mechanism is set to close for good. With an almighty and desperate effort she bends her aching head, and eases herself little by little, inch by inch, out of the ghosts' clutch. A shattering scream fills the night air, as the girl is released. She lies still, ever so still, but after a while begins to unfold herself gently, right down to the very tips of her fingers and toes. Deeply she fills her lungs, her chest rising and falling in rhythm with her beating heart. Dudumm, dudumm, dudumm. She remains on the ground for a very long time, in fear of the ghouls with their almighty grasp. Never before has she suffered such fright, she thinks. But, eventually, as is so often the case, curiosity gets the better of her, and the girl opens her eyes, tearing aside the veil of darkness.

Sunlight floods her body, rushes in between bones and skin, lightening the thick and sombre flow of blood, and she rejoices in aches coloured by pleasure. "I am alive" she thinks, "I am – where am I?!" Held lightly in her golden net, she finds herself floating on a breeze, down, down through the open window right into the room she had awoken in, once upon a time. Up she jumps, excitedly, when she catches sight of someone in the mirror. "Is it? Is it really?" – She breaks into an almighty smile, and is immediately rewarded by its return. She smiles again, and again, and each time, the girl in the mirror does exactly the same. "Pleased to meet you" they say to each other, and "You are so very welcome". She turns to the window, and smiles into the world. "Yes", she shouts, "yes, yes, yes..."

And the net, the golden net? Well, if you look ever so carefully, you can see it hanging right next to the mirror. Amongst its delicate strands are shapes, many shapes, gossamer-thin, lace-like, shiny.

II.

What is there to remember? What is there to remember if we were told as a child? What we were told as a child? Was 'Once Upon a Time' an insidious opening to tales that needed to be shut away, burnt to cinders in the great fire of 1933?¹¹

And yet, the words came so easy: *Once upon a time*. They appeared almost effortlessly, if one can ever say such thing about the process of writing. And then I waited, lay in wait for what was to follow. There is a certain sing-song quality to these words, a literary lullaby, evocation of place and time long ago. The stories developing out of such opening lines delve deep into marginal territory “where magic is woven in a world outside the physical daily world inhabited during the waking day” (Walker, 2010:83). The tales hover, if you will, on a threshold, and slide in between that which is available to conscious processes and the larger arena of that which remains outside awareness.

We have been writing ourselves into perfidious times and places, haven't we? Times which continue to bear on those whose mute cries can be heard in silent places. Do you remember, we write, but where do we begin? I mean, where do we begin? “History is

¹¹ On May 10th 1933, thousands of books were burnt in university towns all over Germany. The act of cultural barbarism (Ritchie, 1988) was initiated by student bodies, many of whom were in support of ‘cleansing’ Germany’s cultural aesthetics from influences of authors who were supposedly undermining the nascent Third Reich with ‘un-German’ literature (Fishburn, 2007).

amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral: what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers”(Michaels, 2009:138).

Would it be appropriate to assume that when my parents attempted to divert troubling imagery, “formless, nameless anxieties, and [...] chaotic, angry, and even violent fantasies”, as argued by the psychoanalyst Bettelheim (1991:7), it was done on the flawed premise that “only conscious reality or pleasant and wish-fulfilling images should be presented to the child – that he should only be exposed to the sunny side of things”? But, he continues, “such one-sided fare nourishes the mind only in a one sided-way, and real life is not all sunny.” Sunniness - the term forges an allegiance with cyclical weather events over which we have very little influence, but which define us nevertheless.

Do you remember, do you remember the times we sit in the back of the car on one of our excursions, and the sun is wrapped in a shroud of fine dust, and trees and broken houses, and broken factory walls rise out of the fog only to disappear in the blink of an eye? And do you remember that no matter how hard we try to reach up to the huge button in the sky, our arms are never long enough to take off her blanket so she can shine, shine, shine? And that, after a while our lids feel heavy, but we cannot sleep? Do you remember? Do you?

I cannot even say if my laconic response to such experiences was peculiar – it was merely a given. Without narrative to flesh out a possibility of meaning, not because ruinous cities were in themselves meaningless, but because they contested the simplicity of a ‘new beginning’, I was left with imagery beyond calibration. In contrast to Warner’s (1995:XI) description of a tale-teller who “nourishes them on talk, [...] wraps them in language; [...] banishes melancholy by refusing silence”, my tale-tellers were mute. Given that my

parents were unable to find a language with which to speak their own experiences, I am inclined to believe that they were in the grip of a psychic trauma on a scale which “tends to linger and is not metabolized in one generation; its effects are passed on to subsequent generations” (Akhtar, 2009:229).

And then Mammi and Papa sing to us, do you remember? About little Hans who goes out into the world, all alone? But his mother cries so much that he immediately returns home. I can still hear the melody, even after all these years. We sit on Mammi’s knee, right in the front of the car, do you remember? And, do you remember how we can never really understand when Mammi’s lips shrink into a trace, a line in her face? Because, the strange thing is, we are not “trying to understand the silent witnessing of the child exposed to stories not meant for her ears”(Schwab, 2010:45), are we? We are trying to make meaning of the silent witnessing of silent stories slipped into small and silent bodies. Aren’t we? Aren’t we?

To say that I wrote the tale my parents were unable to tell might also be ‘a way of posing a question’, to paraphrase Warner (1995), about the beliefs and values which shaped my, and countless others’ upbringing in the wake of World War II. I narrated a tale pertaining to somewhat idiosyncratic experiences “embedded in material circumstance” (1995:XVIII), or context, within which I interwove other less clearly definable accounts, “that is, the dark monsters residing in the unconscious” (Bettelheim, 1991:121). My fairy tale transgressed, I suggest, the specificity of defined boundaries in favour of memetic inflections, and began to speak to the uncanny silences surrounding the beginnings of the Zero Hour in the wake of WW II.

Why uncanny? Or, more appropriately, what was *unheimlich* about my tale? *Unheimlich*, so wholly inadequately translated into ‘uncanny’, speaks to home, the un-home-ly, beyond home yet bound into it. When Freud (1917-1920/1947) wrote his seminal paper on *Das Unheimliche*, the uncanny, he distinguished it from other forms of anxiety provocations. *Unheimlich* was set as antonym to *heimisch*, *heimlich*, meaning familiar and known, and became something to be feared because it was unknown. However, as not everything that was unknown or novel provoked anxiety, Freud assumed that the shift into the uncanny operated beyond the binary equation of unknown to anxiety. Honing in on the lexical definition of *heimlich*, Freud began to argue that *heimlich* connoted with notions of clandestine or surreptitious engagement. The signifier was not tethered solely to what was considered familiar and homely, but also to what was covert, furtive and secretive. And it is in these overlappings between what is so intrinsically familiar yet strangely disconnected and out of sorts that the heart of the uncanny lies: “Unheimlich ist irgendwie eine Art von heimlich”¹² suggested Freud (1917-1920/1947:237). It may be, so he concluded, that the *Unheimliche* is the exposure of what was meant to remain secretive, and the prefix ‘un’ is simply a mark of repression. My fairy story spoke to trauma and terror, and it spoke to repression, of which Freud (Freud, 1915/1946:253) said: “Wir dürfen uns vorstellen, daß das Verdrängte einen kontinuierlichen Druck in der Richtung zum Bewußten ausübt”¹³. It seems almost spurious to assume I could claim some sort of definitive knowledge around the kind of repression my parents were unconsciously engaged with – such story will most certainly remain

¹² Uncanny is in some way a form of clandestine

¹³ We may assume that the repressed exerts a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious

unwritten! I am inclined to think that as a young child I became witness to the effects of repression without means of bearing what I became witness to. I knew without necessarily knowing what I had knowledge of. But I simply failed to thrive.

Do you remember when we are three or four years old, and Mammi gets us ready. Why don't you bring your doll, she says, but I don't like to. I don't like her. She never closes her eyes, do you remember? And we go outside and walk along the pavement, hand-in-hand we walk, and Mammi carries the spooky doll with no name, and we wear coats with furry collars which tickle our cheeks. And the sun shines this time, or? And then, you remember, we enter a shop. A man takes us into a dark room. And you know how much I hate the dark, and we are afraid, we are so terribly afraid. And Mammi, she watches every move, was it Mammi? And the man says Sit down, and we hover on the edge of a high chair, and he says Take off your coats and we don't and he says Look at the camera and smile and we don't, and, remember, we tighten our lips and look away just like Mammi does.

I located the protagonist of my tale in a soundless land, in an environment without language. My imagery was primarily informed by a framework which underscores the role of language for thinking through trauma in relation to its unspeakability (Nicholas Abraham & Torok, 1994; Barnaby, 2012; Brison, 2008; Caruth, 1996; Clough, 2009). In my story, language had been erased, or in Freudian terms repressed, because what it needed to speak was inarticulable. To narrate a self from a position which forecloses its very performance problematizes the dilemma of an embodied, yet unspeakable, knowledge. My own knowledge was of a kind which, to follow Uotinen (2011:1308) “requires the existence of a body, but, surprisingly, it seems that bodily knowledge does

not necessarily presume consciousness.” Such embodied traumatic knowledge acts seemingly in defiance of what can be narrated, embedded as it is in the unconscious, from which it perpetually returns. Freud terms such endeavour (Freud, 1920/2003) ‘repetition compulsion’, as a way of describing how experiences vie iteratively for meaning making. That the little girl in my tale seemingly knew her way through chaos and devastation in order to arrive at the house full of words is not entirely surprising. After all, she knew about absences, deaths and voids, about repression of language and its vicarious implication on the subject, about unnarratability, about “excess of an unorderable cognitive chaos” (Kristeva, 1989:33).

Living in close proximity to what was unspeakable because it was not spoken about cast a shadow over the familiar and known. Freud’s (1917/1964) ‘shadow of the object’ is the trope through which he sought to account for his observations around loss as central component in mourning as well as melancholia. In melancholia, the lost object had been internalized to the extent that it became the blueprint for other relational configurations. In that sense, it threw its shadow onto “the three-dimensional emotional life lived in the world of real external objects” (Ogden, 2007:131). There were no words which pertained to the ubiquitous lacunae, the silenced absences. There were no words or stories relating to “death, to corpses and to the return of the dead, to ghosts and ghouls” (Freud, 1917-1920/1947:254 translation by author). These shadows turned out to be the ones who demanded their due, they haunted through an “enduring presence of an absence” (Gerson, 2009:4). When, once upon a time, I could have written myself into a home, or a place which felt *heimisch*, the security of the space had been inverted and thrown into doubt, became *unheimlich*, uncanny.

Do you remember how afraid you were of the dark, little one, how terrified you were of the night? That you did not know whom to call on? And that you did not know any more if crying would be any good? And, no matter how hard you squeezed, no tears would flow? And do you remember the nights they went out and left you alone, you weren't really all alone, were you? There were others but you could not fathom them, ghostly they were, almost invisible.

When I wrote my fairytale, little did I recognize that this tale was not entirely mine to tell. My story was simply dovetailed into the tale of an imago, an idealization of what I believed my parents needed me to be; the notion of *imago*, as the child's "unconscious prototypical figure which orientates the subject's way of apprehending others" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988:211) borne out of "relational and/or fantasied experience" (Watkins Jr, 2013:66), troubles a somewhat similar terrain to the substitutional proficiency of the replacement child, but its contestations seem more insidious. Leclaire's (1998:2 original in italics) argument does not pull any punches: "Psychoanalytic practice," he says, "is based upon bringing to the fore *the constant work of a power of death – the death of the wonderful (or terrifying) child who, from generation to generation, bears witness to parents' dreams and desires. There can be no life without killing that strange, original image in which everyone's birth is inscribed.*" The layering of an original imago, in the sense of Leclaire's (1998:34) "phantasy of perfect obedience to the primary narcissistic representation" is foreclosed, but possibly not abandoned, in the death of a child: I imagine that a weave of interlapping imagoes, replacements and phantasies is imbricated in births following such death, the unconscious repercussions of which are, at times, not easy to bear.

Undoubtedly, my birth was underwritten by an entrenched anxiety, not only in fearful expectation arising out of my parent's intimate trauma, but also in the context of an aftermath to an unmeasurable and abject war. The trajectory, I believe, was hence as follows: if, unconsciously, I partook in the phantasy of being fearless, then I would somehow keep us all safe. A safe life, a liveable life, a secure life, a good life – these notions were parameters my parents attempted to adhere to, and to which I, too, felt an unobjectionable obligation. While death could not always be denied (I recall the suicide of an elderly neighbour one Christmas day – her blood left faint traces in the pristine snow), a hastily shut front door to its immediate proximity was preferred, in particular when I was around. Of course, and paradoxically, my very presence became a continuous reminder of more intimate losses, deaths so close that no door would have held back its reckoning: I rarely left my mother's side, lived by what Leclaire (1998:33) calls “the figure of the-child-kept-alive-for-[her]-mother's-solace”, the sine qua non of replacement phantasies. And as inscribed into the script, I intuitively abided by the assimilated rule of silencing what was traumatic and terrifying. There just were no words.

Do you remember, little one, that you never spoke about the red snow? That you never told a single soul? That you always kept mum, in order to keep mum?

In contrast to my imago of narcissistic omnipotence, I was anything but an adventurous or fearless child; I withdrew into the world of fantasy and would seek excitements by proxy: curled up in a corner, I would read children's fiction about the Famous Five (whose dubious political undertones were lost on me. I enjoyed them for what I took them to be: escape mechanisms into a world where grown-ups did not feature), or any other stories which attended

principally to my unconscious desire to flee from a familial situation I just could not make sense of. The need to repress what cannot be assimilated has been theorized by Freud as early as 1896 and developed further in his seminal work “Die Verdrängung”¹⁴ (1915/1946, 1915/1964b) in 1915. Freud saw repression primarily as response to trauma, and I am in no doubt that its vicissitudes shaped our family narrative: whatever bad had happened, as long as we don’t talk about it, it cannot divert us from the rigid trajectory of safety and security at all costs.

Once upon a time I wrote, and inserted into my tale less noticeable filaments. Into the heart of courageous adventure, of almost foolhardy recklessness, I inscribed their inversions. To speak dread, and worst of the worst would shatter, I feared, the phantasmagory the little girl needed to keep the ghouls at bay. And, given that she learnt early on to repress anxiety at all costs, her language was invested in the phantasy of upholding a powerful imago.

And now, little one, what now? Where do words like fear and anxiety sit on the merry-go-round of our tale? Do they sit in a tight embrace with phantasies of courage? Do they vie for attention only to pull you in all directions? But, and here is the paradox, are they not always embedded in each other in a barely differentiable in-betweenness - and to speak one, speaks the other, even if, yes, even if we wish it were otherwise.

¹⁴ Repression

Six. And Then: Untellings, or Echoes of Echoes

So there we are, I say, there we are.

There is a certain finitude in the opening sentence, isn't there, a breezy sort of exhalation, in a similar way to the gentle expulsion of breath without the immediacy of urgent inhalation, and I find myself in the gap between one and the other, a resting place, of sorts. And maybe, maybe, this is where I am, where we are, *you* and I, together, in a place without obvious demarcations of what is one, what is the other. What is the 'we' after all but an inflection of the fluidity of enmeshment, of in-betweenness, with which I continuously write myself into texts whose authorship is troubled and troublesome?

And neither, frankly, can I fathom if what I refer to as a 'there' could be apprehended as a place, in opposition to a 'here', or if it is rather invested in an overarching gesture of circumference, a showing, say, for the time being, of who or what I speak to/through when voices crackle like parchment.

In reflecting on the gossamer threads interwoven into the fabric of this thesis, the sheer mere-ness of fleeting disposition with which I am perpetually entangled, I cannot but ask if this writing, somehow, suffices, if it allows for tentative arcs to be drawn across a divide that is as much defined by the unsayable as it is by that which yields itself to language.

Little did I know. Little did I know that my inquiry would offer itself on a threshold – the threshold of the almost inaudible against the background of the always already, that what I became witness to had as much to do with familial idiosyncrasies as with abject perversity. I began, but I think I had begun before I had even thought of beginnings. In the thick of it, that's where

I was, if truth be told. What is writing but an attempt of making some sort of sense of the thickness within which we find ourselves? I knew, but I did not know what it was I knew; now I know more, but I never know all that I know...

Yet, because I 'knew', I somehow began, or rather, I narrated my beginnings in words, in sentences, in chapters. I formulated my thoughts around the discovery of an image, the photo that vied for something to be done with it, to it - it did not offer anything else but a cut against the grain of the dominant familial discourse of picture-perfect little family. It offered a constellation which troubled my 'taken-for-grantedness' in a disruptive and rather uncanny way, and evoked a haunting presence. The chapters which unfolded in the process of writing this thesis had as much to do with loss of a priori assumptions and certitude, as they had to do with silences and loss, with ruins, absence, memory, and ghosts, always ghosts.

Writing into and through such matter carried the risk of smoothing over uncalibrated and uncalibratable excess, to the extent that the linearity of an argument, say, erases the fine permutations interwoven within texts, and obscure the necessary marginalia and palimpsests without which words would not be held. I say *would* not be held, but, it might well be that they *could* not be held. Because are we not, in line with Gannon (2002:671), always "partial and contingent, fragmented and transitory"? In writing myself into vexing and perplexing hauntings, I sought partial re-conciliation with fragmentary embodied knowledge, with traces curving back into lives lived, and lives unlived, even if such conciliatory gestures can possibly only ever grasp at what remains ungraspable.

This is an ending, of sorts, an ending to these writings, for the time being, but not an ending of the kind that leaves nothing further to inquire into. What I have done through the process of writing might be described as an unfolding and refolding – of dis-synchronicities, of gaps, of fissures and fragments, in a fashion which initially drew me, and continues to do so, to psychoanalytic theory. I barely registered what it was I was in search of, apart from a theoretical resonance with which I could not only begin to, fleetingly, make sense of memory-shards set in a barren field of silence, but also, and possibly even more so, of the perplexing dissonance between my embodied experiences and the rarely spoken of undercurrents bearing on my childhood and adolescence.

Echoes of silence: writing into reverberations of trauma – the title bares itself in the tonal solipsism of an *echo* with its *reverberations*, that is, as act caught in its own ricochets. I would like to lay claim to the title, in terms of conscious choice, but, frankly, I am not so sure: it seems that the title had chosen me, that words had attached themselves to something that needed to come into language, long before I knew what kind of language was asked of me. I am struck by the fate of Echo, one of the nymphs in Greek mythology, whose beautiful voice and entertaining stories beguiled Zeus' wife Hera, to the extent that she paid insufficient attention to her husband's sexual cavorting: furious of having been cuckolded, Hera curses Echo through taking away her speech – all she is left with are repetitious repetitions.

Echoes resonate solely with themselves, they are dependent on a system inaccessible to interference, inaccessible to an other. My reverberations spoke to a hermetically-sealed impenetrableness, where nothing shifted because

nothing was shiftable, and lives were lived in an orderly and predictable fashion.

Picture-perfect, indeed.

Writing not only interrupts, but has the capacity of prizing open this tightly-bound echo chamber. Against the restrictive and constrictive values of resonance, writing, I argue, offers a response. Performative writing has the propensity of exploding, of shattering, the rigours within which silence is held. It is unruly, uncertain, unpredictable; it is written into/through the body, the knowing body, even if language is, sometimes, obfuscated. "In the comfort of incoherency and incompleteness, I began to find relief" writes Spry (2011:503), "I began to experience rupture and fragmentation as a form and function of performative ethnographic representation." Could an argument be upheld that posits psychoanalytic theory into a frame of reference not dissimilar to the one above, in the sense that incoherency is evoked in relation to the unconscious with its repetitious returns of what has been repressed? That, at times, I am not making sense of/to my self, and find these vestiges to a past strangely comforting, even if I am left clueless? At other times, I am perplexed, dumbfounded even, cannot **not** make sense, and am left in utter chaos.

Performative writing into psychoanalysis gives due attention to the complex machinations at play in our unconscious. "A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds fulfilment in the creative work." While Freud's (1907/1962:151) continuous interweave of the past in the present is relatively tightly calibrated in terms of what could easily be thought of as solipsistic agency, a more

generous, Butlerian (2005:37) reading would extend his argument towards “the ‘I’ [who] can tell neither the story of its own emergence not the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present.” The social matrices Butler makes reference to are not only deeply imbued with alterity, but they also enforce a repositioning of self in isolation towards one always already in relation, albeit one imbricated with and articulated through incompleteness.

The vein running through my theoretical underpinnings can hence be read as an endeavour to trace traces, traces, which, as Freud (1907/1962:49 italics by author) argues, are “only repressed because they are associated with the release of feelings *which ought not to occur.*” But could the propensity for sabotaging that which is forbidden by its very opposite not be one of the tenets of psychoanalysis? And, furthermore, is the very act of writing into reverberations, into traces, not always already imbued with the presence of an alterity, in an enmeshment of absence and presence, of voices, of bodies, of stories told and untold?

Writings, irrespective of whether they are ‘factual’, I propose, are always fictional, in that they re-present a temporality and spatiality that is non-narratable. “I am always recuperating, reconstructing”, says Butler (2005:39) “and I am left to fictionalize and fabulate origins I cannot know.” Could this be considered leverage in the argument of silences as haunting presence, the origins of which remain unknowable – after all, is this not the gap into which ghostly hauntings slip? And, if that were so, were not written into my body other fabulated accounts, “cajoling [me] to reconsider [...] because cajoling is

in the nature of the ghost, the very distinction between there and not there.” (Gordon, 2008:6)?

The fallacy here is that the cajoling Gordon speaks about rarely ends in such definitive distinctions – this thesis is infused with the indistinct and indistinguishable nature of ghosts in the aftermath of traumatic experiences – it is infused with authorial presences whose voices speak – through me, with me, at me – the ‘I’ who is writing now, writing these last few paragraphs, the ‘I’ who might have been, the ‘I’ who remembered even if what I remembered was different to the remembrances of others, the ‘I’ who performed herself in the embrace of fiction, born, as it were, out of shards, of fragments, out of a loss of narratability, out of that which was held by gossamer threads.

Fallacious Accounts

She looked at the baton in her hand. Had she not held on to it for many years? Her fingers had accommodated its weight, had bent themselves in an almost perfect O around the smooth circumference. She looked closer, inspected the barely visible indentations in the wood, the marks left in slightly darkened grooves. This baton mattered, had mattered more than she had cared to admit, even to herself. And now?

It is on account of writings which are “partial, incomplete, and [...] always in a process of retelling and remembering” (Alecia Jackson & Mazzei, 2013:262), that I return to the critique I made in respect of autoethnographic accounts of trauma, premised, as it were, to a large extent on the healing trope. When ‘autoethnography-as-therapy’ (Gannon, 2006), mapped out by Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:280 italics by author) in the suggestion that

the writing process can be “*therapeutic* for participants and readers” through which, moreover, we can “*purge our burden*”, is considered the sine qua non, to what extent is it premised on a reductive, but equally quite astute mis/understanding of what is taken to be therapy’s task? When the argument is upheld that proposes therapy as the patient’s great enabler - to heal, to feel better, to cope, to move on – the “universal healing technology that has already brought a transcendent ‘cure’ to earthlings” as Cushman (1995:6f) rather provocatively puts it, to what extent is the ‘cure’, “permeated by the philosophy of self-contained individualism” driven by the shift from medical ‘pathology’ discourses towards those underpinned by ‘empowerment and self-realization’? It is these individuated subject positions Giorgio (2009:151 italics by author) calls upon when she says: “When we speak, or may I add write, we assert *our own order* onto the mess of trauma; we *regain control* over our lives by acknowledging and sharing with others our truths.”

She suspected that batons were used as incitements to gain order, to divide what squelched and spluttered from what was neatly packaged. Looking down at her feet, she bent forwards, and drew a few squiggles in the mud. She drew more. And more.

There is more, always more: “In a good narrative, the reader will learn, benefit, and be guided by the story, as a good narrative conveys meanings that help us *cope with our experiences*” (C. S. Davis & Warren-Findlow, 2011:570 italics by author); “It is about the process of writing memory, and coming out the other end. It is about *narrative healing*.” And further on: “When I need expansion, or understanding, *or healing*, I turn to autoethnography” Poulos (2012:324 italics by author).

The fixicity with which narrativization of trauma is suggested as ultimate healing panacea fails, I fear, to acknowledge that there is, simply, no neatness or tidiness to trauma, no means of speaking it for the very last time.

She smiled. Let the baton fall. Stepped over. And walked on.

... And, of course, how can there be an 'I' without a 'you/You', not solely in the sense of the stylistic invention, or fabrication alongside/against whom I struggled with in the howness of these writings; in writing you, I also attended to an alterity which, as Freud (1916:486) would have it is the basis of our psychic life. "The unconscious is the real psychic" he says, "its inner nature is just as unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs." Unknown, unknowable, imperfect.

So, where are we now, I say, where are we now?

I am sitting in the office, strip-light plays hide-and-seek with the sun, outshining each other; just now I rest my fingers on keys which have played immeasurable music. I truly did not know that I had it in me, or rather, that what I had in me was part of a wider discourse around pernicious trauma and its generational inflections. I wrote myself into fissures, into gaps and breakages, I fabricated compositions, if you will, of my inquiry, particular genres which, I hope, aligned concepts and creative configurations. But, of

course, as St. Pierre (1997:408) says, “as I write, I think, I learn, and I change my mind about what I think.”

It is fallacious to imagine what I would change now at the end, after the event of writing what I have written, so to speak, not because my writing is perfect, or coherent – far from it – but because such interjection pays scant attention to the procedural nature of continuous and iterative changes or shifts I had been subjected to, or rather, by which I became, and continue to become subject. That such iterations were part of fragments with which I narrated what fell outwith the margins of narratability should not be seen as a reductionist ploy, but rather as an acceptance of the limitations of narration: are we not always invested in an assumption of coherence, in the way we linearly construct ourselves through the stories we tell, even if, or maybe particularly if what we tell is fused with absences and silences?

This thesis, in all its exemplary fragmented messiness contributes to writings of a nature which pay tribute to such paradigmatic heterogeneity, by attempting to temporarily defuse the boundaries between the stability of binaries – absence/presence, self/other, individual/social, being/becoming, cohesive/fragmented, dominant/marginal and any permutations arising out of those dichotomies, given that they operate on an a priori assumption that forecloses, I argued, investigations into meaning-making which attend “to the unthought, unspoken, unthinkable and unspeakable” (Aranda, Zeeman, Scholes, & Morales, 2012:553). As such, this text made a case for enmeshed knowledge, driven by the thematic entanglement of a specific triad - trauma, silence, ghosts – and its equally entangled epistemic inquiry; it offered, I

suggested, one way of iteratively, yet only ever momentarily, destabilizing homogenous knowledge. There is, indeed, no finitude to destabilization.

Psychoanalysis was the trope through which I began to investigate uncanny appearances of ghosts, apparitions in the gap between discourses and the very lack they unconsciously failed to articulate – articulations around loss – where familial, social, national, cultural losses were cast into the shadow of silence. I swept in a wide arc, in a trajectory that followed monadic autonomy into intersubjective relationality, by which I sought to theorize what I understood as reverberations of trauma, under which ghosts and hauntings could be made meaning of. What followed in its wake was a (necessary) collapse of methodological certainties, to the extent that in further cyclical unfoldings, I began to trouble, and was troubled by, an autoethnography premised on an unambiguous discrete subjectivity, one which, I feared, foreclosed to a large extent the multifarious complexities at play in my genre of textual devices (Atkinson, 2013). When the 'auto' in my writing was foregrounded in an iterative heterogeneous performative sense of self, I am left wondering now if the term 'autoethnography' suffices in undergirding writing practices which yield to fragments, inconsistencies and paradoxes. Writings without resolutions, without finitude, without linearly constructed cohesion, unknowable writings, as it were, that arose in the wake of Poulos' (2009) 'accidental' discoveries. But, frankly, what is 'accidental' in the discovery of the haunting photo, whose very presence spoke to a perfidious absence, the magnitude of which I was at pains - at pains - to keep at bay? In recognizing an irrefutable tangent from what was barely to what was never spoken of, I unfolded myself in memories and imaginings of familiar silences, wrote myself into an embodied and situated knowledge that spoke as much to

familial as to socio-cultural and historical contextures. The personal is indeed always political.

Each of the chapters I wrote in pursuit of an inquiry into something I did not know how to inquire into from the outset is fashioned in a way that, I hope, interrupted and problematized discursive theoretical parameters. I utilized specific genres, invested in “the process and the product of constructing knowledge” (Bhattacharya, 2013:611f), “moving in multiple directions, producing multidimensional knowledge, and developing contradictions and tensions, all the while playing with form and content to provoke people into dialoguing.”

My play took me into writing theory as dialogue - an interlocutor set in conversation with a protagonist - whose roles, as reflections into meandering investigations were developed over the course of *Kitchen Conversations*. Shuttling between one voice and another, as other, was primarily informed by a way of rendering visible the underpinnings of an intersubjectively framed psychoanalysis, and I carried the evocations of the other into all subsequent chapters: *Dear Departed* can hence be read as a refrain on an irrevocable presence in absence, on the way that the other is continuously implicated in the formation of self, as Kristeva (1991:182) would argue, so that “on the basis of the other, I become reconciled with my own other-foreignness, that I play on it and live by it.” To write ghosts and hauntings can be understood, I suggest, not only as an act of conciliation with these fleeting concatenations of past and present, these spatial and temporal fugitives, but equally as an act of re-conciliation with the heterogeneity of the unconscious, parts of which will remain forever irreconcilable - the knowledge of non-knowledge, so to speak.

And while alterity in the chapter *Monday* is woven into the text through repetitious enmeshment with what defies calibration, *Ghost Talk* opens the window onto a densely populated silence, which reverberates with lost or never-heard voices. "The experience of the loss of a loved one is complex and comprises many intersecting layers of heterogeneous origin: some of them are of linguistic provenance and character, others are of the purely nonreflected experiential. The latter consist of sheer pain, suffering made of ache, throbbing resulting from the simple experience of being severed from the loved one, regardless of our convictions about and beliefs and interpretations of the 'nature' of (any) connections with and attachment to the other: [...], the experience of grieving itself is that of pure suffering inflicted by the sensation of being severed from the loved one" (Kolozova, 2014:127).

That's where I am, I say, that's where we are.

I could and, indeed, would not deny that the continuous invocations of other, and the Other, were hinting at an inherent loss in my narrative, in the sense that while writing into otherness, I fabricated a presence that has, for most of my childhood and adolescence, been absent. The irony is that while my parents fought their own battles, silent battles, with what they were, I imagine, unable to resurrect into language, and sought recourse, or possibly oblivion, in work and alcohol, I was somehow left on the battlefield. The textual fabrications, say, infused with past and present selves, with fragments, memories, with conjectures and seeming facticities served not only as reminder of the lacunae I needed to live by, but also as arcs, tentatively bridging gaps between fragmented 'not-yet-narrations' of trauma and its aftermath, for the sake of semi-coherent narrativization. Does the argument

hold that such endeavour cannot be anything but reductive? Possibly. Because is the heel of narratability not somehow always positioned in the ground of what resists narration? And is any narration, irrespective of its coherence, not always full of absence? My attempts to write into what defies narratability (not solely in terms of the personal story, but also in view of Germany's war and post-war experiences) does not foreclose what I think of as an inherent paradox: we live by a contentious, yet taken-for-granted assumption that our lives are story-able to the extent we often wish them to be – as alignments on an almost uninterrupted trajectory from a beginning through a middle to an end - and that these stories make sense, that they offer a modicum of coherence, that they give meaning to our experiences. Trauma shatters that assumption, opens up substantial cracks and gaps in narrativization, and fragments the coherence of meaning-making. While Cohen's (2013:55 italics by author) argument that "you can be haunted *only* by the incomprehensible" seems too reductive - because, after all, hauntings can appear as 'unknown knowledge staking a claim for recognition' – what ghosts hold up are substantial fractures in the narrative frame, or, to put it another way, the deeper and wider the fissure the more it is populated by hauntings and ghosts. These spectres slip under the calibrated radar of certitude, of singularity, of conclusion and finitude, enmesh themselves as much with what is not spoken of as with what needs to be kept at bay at all costs, and what, possibly, can never be spoken of.

"Our steps are dogged by past and future; we are never left alone," says Frosh (2013:166). And, maybe, this 'non-aloneness' is part of the enduring aliveness of hauntings and ghosts, part of the uncanny realization that something remains at stake, has not been given over – I would like to write 'to words', or

'to recognition', but I shy away from the invocation of such definitive gestures. And yet, and yet, was it not so that my writings into silence, into hauntings and ghosts were ways of writings into what was at stake, into an absence demanding its due? Does it suffice to declare writing acts of that nature as acts of writing into what has been lying dormant in the field of ungrieved loss? Did I write because I needed to right? And what did I 'right' if not overtly registering an absence, perdition even? My argument is that through performative writing I did not only externalize a process – the process of becoming witness – but offered, if you will, an intersubjective testimonial frame within which processes of mourning can be thought of.

But, of course, such overt proclamations break the tight boundaries within which unspeakable knowledge has been secreted away; it violates its very foundations. Writing exposes, transgresses, as Cixous (1981/2000:97) would have it: "Am I transgressing by writing what I am writing? Or by not writing what I am not writing? Or both? What law(s) am I transgressing? [...] I think that one transgresses (1) the law of silence that must be observed [...] in the face of almost everything." Were I to consider my thesis in the light of Cixous' question, what I wrote could indeed be understood in such contested terms – of the codex to keep hidden what did not fit the familial paradigm, which was itself deeply embedded in lack: when I left Germany in the 1970s, the then palpable lack of discursive engagement with Germany's recent unspeakable past continued to cast its deep shadows. Much has changed in the intervening years. To write can, I suggest, now simply be understood in terms of a declaration of wilful contamination – an overflow out of what was so neatly and so deadly declared *tabula rasa*.

And now, I ask, and now?

I sit at my desk, fingers poised, arms slightly extended to rest on the keyboard. It is cold outside. It is slightly warmer inside. This is the 'now', the non-graspable instant which dissolves as soon as it is uttered. "The performative I puts experience under erasure" says Denzin (2013:38); Dear Norman, I'd like to say, it is not so much experience that has been put under erasure, but the telling thereof, the assumption that there is indeed only one story to tell, that the authorial voice speaks eloquently and longingly of coherence, in full view – imagine - of its inherent myth. That the story of my mother's grief for her lost children, for example, could only be told in recognition "however dimly, [of] the possibility that her silence had nothing at all to do with the loss of her child[ren], but rather had to do with the weight of her living child[.] – or more distressing still, had nothing to do with any of us at all" (Phelan, 1993:13).

And yet.

And yet...

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