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Posthuman Counselling:

Understanding a Counselling Session as a Materially Entangled Performative Encounter

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In memory of my mum Jane, my dad Foss and best friend Anne.

Abstract

While counselling theory and practice has acknowledged the materiality of a counselling session, research into the entangled, dynamic relationship of the human and nonhuman in the counselling session remains largely unexplored. To date, counselling research has been predicated on assumptions that privilege the human over matter and which emphasize the binary positioning of the knower/known, subject/object, client and counsellor. This study looks to the feminist philosopher and quantum physicist Karen Barad whose theories encourage a fundamental rethinking of concepts which support this binary thinking and inspire a move towards an ethico-onto-epistemological view of counselling. This thesis is expanded by engaging with the work of Karen Barad to reconceptualize what we view as a counselling session in terms of an entangled performative encounter. It considers how the posthuman new materialist principles of agential realism might trouble our theorizing of a counselling session when viewed as a phenomena intra-actively co-constituted through the specific material discursive practices which emerge. The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that when we emphasize the absolute indeterminacy of experience, acknowledging that past and future, the conscious and unconscious, are repeatedly reworked and enfolded through the iterative, dynamic practices of spacetime-mattering a richer understanding of counselling experience begins to emerge. This thesis troubles the idea of defined prescriptive methodologies. It acknowledges instead that this thesis emerged iteratively and unpredictably and represents my attention to the agential enactments which emerged in the material-discursive practices of writing, thinking and reading my memories and experiences of counselling. It presents an exploration of what might emerge when we diffractively read, write and think the

theories of psychodynamic theory through the posthuman new materialisms. It gives space to the differences and new understandings generated by an entangled reading of experience in counselling, a knowing in being. This thesis demonstrates that when we attend to the ethical and onto-epistemological matterings of the therapeutic encounter we produce a richer, more materially expansive understanding of counselling as an experience.

Lay Summary of Thesis

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This thesis is an attempt to explore counselling from a posthuman new materialist perspective with emphasis on Karen Barad’s theory of agential realism. I believe we can have a richer more nuanced understanding of counselling if we explore the role of the material in the counselling session.

The posthuman new materialist position considers the new materialisms and posthuman as so entangled that it is at times impossible to separate the two. The philosophies of posthumanism and new materialism each share an emphasis on the agential, entangled nature of the material with the human and both challenge human centred ways of thinking. Agential realism posits a posthuman ethical theory which emphasises the entangled nature of human and non-human entities. It proposes a relational ontology. That is, an ethico-onto-epistemology which suggests our ethics are enmeshed with the nature of knowing and being.

I use writing as inquiry, as a process to explore and make sense of experiences in counselling. I did not begin writing this thesis with a fixed idea of what I would write nor did I apply a rigid methodology, rather I allowed the thesis to emerge as I diffractively read posthuman new materialisms through psychodynamic theory and my own personal experiences of being a client in counselling. That is, I tried to understand counselling by exploring the ways in which the theories interact and shape each other. This involved looking at counselling from each perspective and accepting that the knowledge that I produced is not fixed, but rather is shaped by the relationships between people, objects, and ideas. By accepting the value in the diverse perspectives, I was able to create new understandings of counselling through the exploration of difference.

The themes that emerged during this thesis were loss, trauma and difference; through which I also explored the material nature of silence in counselling sessions. I suggest that by reading the posthuman new materialisms through counselling, theory and practice we can better understand the complex relationships between human and non-human entities in the counselling session. I propose that a posthumanist-influenced approach to counselling, informed by new materialism, can lead to a more holistic and expansive understanding of counselling.

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Glossary

Term	Definition
Agential Cuts	According to Barad, the deeply connected way that everything is entangled with everything else means that any act of observation makes a "cut" between what is included and excluded from what is being considered.
Agential Realism	A theory proposed by Karen Barad, in the book "Meeting the Universe Halfway". The main tenet of the theory is that the universe is comprised of phenomena, the reality of which we can understand through relations that come into being through and in intra- actions. What we know, think, and observe are products of a dynamic material intra-activity.
Apparatus	The apparatus of agential realism are not simply inert instruments of measurement but rather a material discursive practice. They enact what is included and what is excluded from mattering.

Diffracted/Diffraction	Haraway was the first to introduce a concept of diffraction to encourage us to reconsider difference and reject the oppositional and binary thinking. Barad expands on this term, cultivating a performative alternative to representationalism in the form of diffraction and diffractive methodologies.
Ethico-onto-epistemological	The term was conceived by Karen Barad to characterize the inseparability of ethics, ontology, and epistemology i.e., what we know, how we come to know it are inextricably entwined with our ethics of being. We have an ethical responsibility for the knowledge that we produce and the role we play as part of the worlds becoming (Barad, 2007).
Intra-action	Barad uses intra rather than inter to denote that we come into being in relation to others, produced in the performance, not existing prior to this intra-active moment of becoming.

Material-discursive	This a term coined by Barad which suggests that materiality is discursive while discursive practices are already material. The term material-discursive points to the entangled nature of the two and indicates a need to move away from thinking of the relationship of discourse and matter in binary terms.
Phenomena	Refers to the smallest units of analysis.

Introduction

“There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly. The world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting. How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter?” (Barad, 2007, p. x.)

1.1 First Cut: Thesis Aim

This thesis interrogates how the application of what I term posthuman new materialist philosophies can expand current understandings of the experience of counselling. I invoke the term posthuman new materialist philosophies to reflect the way in which the fundamental ethical, epistemological and ontological principles of the new materialisms and posthumanism are entangled with my writing. The ultimate aim of this thesis is to conceptualise a materially engaged performative posthuman counselling session, a reconceptualisation of what we view as a counselling session in terms of an entangled performative encounter, an exploration of what might emerge when we diffractively read, consider, write, think posthuman new materialist theories through a therapeutic counselling session. Throughout my research, I consider how the philosophical principles of Karen Barad’s theory of agential realism (Barad, 2007) might trouble our theorising of a counselling session when we consider it as a relational, performative encounter of material phenomenon and discursive practices i.e., a doing, not a representation, which encourages us to redirect our attention away from theoretical interpretations of the material and reality to practices/doings/actions (Barad, 2003). I reflect on how a posthumanist performative view of counselling practice encourages us to specifically acknowledge and

consider the dynamism of matter in the session (Barad, 2007), to engage with the materiality of thinking, feeling, remembering, to consider the material force of language and its entanglement with bodies and matter (MacLure, 2013). However, more than this I turn to agential realism, not only as a concept with which to explain or capture the experience of a materially informed counselling session (Barad, 2007) but as a theory with which to engage with, and be of, the research process. In short, agential realism is an ethical apparatus with which to experience the agential, discursive materialities of knowledge production that take place in a counselling session i.e., what we hear and what we don't, what we say, don't say and forget to say, what we remember, what we forget, what we feel and what we imagine; to contemplate the potential for greater understanding of experience in the counselling session when viewed from an ethico-onto-epistemological position, from where the "intertwined nature of "ethics, knowing and being" are acknowledged" (Barad, 2007, Barad, 2014, p.185).

I believe that by considering the materiality of the counselling session and viewing it through the *seemingly* abstract structures of quantum mechanics, we can discard the dualist positioning between knower and known, subject and object, client and therapist, material and human. We can reject traditional linear notions of causality, space and time and emphasise instead the entangled, inseparable yet discrete nature of each; indistinguishable, enmeshed, counsellor and client forming iteratively through the process (Barad, 2007). By reconsidering the traditional forms of duality of human and non-human and adopting instead a post human position we can acknowledge the entangled, inseparable nature of matter and meaning as they are mutually constituted in the counselling session (Barad, 2007, p.152). Posthuman ethics of the

new materialisms, presents an ethical requirement to consider the relationship between human and non-human, re-positioning matter/human (van der Tuin, 2014). By de-centering the human in the counselling session and placing them on a culture/nature continuum it addresses binary thinking and the implications this has for our collective knowing and being in the counselling room. The material conditions become integral to the process, the material and discursive entanglements need to be attended to. Crucially, “the posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming” (Braidotti, 2013, p.11). Through the prism of posthuman new materialisms, it is evident that what we know and understand of counselling is inextricably linked with both our way of being and our ethics (Barad, 2007); the way in which we understand encounters between client and counsellor has become epistemologically challenged.

This thesis set out to be an experiment in post qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2011), assembled diffractively, in lieu of a more traditional linear format. The reader will not find a traditionally structured thesis in terms of a literature review, data, findings and conclusions. Instead, working within the philosophical positioning of the new materialisms, I creatively challenge ways of thinking about counselling, shifting the emphasis away from theory, interpretation and analysis to one of “knowing in being” (Barad, 2007, p.185), where being and knowing are mutually implicated. I bring the thesis to life by diffractively reading this posthuman agential realist framework through my own writing, thinking, remembering of personal therapeutic encounters, experience as a counsellor, experience of relationship. Writing to explore, writing to inquire, writing as a material emergent practice will be an intrinsic element

in this post qualitative inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Writing encounters which trouble time, memory, space, “matterings” (Barad, 2007), invoking Barad’s theory of agential realism, which disrupts ideas of continuity, I invite the reader of this thesis, to share in this performance of time and space recomposed in a way that allows you to experience something more analogous to the dis/orientating encounters of an electron (Barad, 2010) (or indeed the bewildering experience of a first counselling session) than the traditional, often undeviating path of a thesis. It is a story, a telling. I encourage the reader to inhabit the world of the electron, as Barad does, “disjointed, dis/orientated in time and space, at once entangled with the here and now/there and then, to experience the spectral quality of “quantum discontinuity” (Barad, 2010, p. 240).

Emboldened by St. Pierre (2021), I have abandoned a structured methodology, acknowledging from an early stage it’s incompatibility with my post human onto-ethico-epistemological position. Undoubtedly, positioning this thesis within a context of post qualitative inquiry¹ rather than applying more orthodox research methods empowered me to pursue alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation (Braidotti, 2013, p12) in relation to the experience of doing research. A “methodology free” approach will allow creativity rather than a mere reproduction of material (St Pierre, 2017, 2021). Freeing myself from the restraint of methodologies while immersing myself in posthuman thinking, I have been able to

¹ Despite my interest in adopting a post qualitative inquiry position on methodology, I found myself troubled by this decision midway through writing this thesis. See Chapter 5 for an explanation.

open myself up to the materialities of the encounter; to allow for the intra-action of space, time, matter, the organic and inorganic, the social and natural, while giving space for abstract and indeterminate yet material concepts of thought, memory, experience, I found the confidence to accept my entangled, iterative thinking, writing and reading as my research work.

My first task, when I set out to produce this thesis, was to establish my epistemological and ontological position (Chamberlain, 2000; Mason, 2018). However, I was still not clear what was being asked of me and it was while trying to assimilate the definitions that I stumbled across a book review of Karen Barad's "Meeting the Universe Halfway". Despite finding the language intimidating, I was immediately drawn to the idea of an ethico-onto-epistemology. It seemed the perfect ideological fit.

Now, having developed what some might describe as posthuman sensitivities, after discovering Barad's work, I present a thesis which cultivates the notion of an entangled, relational, and intra-active counselling session, and diffractively reads through the many complex configurations which form and re-form human and non-human subjects (Zapata, 2018). In short, I think counselling with agential realism. I wonder what it means to think of the counselling session as so enmeshed with our ethics and what we know that aspects of self and client cannot be teased apart, each informs the other. "We come into being together since knowing/be(come)ing, doing cannot be separated" (Zapata, et al. 2018, p. 479). I question what a posthuman counselling session looks like when it is thought and performed through relational ontologies. When the client and counsellor are not separate, fixed entities. Instead, their

relationship is viewed as a becoming, a process not a state (Coole and Frost, 2010) which comes into being. Each session emerging in a uniquely iterative moment, every session unfolding differently.

As the writing of this thesis unfolds, I consider what happens when we hypothesise my experience of counselling as a diffractive rather than a reflexive process. I wonder about the diffractive effect of the counsellor/client dyad and the emergence of new patterns caused by the enactment of agential cuts materialising different phenomena (Barad, 2007), in the materially discursive processes, cuts which become entangled with other phenomena created in the session. Agential cuts which represent decisions, unconscious or otherwise, where we draw the line/boundary between the material and non-material/ self/other. I reflect upon the absolute indeterminacy of my own (and my therapist's) ways of knowing/being/doing (Zapata et al., 2018) a counselling session and explore how the idea of agential cuts (Barad, 2007) suggest a new way to think about causality in counselling. I begin to think about the counselling session as the apparatus, intra-actively affecting each object, each leaving a mark, a measurement, creating understanding through the discursive materialisation of the impact (Barad, 2007) in the expectation that I will produce a new way of thinking about therapeutic encounters, an altered conceptualisation of what happens in counselling when we view it through the ethico-onto-epistemologies of agential realism. The intra-action, which has become the "transformative force of desire", that is my enthusiasm for my thesis subject, will stimulate my writing (Mazzei, 2014).

1.2 Second Cut: Finding My Way to a Posthuman New Materialist Framework

This thesis emerged organically from my growing enthusiasm and personal interest in working from a position within the academic domain of the new materialisms which is underpinned by posthuman ethics, placing particular emphasis on the theory of agential realism (Barad, 2007). However, this is a long way from where I started my academic journey, when I was interested in the intersubjective and intrinsically relational nature of the production of knowledge. I believed that if I could contextualize my research, acknowledge the subjectivity of both the participant and I, and do it well enough, I could effectively enhance my knowledge of both the personal and social experience of counselling (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

Until recently there has been an ambivalence towards counselling research based on the pragmatic and ethical position that researchers should produce replicable, robust, research that would attract sustainable funding for counselling services. Demonstrating “what works” had become an obsession amongst funders and evidence based practice (EBP) is very much seen as the “new holy grail” (Sanderson, 2003, p4) or “gold standard” (Lather, 2013, p. 435). Certainly, in counselling research there remains significant emphasis on process and outcomes and a mass of increasingly technical psychotherapy outcome literature (Scott et al. 2013). Along with stress on randomised control trials (Bondi & Fewell, 2016), the need to prove which therapies produce the best outcome? “What Works for Whom?” (Roth & Fonagy, 2005) and which therapy best suits which condition (Wampold & Imel, 2015). We seem socially conditioned to believe that authentic science is quantitative and empirical (Wall, 2006) including counselling researchers, many of whom continue to be drawn towards the panacea of evidence-based practice (Bondi & Fewell, 2016). There is a focus on setting goals, improving counsellor understanding, and the

production of counsellor knowledge, to “produce knowledge that makes a difference to practice” (McLeod, 1999). All of which is based on the ontological realist assumption that there is an objective reality that exists irrespective of the researcher’s position (Bager Charleson, 2020). Yet, counsellors themselves recognise that this represents a disparity between the epistemological disposition to a positivist construction of knowledge, and research that accounts for the intersubjective and “embodied, emotional and intuitive” experience of their practice” (Bager-Charleson, 2020). There has been some movement towards the consideration of the contextual, subjective experience of the participant in counselling research (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988 cited in Edirishingam 2012; Neuman, 2000 cited in Edirishingam 2012; Bager Charleson, 2020). In short, recent postmodern philosophical alignment has encouraged researchers to think that knowledge and research could be done differently (Wall, 2006), old ontological assumptions could be usurped by the idea of a co-constructed reality that emerges in relation to others and that qualitative inquiry could be done differently.

Nevertheless, I found myself troubled. How could I produce knowledge that was value free or truly objective when my own contextual positioned perspectives and realities would always influence what I write? How could I, as a researcher, ever be truly reflexive? My psychodynamic counselling training was influencing my thought processes. To what extent is “what we know” in social science research, a form of projection, how much of our knowledge is dependent on what we put out (ask) when it always influences what comes back? Experience can increasingly be recognized as being shaped in response to what we put out (project). I wondered if I could approach my research with the aim of creating enough mental neutrality to create an

internal potential space (Winnicott, 1974). Bollas (1987) uses the phrase “countertransference²ready” to describe making this internal space available for use as opposed to hiding behind a therapeutic stance. Or in the case of this thesis, hiding behind “scientific detachment” or “mental neutrality”. I began to be excited by the idea that if I could be counter transference ready to my research, be open and reflexive, aware of my projective response to the knowledge that was being created, my thesis might be truly reflexive, transparent and hermeneutically considered (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Could the application of psychoanalytic concepts be a way forward in qualitative inquiry (Frosh et al., 2003; Frosh, 2019; Kvale, 1999).

I spent some time wrestling with what I perceived as the challenge of producing research that was value free or truly objective. However theoretically naïve, I was acutely aware of the sensitivities of retelling someone else, or my own, story and authentically committing that experience to paper; today’s truth will be different tomorrow, reality is dynamic and unfolding (Barad, 2007). And so, in the early days of my research, I constructed a case for taking a psychodynamic, interpretative approach to my research analysis, aspiring to a reflexive and transparent thesis that was hermeneutically considered (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Yet, I continued to be concerned with the integrity of knowledge, how my contextual positioned perspectives as a psychotherapeutic counsellor researcher, and the multiple realities of client, counsellor, researcher would influence the methodological process of this research, and ethical

² Countertransference is an unconscious phenomenon which describes the impact of the client’s transference on the counsellor.

accountability, not only on an institutional but also on a personal level. It was clear I needed to clarify my epistemological and ontological view in relation to my research, a status which would effectively integrate with my philosophical and theoretical thinking before I explored the paths that might lead to a cohesive methodological position (Chamberlain, 2000; Mason, 2018; McLeod, 2010).

Agential realism and posthuman ethics crystallised my dilemma by calling into question the distinction between ontology and epistemology, theorising that what we know is inextricably linked with both our way of being and ethics, offering an onto-ethico-epistemological position where each is enmeshed, intertwined by nature (Barad, 2007). That is, “third wave epistemologies” which could be used to understand the “entangled” nature of research by viewing it through an “ethico onto-epistemology” (Barad, 2007). A relational ontology (Barad, 2007) would discard the idea of separation between researcher and researched, there would be no distinction between the two. Participant/researcher no longer passive and separate but entangled in the production of knowledge, who’s very presence creates an agential cut, demarcating the boundary between what is excluded and included, in an intrasubjective, and emergent process. Offering a posthuman ethical framework within which to re-examine knowledge production in the encounter between client and counsellor.

I found myself drawn to the new materialism axiom that all matter is ontologically relational and comes into being in relationship with other equally unpredictable and transitory bodies, things and ideas (Barad, 2007). No longer inert but “animated and agential” in a

generative becoming (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.2.). I am acutely aware that today more than at any other time we cannot ignore the material, as the effect of human behaviour on the planet becomes glaringly obvious. Moreover, we live more closely integrated with technology than at any other period in history and the ambivalence of this relationship cannot be ignored, we cannot live without it but equally the reality of how much technology penetrates our lives can be discomfoting. We delegate responsibility to technology, wittingly or otherwise. Agency no longer resides in the human but in technology (St. Pierre, 2019). I felt the urgency of the posthuman challenge to reject hierarchical assumptions of the human and matter, to consider the materially mediated subject (Braidotti, 2019) and question the power dynamics implicit in the relationship.

Moreover, these concepts (and this thesis) are predicated on the work of Barad, a posthuman philosopher who advocates new materialist ethics, “one of the most influential and important representatives of contemporary materialist scholarship” (Lemke, 2015, p5). A feminist theorist and quantum physicist, Barad’s theories have been enthusiastically assimilated and integrated into the study of a wide spectrum of academics, working across a diverse range of disciplines. Hollin et al. (2017) coined the phrase “Barad Bingo” to acknowledge the ubiquity of reference to Barad’s work and the use of “Baradian vocabulary” of “entanglement”, “intra-action”, “diffraction”, “agential realism” (Hollin et al., 2017 p.2). In this thesis I use Barad’s work to explore in more detail the boundaries which materialise in the posthuman counselling session, expanding on the notion of the session as a boundary making process, exploring in detail how the boundaries between self, other, material, and non-material emerge. To consider what

kind of knowing subjects we are in the process of becoming (Braidotti, 2019) in the entanglement of a counselling session.

1.3 An Emerging Thesis

I must acknowledge the indeterminacy of this project at every stage. I did not plan to write about counselling, the idea emerged, quite organically several months into the project, as I walked down an old, cobbled street in Edinburgh reflecting on a very materially entangled counselling session I had just had with a new client. I was thinking about the expressive hands that seemed to have a life of their own as they squeezed the wet tissue overflowing with tears, the dry tissue that I quietly held out for her, the materiality of which seemed to “produce effects and alter the situation” (Bennett, 2004, p.355). I reasoned that by making an ontological shift to consider the material-discursive nature of the session, I could come to a new philosophical position on counselling. Increasingly, the counselling session became the focus of my research interest. In holding together counselling and the new materialisms I was setting myself a very specific ethico-onto-epistemological task i.e., to stop thinking in the binary. This thesis has come to represent an acknowledgement of what I consider the ontological inseparability of the client, therapist, space, time, room, tears³ (Barraclough, 2017), laughter, the human, matter. From the ethico-onto-epistemological position of agential realism therapeutic encounters become an

³ Barraclough (2017) considers the materialisation of tears in the materially-discursive encounter with counsellors in training.

entangled phenomenon from/in which the therapeutic work thrives. No longer viewed as representational of the relationship but as performative, a material discursive process.

I had in mind something much more philosophical, and theory driven, I had not planned to write about my own personal experiences as a client, after all as Brian Massumi warns “no-one is interested in my personal life”. There was the added pressure that, as cautioned by Ellis & Bochner (2000, p.739), I would need to “produce exceptional writing” that is deeply analytic, interwoven within a cultural context if was to avoid criticism when writing. I was also aware that there are voices for whom there is concern at the growing dis-association between self-disclosure and the loss of privacy and intimacy (Nicholson, 2013). Early on I had conceded to my supervisor that the use of client work might give my thesis context and depth. Certainly, with over 20 years-experience as a volunteer counsellor qualified to work within the dialogue between psychodynamic and person-centred theory, my therapeutic practice seemed a natural starting point. And so, I began to think about my client work. More significantly, I began to write about counselling⁴. However, what emerged was not a transcribing/retelling of my encounter with clients but a retelling of my own personal therapy, intimacies from my own life through counselling sessions, re-remembered⁵, imagined, altered. Unexpected yet predictable memories of trauma, loss and difference unfolded in the writing each entangled with silence. In this encounter with writing, quite unexpectedly, silence materialised and formed a theme that runs

⁴ I write in more details on about my reticence to use writing as a form of inquiry

⁵ I use re-remembered to reflect the repeated, iterative remembering of sessions.

through my memories of counselling. From a post humanist agential realist position (Barad, 2007, 2012) I can describe this unpredictability in writing this thesis as an intra-action of the ontologically indeterminate phenomena of memory, feeling, experience producing new meaning in the apparatus of my writing. I seem to have unwittingly “written myself into my work”, the starting place of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Mazzei 2013). This thesis emerged; it materialised in a form that I barely recognise from my earliest days of planning. Haraway (2006) encourages me to think about my role in terms of a posthuman academic. The researcher does not decide what is important and what they must respond to. Instead, the ethical question of responsibility suggests that we come to terms with where we find ourselves rather than chose how our research moves forward.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

Throughout this thesis I draw on the new materialisms and predominantly from the work of Karen Barad, particularly their work “Meeting the Universe Halfway” (2007), where they set out the ethical imperative for us to move towards the posthuman paradigm. In this writing, I take material responsibility for the entangled differings within and of the counselling relationship through the writing of this thesis. Where I speak of matter, I speak of discourse since in this onto-epistemology there is now inherent difference. I have structured the thesis in two parts. However, the reader should be alert to the different styles of presentation between Part 1 and Part 2. The reader will find that Part 1 is led by theory and analysis as I contextualise my thesis within the material turn, it represents an exploration of literature, concepts and methodology as I construct an academic case for grounding this thesis on posthuman new materialist assumptions.

While Part 2 involves writing about counselling, an intimate threading through of emotional, personal experience with notions of materially informed theory.

In Chapter 1, I expand on the notion that matter, no longer considered inert and inactive, has become completely entangled with the human, human that is no longer considered ontologically superior to matter. I explore the ensuing academic turn towards the material and the progression of academic research around this, briefly addressing the work of a small number of the key scholars involved in this material turn and who have meaningfully informed my writing i.e., Haraway, Coole & Frost, Braidotti, Barad (I expand on Barad's writing separately and more fully in Chapter 2). I also acknowledge the cuts I make to Deleuzian theory, despite his important contribution to the surge in materially informed work. Crucially, I point to the neglect of this material turn in counselling research asserting that this thesis is an ideal position from which to generate an understanding of the performative materiality of counselling. This chapter also sets out the complexities I experienced when trying to work within the posthuman and the new materialist paradigms. It articulates the theoretical confusion I encountered when trying to assimilate theories which simultaneously have ontological similarities and overlaps, while emerging from distinct philosophical and research roots (Taguchi & Eriksson, 2021). In doing so, I demonstrate how I augment, extend and arguably re-purpose these two theories to produce a new posthuman new materialist perspective.

I set out the key concepts of agential realism which inform this work, the significance of Barad, as a key philosopher of post humanism, and of her role in new materialisms in Chapter 2.

This theorising becomes a tentative form of exploration (Barad, 2007) as I begin to thread aspects of counselling through this agential realist framework. As the chapter unfolds, I present a more comprehensive discussion of the various concepts related to agential realism e.g., entanglements, performativity, apparatus, diffraction etc., providing definitions of the key terms before considering how they each have the potential for supporting a more elaborate understanding of counselling, that is, a posthuman account of counselling.

Critically, I am aware that new materialist philosophies have not yet been applied to counselling experience and that the new materialisms and in particular that the work of Barad engender a strong response. People, both within the academic world and in my personal life, have been curious, sceptical, questioning of a theory which uses quantum mechanics to explain human behaviour and in particular counselling. It has therefore been incumbent upon me to reflect critically on these arguments and give the criticisms of Barad, and others work, careful consideration. I use the final section of this chapter to attend to the critiques of their work in order to explore what the implications for this thesis are before responding to the judgements. I include an explanation of how my own research philosophy comes to terms with the criticism. I believe my thesis is richer for addressing these. Considering how my thesis is contextually placed within the debate reinforces my commitment to presenting an ethico-onto-epistemological, posthuman account of counselling.

In chapter three, I turn my focus to what I view as the literature of psychodynamic counselling theory which is most relevant to this thesis. More specifically, I launch my own

thoughts on where psychodynamic literature might be understood more expansively if read diffractively through the new materialisms to produce a posthuman understanding of counselling. My aim is to demonstrate how the conceptual idea of a posthuman counselling session can sit within the context of existing counselling theory and research material. I end Part 1 with a presentation of the methodological theories underpinning this thesis; I consider the challenges of working without method, doing post qualitative inquiry and the theoretical principles on which they are founded.

Part two is altogether more personal as I write through my experiences of counselling sessions and weave my counselling knowledge (both theory and practice) with the new materialisms. Memories, loss, forgetting, transgenerational hauntings and forgetting each emerge and are explored in chapter one. It represents an entangled becoming in the intra-action of memory, of touch, spacetime matterings, indeterminate identities, ghosted bodies, theory and writing as I examine the impact of agential cuts as they create boundaries between what is remembered and forgotten. In chapter two childhood trauma emerges iteratively in the silence to become the main theme in the material discursive practices of writing. It becomes an exploration of how we understand silence in terms of posthuman counselling session. There is a brief examination of difference as it is produced in the materially discursive practices of encounter in chapter three, how differences produced in the diffraction come to matter in the performative, relational and entanglement with/in the counselling session. In the fourth chapter, the red scarf becomes symbolic of the materially discursive beginnings of a session, coats being hung up, chairs being re-aligned, cushions being moved. It becomes a diffractive reading of the

performative nature of counselling sessions, the materiality of voice, and a becoming together since knowing, being and doing are inextricable. These chapters are a demonstration of how agential realism has allowed me to explore a posthuman experience of counselling, the struggles, the anxieties, the unease, in terms of the entangled material enactments.

The New Materialisms

2.1 Why the New Materialisms

“The New Materialisms returns us to (...) fundamental questions about the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within a material world.” (Coole & Frost 2010, p.3)

Our relationship with the material world has never been more open to question. There is almost universal acknowledgement that humans have had a dominating and powerful impact on the planet and its functions. Environmental changes to our planet, the destabilisation of earth’s ecosystems, depletion of resources, global warming, all driven primarily by human action, has forced many to re-consider the previously accepted dualistic view of nature and human and to re-orientate our relationship with the world (Oldfield et al. 2014; Coole & Frost, 2010). Patricia Clough and others make very strong arguments as to why, in a period of climate emergency, oppositional binary positioning of the human and the planet does much to absolve the human of their role. Karen Barad (2007) questions the part human practices play and questions our commitment to notions that privilege the human, when we consider the damage that we have inflicted. (Clough, 2007, Braidotti, 2013). Braidotti (2013) argues that a contemporary, subtler, and more complex relationship to our planetary dimension is needed, one which asserts the entangled, intra-active nature of human and non-human. Furthermore, we are faced with the ubiquity of technology in society, in the counselling room and its impact on the human to act independently as it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between “the natural and technology” (Johnston 1999), “machine and organism” (Haraway, 1985). Self is

enmeshed with the digital technology we use, with social media, A.I.⁶, computer aided design, digital process automation. As computers progressively take on more human tasks, including counselling and develop human attributes there are questions to be asked about what counts as human (Clough, 2007; Braidotti, 2013). We have begun to question who is dependent on who in the relationship between human, technology, machine as the boundary between each is blurred in what Haraway might describe as hybrid techno-organic embodiment (1985, p.148). There is “no fundamental ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic” (Haraway, 1985, p.149). This thesis posits that if we are to find ethical ways of being and knowing in counselling, our frame of reference must include the entanglement of technology and nature, of matter and human, each must be mutually implicated in the action of the other since it has become almost impossible to conceive of them in any other way, “foregrounding material factors and re-configuring our very understanding of matter are prerequisites for any plausible account of co-existence” (Braidotti, 2010) in the counselling room and in research.

This chapter presents an overview of the theoretical principles that have stimulated this material turn in research and the burgeoning interest in the entangled nature of the human and material. It explores the situated philosophies, debates, and ideas that have informed my inclination towards this piece of materially informed research and demonstrate how my

⁶ In recent years there has been a significant expansion in the use of AI chat bots to provide remote therapeutic support.

exploring of the experience of counselling is located within the posthuman body of knowledge. I also articulate the messy trajectory that took me from a writing and thinking within a homogenous new materialist /posthuman position to the conviction that this thesis can be best described as a posthuman new materialist piece of work. I contextualise the unfolding of my theoretical disposition describing the confusion I felt when working within an academic field which (at times) describes itself as both posthuman and new materialist. In the second section of this chapter, I offer an introduction to the work of key scholars whose writing has influenced the theoretical positioning of this thesis. This brief review of literature helps situate the discussion of a counselling session conceptualised within posthuman new materialist framework. Towards the end of the chapter, I take time to position the work Giles Deleuze exploring my exclusion of his work in terms of what Barad would refer to as agential cuts, wondering about the differential becomings (Barad, 2007) of my writing that resulted in his philosophies being used rather more incidentally than might be expected of someone who is credited with stimulating the material turn.

2.2 A Material Turn

A material turn in academia has seen a “new” conceptualisation of the material in relationship to the human (MacLure, 2013; van der Tuin, 2009; Coole & Frost, 2010), matter is no longer viewed as inert but “animated and agential” in a generative becoming (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.2). There has been an increase in demand for a more materialist mode of analysis (Coole & Frost, 2010). Something which is evidenced by the rapid growth of academic publications (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012), the burgeoning of new and diverse, often unorthodox, methods

for framing and exploring the material reality (Coole and Frost, 2010, p2). It is a period which, questions the structure of the human/material relationship, which no longer places “humans at the ontological centre or hierarchical apex” (Bennet, 2010 p11). It is this emergent perspective on the entangled nature of human and non-human, the requisite to question and rethink being and knowing in relation to matter and the implications this has for knowledge production in counselling that led me to the relational ontology of the new materialisms and more specifically to theories of agential realism (Barad, 2007).

Some view the new materialisms, as emerging as a reaction to the inadequacies of social science and the humanities (Fox & Alldred, 2018). Certainly, in a period of global transformation, where we have seen significant shifts in environmental, economic, geopolitical, and cultural factors, theories of discourse have become inadequate (Coole and Frost, 2010). The new materialisms along with the protagonists of the material turn, have declined to work within the linguistic paradigm (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). Coole and Frost (2010) characterise this emphasis on the material as developing in response to the deficiencies of the textual methods, whereas for Barad “language has been given too much power” over the material (Barad, 2003, p.801). Clearly, emphasis on discourse, analogous with the cultural turn, was proving insufficient (Coole & Frost, 2010). How can we examine the reality of the female body as constructed through discourse without exploring the body itself as an active agent? (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). The emphasis placed on discourse and the “failure to reject the dichotomy of languages and reality” has become a source of criticism of post structural and critical theories (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p.2, MacLure, 2013, Barad, 2007). Barad (2007) points to post

structural and critical theorist's, such as Foucault and Butler, inability to extricate themselves from the "seductive nucleus that binds them" to discourse. Language and meaning characterise much of current counselling theory (Georgaca & Aca, 2009) and certainly, within the domain of counselling research there is considerable emphasis on the value of interpreting language used in counselling, reflected in the growth in narrative, discourse and conversation analysis (Georgaca & Aca, 2009). Whether positioned within the in constructivist paradigm, which views narrative as a reflection of a client's well-being, the social constructivist which acknowledges the diverse, interactional nature of language in counselling, modernist which emphasises the productive potential of language (Frosh, 1995) or in postmodernist terms where the emphasis is on alternative voices and the repudiation of claims to truth (Frosh, 1995) the paradigms stress an emphasis on linguistic meaning and the constructive purpose of language (Georgaca & Aca, 2009). Haraway's (1988) legacy on the other hand has been to encourage us to reflect on how materiality and discursive power relations come to matter conceptualising the material and the discursive as inseparable (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, Barad, 2007), where discourse and matter become "mutually implicated in the unfolding emergence of the world" (MacLure, 2013, p.659). The posthuman counselling session of this thesis can be understood as a materially discursive phenomenon from where I am able to explore my understanding of knowledge production through and in the materially discursive enactments of counselling. It is this entangled understanding of material and discursive practices, expanded ideas on the inextricable causality in the relationship between discourse and matter that I believe has the potential to impact the way in which posthuman a counselling session is theorised. This material discursive explication of

counselling is a key tenet of a posthuman counselling session which I posit and explore in further detail in part 2.

The theorists who have most influenced the development of the posthuman/new materialist position and whose work I have drawn on extensively for this thesis are Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, and Rosi Braidotti, each of whom can be described as both posthuman feminist philosophers (although Haraway refused to describe her work as posthuman) and new feminist materialists (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2016). Looking across the breadth of academic subjects influenced by their work, and in particular that of Barad, it is evident that it is applied in a myriad of ways, different academics have found different ways with which to engage with agential realism. I wonder at the lack of response from others in the counselling world. It is clearly a theory which has transdisciplinary applications (Juelskjær et al. 2020) and there has been an exponential rise in the number of publications applying aspects of agential realism. The diversity of application looks set to grow as the “endeavours to develop and iteratively unfold agential realism continue” (Juelskjær et al. 2020), as Barad comments, they have not yet imagined the many ways others will become materially entangled with her work (Barad in Juelskjær et al. 2020). This, I believe, is particularly true of counselling research which has yet to imagine the potential new configurations and understandings a posthuman relational ontology can offer as it accounts for the ethico-onto-epistemological dynamics of counselling theory and practice. A new way of knowing-in-being in the counselling relationship, a re-consideration of what we “know” in the counselling room as mutually constituted in the intra-action of matter and discourse.

2.3 A Diffraction Reading: Posthumanism / New Materialisms

Work characterised by the material turn is taking place under an assortment of terms e.g., material feminism, new materialism, new materialist, new empiricism, posthuman studies, posthumanism, posthumanist, affect theory, process philosophy, the ontological turn (MacLure, 2018, p. 94). The human entangled with non-human but decentred (Zapata et al. 2018). Certainly, it is these materially informed theories expanded through the philosophical principles of a relational ontology which provide the important foundations to the ideas that ground this thesis. Theoretical principles which re-direct our gaze to the emergent nature of knowing in being provide the underpinnings from where I re/imagine ideas of working within a posthuman new materialist paradigm, rethinking the new materialisms and the posthuman position as entangled.

However, the decision to adopt this posthuman new materialist position took time to emerge. After all, while there is a proliferation of terms for materially informed work, as set out above, the term posthuman new materialisms has yet to be used. During the early stages of my research, I had naively accepted a more undifferentiated position between the two, routinely finding the terms “posthuman”, “posthumanism” and “the new materialisms” conflated and used interchangeably. I found academic writers simultaneously referencing both posthumanism and theories of the new materialisms in their work, often without offering a distinction between the two e.g., Thorpe et al., 2020; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Devellennes et al., 2018. I did not question this until challenged by my supervisor to distinguish between the two, which inspired me to reconsider their differences and how these differences would come to

matter in a re-positioned counselling session. Where the boundaries between the two might be enacted, how my reconceptualisation of a counselling session might relate to each of the philosophical positions. Indeed, I soon questioned how I had made such a fundamental error. This was a testing time, I soon found my confidence in my ability wane as I became tangled up in the concepts, my attempts to approach the topic systematically, mind maps, tables, notes, and more notes, produced messy results. No sooner had I reached a plausible definition of one philosophy, I found another contradictory, equally valid but destabilising interpretation. It is evident that where the two theories overlap, emerge and diverge is uniquely nuanced. Certainly, there seems good reason for my early confusion since much of the academic world is at odds with itself over the terms and how they are used. The new materialisms did not emerge at a defined moment as an academic movement, the result of a neat linear process, one theory neatly folding into another. Nor can it be accurately attributed to a particular theorist, philosopher, or academic field. Writers Deleuze, Barad, Haraway, De Landa, Grosz, Braidotti, Bennet, among others, have all played a role in the academic conceptualisation of this material turn. And the notion of matter in relationship with the human, does not come with a concise, definitive term of reference but rather a myriad of reference terms. In short, the new materialisms is not a unified movement, rather a myriad of disparate views, positions, and applications (Lemke, 2015; Krause, 2011), it represents a multitude of things, from a range of heterogenous backgrounds (van der Tuin, 2013) “an amalgam of different inter-disciplinary studies from different fields which have developed cross disciplinary tools to deal with agential matter” (Abadia, 2018). MacLure (2015) acknowledges the term “new materialism” is problematic, as what it creates is a “disparate – yet disparately connected” body of work. She uses the word “catachresis” to describe the repeated

misuse of the term new materialisms or lack of consistency in what it stands for (MacLure, 2017). It is described as an emerging discipline, “variously connected and complementary” (Djuric, 2018) and is indeed very much a becoming (St. Pierre et al., 2016).

Much the same can be said of work informed by the “posthuman”, which represents a similarly broad range of fields. Ferrando (2013) describes it as an umbrella term for an assortment of schools of thought and theories observing that “such a generic and all-inclusive use of the term(s) has created methodological and theoretical confusion among experts and non-experts alike” (p.1). To add to the confusion, St. Pierre et al., (2016) interpret posthuman as a “time after human”, “the extinction of human”, while Barad (2007) is quite clear that the posthuman she offers is not postulating a time after human. Braidotti (2011, p.327) labels this “time beyond species” as “post-anthropocene”, drawing a clear distinction between the two; positing the posthuman as a “post self”, the study of which draws on philosophy, cultural humanities and history studies, while a post anthropocentric interpretation turns to science, technology, media, digital, bioscience and robotics among others (Braidotti, 2013). Others extrapolate the posthuman as post anthropocene (Zapata et al., 2018; Clough, 2007).

The disparities intensify with the lack of clarity over how the two theories are interrelated. Posthumanism is described as a disparate strand along with neuroscience, quantum physics, and feminism that make up new materialisms (Fox & Alldred, 2015). While the new materialisms is defined as an umbrella term that encompasses posthuman (MacLure, 2015). However, according to Ferrando (2013) the new materialisms constitutes a separate but distinct

movement within the “posthumanist theoretical scenario” (p.30). Whereas, “posthuman” has become an umbrella term for “posthumanism”, philosophical, cultural and critical, and the new materialisms, a specific feminist development within the posthumanist frame, (Ferrando, 2013, p.1). Braidotti (2013) suggests that as a new understanding of the material evolved, research entered a posthuman era (Braidotti, 2013), also known as the post anthropocene era (St. Pierre, 2016), the new materialisms (Coole & Frost, 2010), feminist materialisms, the chthulucene (Haraway, 2016). My own introduction to the term new materialisms came with my discovery of Barad’s writing, who is invariably described as playing a principal role in the new materialisms, one of the leading academic representatives of materialism or as one of the most influential scholars of the new materialisms (Lemke, 2015; Hein, 2016). Their work is regularly defined in terms of the new materialisms e.g., St. Pierre et al., 2016; Abadia, 2018; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2016; Lemke, 2015. Yet, depending on the source, Barad is identified as both new materialist and posthuman (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Abadia, 2018). Interestingly, when I returned to Barad’s work to settle my confusion, I was surprised to find that the term new materialisms only appears in “Meeting the Universe Halfway” three times. Furthermore, I discovered that Barad describes themselves as a posthuman scholar with new materialist ethics (Barad, 2007). They encourage the new materialisms to embrace posthumanist ethics inciting a posthumanist material world and indeed problematise the use of the term “new” materialisms as well as the notion of “turns” (Barla, 2019). Certainly, while Barad exerts a posthuman rationale, it is a position which overlaps with the same philosophical ambitions of the new materialisms which is to acknowledge the agential nature of matter.

As I emerge from the confusion, I wonder about the posthuman new materialist position that I have now adopted, a philosophical position which I have chosen, not in a bid to produce a new way of theorising rather to realise new ways of doing counselling research, to consider different ways of becoming with my thesis, with counselling. I appreciate that the new materialisms and posthumanism clearly evolved from different philosophical and research strands (Lenz Taguchi & Erikson, 2021). The new materialisms has its roots in the sciences including feminist theory, science studies, cultural studies, and continental philosophy. While posthumanism draws predominantly from an interest in the continental philosophers Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard. Described as an intellectual and cultural movement it is motivated to challenge the traditional ways of thinking within the humanities and social sciences about the nature of human beings and their place in the world. Posthumanism rejects the traditional human-centred perspective as limited and advocates a re-centering of human beings, who should no longer be viewed as the centre of existence. Yet, despite the different beginnings it is clear that they share some core characteristics with very evident ontological entanglements (Lenz Taguchi & Erikson, 2021). Indeed, when the shared conceptual principles of each are threaded through the other this posthuman new materialist proposal challenges traditional human centred ways of thinking positing a repositioning of matter/human (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012) to consider experience in the counselling room in a wider context and from different perspective. It asserts the agentic, entangled nature of the material (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013,), an expanded notion of agency which re-orientates us towards a client who is becoming of and in the session. This blending of what might be described by some as separate domains of academic research, in my view, while

invoking a more expansive understanding of the de-centred human also offers new ways to frame the experience of counselling, in terms of materially entangled ways of being in knowing.

Undoubtedly, philosophical incompatibilities and challenges emerge when theories are being articulated from different academic positions, but rather than reject the theories of the new materialisms in my posthuman performative counselling session I have increasingly found it more useful to re-read the theories diffractively through each other in the hope of producing a new understanding of counselling (Barad, 2007; Jackson and Mazzei, 2012; Lenz Taguchi, 2012). Lather (2016) suggests that this is a time to invent not to critique. Pointing to the potential, Lenz Taguchi (2016) referencing the work of Deleuze and Guattari, note that when different academic fields come together in this way, they “link up with each other, support one another, coordinate their contours, articulate their respective problems” (p.18).

Nevertheless, the tangled feelings around the philosophical underpinnings of my thesis stayed with me for some time, I still found myself wrestling with my decision, was I writing with the new materialisms or is this really a posthumanist piece of writing⁷. Gradually, I understood that my ontological turn would fail if I insisted on the binary positioning of the two, to label “this” as posthuman, “that” as the new materialisms. The posthuman and the new materialisms are indeed entangled, they are co-constitutive of each other. Massumi (1995), making use of propositions of Derrida (1992), cautions that it is an act of violence to force theories together or

⁷ After all, while there is a proliferation of terms for materially informed work, as set out above, the term posthuman new materialisms has yet to be used.

apart. Therefore, to think one over the other in my research would surely be to apply a “violent hierarchy” in order to emphasise difference (Derrida, 1982). What is required of me is a diffractive reading of one through the other, an understanding that the theory will come into being in the performative intra-activity of the material-discursive processes of reading, writing, remembering, thinking this thesis. Both theories provide tools to allow “post anthropocentric” re-examination of human agency, relationship, and intra-actions (.) and the material” (Zapata, et al., 2018) in the counselling session. What is more relevant for my research is that there is an emerging understanding of materially informed thought and practice, new ways to think and be with theory which affords a posthuman ethical positioning of my work within an agential realist framework. Barraclough (2017) articulates the move towards the new materialisms, out of which has developed a “broader framework of posthumanism” for her research. I recognise that the new materialisms has the potential to promote a more complex understanding of the posthuman counselling subject (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). Abadia (2018), points to the benefits of applying the theories of both the new materialisms and posthuman theories in an interdisciplinary way, suggesting that the cross disciplinary framework of the new materialisms offers new, exciting and stimulating ways of framing of the posthuman condition. Echoing Braidotti’s (2018) view that “the posthuman constitutes a trans-disciplinary field of scholarship that is more than the sum of its parts and points to a qualitative leap towards the construction of different subjects of know- ledge” (p.2).

The question I now ask myself, as asked of the humanities by Braidotti (2013), is now that I have found this posthuman new materialist condition how can I fail to take account of this?

(Braidotti, 2013). Importantly, Braidotti describes posthuman as a philosophy which rejects the humanities for the privileging of the human (Coole and Frost, 2010, Braidotti, 2011) and it is notable that it is in these anthropocentric humanities that counselling research has been almost entirely carried out. And so, from my theoretical confusion has emerged the confidence that situating my thesis within a “post-humanist agential-realist framework” as posited by Barad (2007) and modelled by Barraclough (2017, p.188) would allow the scope to diffract the new materialism principles through posthumanist ethics and facilitate a productive conceptualisation of a posthuman new materialist counselling session. Adopting a post human new materialist position in this thesis is a recognition that “man is not the measure all things” (Barad, 2007, p.136), the human of the new materialisms, and of the counselling session, is already posthuman (Ferrando, 2013) since it is agential, relational and materially embodied. The entanglement of matter and human, of client/session/counsellor/counselling each mutually implicated in the action of the other, becomes almost impossible to conceive in any other way (Braidotti, 2013). As an alternative frame of reference, in a posthuman counselling session the human and more than human are impossible to separate out, one mutually constitutive of the other. In part 2 of this thesis, I use my personal experiences of becoming with loss, grief, memory and difference in counselling sessions in an attempt to arouse the posthuman sensitivities of the reader. Here the posthuman counselling subject (Braidotti, 2013, Barad, 2007) is emergent, entangled, unpredictable, both produced and producing (Zapata et al. 2018), created relationally in the material-discursive enactment of the posthuman new materialist counselling session.

2.4 Posthuman / New Materialist Scholars

Barad believes Haraway, through her work with the Cyborg, which entangles matters of fact and fiction to present a new paradigm, did much to enhance the notion of human entangled with the material (Barad, 2007). In the influential text *The Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway uses the concept of a mythical cyborg, a “hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149) making use of the homology to collapse nature and culture into one, thus allowing us to discard binary thinking of sex, race, nature, culture, as technology which blurs the boundaries of gender difference. The fusion of human and non-human, confronting notions of binary and obscuring of boundaries are themes which are continued in *Situated Knowledges* (Haraway, 1988) where Haraway contours the trajectory of feminist inquiry to the stand still it had reached and remained, caught up in the dichotomy of discourse and reality working from the postmodern view that matter is shaped by the discourse. The negating of materiality in feminist research meant that it was difficult to understand the role matter played in the evolution of discourse with considerable implications for the development of feminist theory and practice (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). Haraway’s work redefines materiality and deconstructs the idea that discourse and reality are separate independent entities, introducing the notion that epistemology, ontology, ethics are interconnected with politics and demonstrating the agency of the object. By questioning the⁸ binary positioning of subject/object, what is known and is experienced is viewed very much as

⁸ The nearest I have found to entangling the terms is by Ringrose et al. (2020) who blend concepts of feminist posthumanism and feminist new materialisms to present an edited collection of works under the acronym “PHEmaterialist”. I have also seen examples of the terms hyphenated e.g., Taylor (2018)

embodied. Situated knowledges⁹ (Haraway, 1988) encourages us to think of what we know in the world as the apparatus of bodily production. For Haraway, who proposes that objects establish boundaries, the body becomes an object of knowing whose “boundaries materialise in the social interaction” they don’t pre-exist and in doing so “threatened the budding sense of collective historical subjectivity, agency and embodied accounts of truth” (Haraway, 1988, p. 575). Haraway’s legacy was to set the stage for “feminist new materialisms” (van der Tuin, 2015, p.21) and her work has encouraged us to reflect on how the power relations of materiality and discursivity come to matter (Sjöberg, 2017). Material feminists argue for the complex entanglement of sociological, cultural, culture, historical, technological and biological factors with discourse and the environment without foregrounding one over the other (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008) and while my thesis does not speak directly to feminist theory, I am positioning this conversation alongside the context of a posthuman counselling session, which draws on these theoretical concepts, placing the material, ethics and situated knowledge at the heart of this thesis.

Rosi Braidotti is a feminist philosopher and cultural theorist known for her contributions to posthumanist thought, challenging traditional notions of human identity and exploring the relationship between the human and technology in a rapidly changing world. However, her work is equally closely related to the philosophy of the new materialist movement. It is seen as a contribution to the broader materially informed project of rethinking the nature of matter and

⁹ i.e., philosophies which are embodied, limited by location and informed by situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988).

agency. Not unlike the new materialists, Braidotti stresses the importance of understanding the ways in which matter and technology are co-constitutive, and the ways in which the natural world and human subjectivity are interconnected. Braidotti's work is significant in that it integrates feminist and postmodern perspectives and provides a framework for understanding the relationships between the human, technology, and the natural world in a rapidly changing world. Braidotti's writing is significant in that it offers a feminist perspective on these issues and argues for a more inclusive and ethical approach to posthumanism that takes into account the experiences of marginalized groups, including women and non-human beings.

Braidotti advances nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011), which emphasises the importance of materiality and embodied experience in shaping human identity, arguing that the posthuman helps us make sense of our fluid, malleable and multiple identities. Braidotti offers the notion of nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti, 2011) as way of understanding the human subject as constantly in motion, constantly changing, and constantly creating new networks of meaning and relationships. According to Braidotti, the nomadic subject is not defined by a fixed and stable identity, but rather by a process of continuous self-creation and adaptation. Nomadic subjectivity is characterised by fluidity, unpredictability, and a rejection of the idea of a singular and permanent self. This concept is particularly useful for understanding the posthuman new materialist experience of counselling in a rapidly changing world since it challenges traditional notions of human identity and provides a framework for understanding the relationships between the human, technology, and the natural world in the counselling room. Furthermore, Braidotti not only provides a theoretical scaffolding from where to explore and understand the continual

practise of becoming subjects in counselling. She also gives me confidence to work within a trans-disciplinary dynamic of the posthumanism, new materialism and psychotherapy suggesting that there is creative potential in a “convergence phenomenon” which will produce new fields of scholarship (Braidotti, 2019), and ultimately imagine a different experience of counselling.

Theorists Coole & Frost (2010) usefully set out the commonalities of the new materialisms critique, contextualising the movement of the new materialisms, in their book *New Materialisms, Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010). They challenge the reader to engage in the ontological turn, demonstrating that “materiality is plural, open, complex, uneven, and contingent”, new materialist ontologies ‘understand materiality in a relational, emergent sense’ (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 29), matter is lively and agentic. The book is premised on the view that the materiality of the 21st century is exigent and that the technological, environmental, political, economic advances can no longer be understood through traditional methods of analysis that indulge notions of knowledge production grounded in human consciousness and subjectivity. “For the new materialisms no adequate political theory can ignore the importance of bodies in situating empirical actors within a material environment”. Coole & Frost (2010) offer a collection of philosophical renderings by key figures of the new materialisms, laying out the ethical, geopolitical imperative of the material turn suggesting that “new materialists are re-discovering a materiality that materialises” (p.9) addressing universal notions of globalisation and capitalism, as well as ideas of agency, identity, and power. For a thesis positioned within the new materialisms this book presents an invaluable summation of the theoretical framework and with over 4,500 citations (Source Google Scholar) it is clearly a valuable source for

understanding the new materialisms. However, while Coole & Frost (2010) attempt to present the “forefront of current thinking about matter, about how to approach it, and about its significance for and within the political” (p.3) I am struck by the absence of key figures Haraway and Barad. There is no credit for Haraway igniting the flame that brought the new materialisms to life despite it being widely acknowledged that the conception of the “material turn” originated (at least in part¹⁰) in Haraway’s writing as it laid bare the inadequacies of scientific practices in its failure to question the relationship of cultural discourse to material dynamics (Hekman, 2008, p.85; Barad, 2007; Hollin et al. (2017), Braidotti (2013). Indeed, the work of Haraway is limited to one reference, “people are becoming something akin to Donna Haraway’s cyborg” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.17), which is used when reflecting on the blurred boundaries between technology and humans. Furthermore, they make no reference to the very substantial contribution made by Barad to the advance of the new materialisms. Notably, Coole and Frost (2010) offer a very similar explication of the way in which quantum physics influences our thinking in the new materialism and problematise how the theoretical physics understanding of matter is untenable when considered from the material perspective of today’s world (Coole and Frost, 2010). As stated above Coole and Frost emphasise the implications of a New Materialisms view for the political, a view that is mirrored in Barad’s work in 2007 i.e., “.... far reaching consequences for grasping and attending to the political possibilities for change, responsible practice for science and the education of scientists (Barad, 2007, p.34). They also note that the work of the new

¹⁰ In 2004 Latour was also questioning the relationship of scientific practices and cultural discourse to material dynamics (Hekman, 2008, p.85).

materialisms is to “track the complex circuits at work whereby the discursive and material structures forms are inextricable yet irreducible” (p. , which seems to evoke an agential realist view of the materially discursive i.e. neither material or the discursive can be diminished by the other “matter and meaning are mutually articulated” (Barad, 2007, p.152)¹¹. The lack of reference to the contributions of Barad and Haraway Is particularly acute in the chapter “Inertia of Matter” where Coole (2010) emphasises the posthuman nature of Merleau Ponty’s philosophy, positing the idea that he offers a precursory, albeit oblique, approach to the contemporary conceptualisation of matter e.g., “there is no essential difference between organic and inorganic” (Merleau Ponty cited by Coole & Frost, 2010, p.99). Coole goes on to reflect on Ponty’s understanding of embodied subjective experience wondering if it answers the question “is it not possible to imagine matter differently: as perhaps a lively materiality that is self-transformative and already saturated with agentic capacities?” (2010, p.92). However, despite asserting the materially discursive nature of Merleau Ponty’s phenomenological account of being “existence is for him an internally productive, formative process wherein meaning and matter are irreducibly interwoven” (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.101) and his phenomenological account of perception to the body becoming in temporal spatiality through bodily action with the material, neither the work of Haraway or Barad are used to elucidate this new materialisms position despite the obvious parallels. Instead, Coole calls on Deleuze and Leibniz to illuminate this theory.

¹¹ Haraway conceptualises the material and the discursive as inseparable (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008).

Nevertheless, the key tenets of the work presented by Coole and Frost, is that matter is lively and agentic, i.e., they offer a posthumanist orientation, that there are significant biopolitical and bioethical considerations to be made in this new materialism, including the implications of how the new geopolitical and socioeconomic structures impact our engagement with our material environment. Certainly, the principle that those working within the new material dialogue are most concerned with, and the view to which I am particularly drawn to in a posthuman counselling session, is the understanding that we all, to a lesser or greater extent (depending on cultural positioning) have a need to acknowledge the relationship, between the human and the material (however that might be framed). In other words, they recognise the agentic, dynamic capacity of the material; Bennet (2010), Hekman (2008), Braidotti (2013), Jackson and Mazzei (2012), Coole & Frost (2010).

2.5 Agential Cuts / Deleuze

Before concluding I would like to attend to the agential cuts that emerged around the work of Deleuze, more precisely I want to acknowledge the excluded nature of his and Guattari's work in a thesis informed by the new materialisms. Deleuze, a posthuman philosopher, is described as playing a key role in the academic conceptualization of the "material turn" and materially informed work (MacLure, 2013), making a significant contribution to the emergence of the new materialisms (Fox & Alldred, 2014). Certainly, for many there are very obvious similarities between Deleuze and Barad (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2009) and a number of academics work between the two, suggestive of some ontological compatibilities between the two philosophies (Hein, 2016). Nevertheless, it is clear to me that my perception of Deleuze and

the relevance of his work to this posthuman new materialist thesis emerged in the various material-discursive practices which were enacted in the productive processes of reading, writing, thinking posthuman/new materialist theory. Early in my research I discovered that a game of Deleuze bingo was just as feasible as “Barad bingo” (Hollin et al. 2017) and found that assemblages, entanglements, diffraction, rhizomatic, multiplicities along with a myriad of quotes from Barad and Deleuze interspersed across academic papers in an assortment of disciplines. Certainly, I could have chosen to diffractively read one philosophy through the other. Thiele (2015) argues that notwithstanding the tensions in philosophical positioning (which I address below) Deleuze’s work can become richer by thinking it through Barad’s diffractive work on difference. Indeed, Wyatt (2019) presents an example of how the philosophies can be used as a tool to articulate a broader and more textured understanding of his own thinking and writing rather than use them interchangeably as if one theory is constituent of the other. However, Hein (2016), complicates the issue arguing that their work is “incommensurable”, positing that “Deleuze’s is a philosophy of immanence and difference, whereas Barad’s is a philosophy of transcendence and identity” (p. 137). Nicolíć (2018) furthering the divergence between the two, points to their ontological, ethical and political differences, directing us to their disparate configurations of space, time and matter. In contrast, there are those who consider Barad’s work to be Deleuzian e.g., Barclay (2017). Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2009, p.539) suggest that there are clear connections between Deleuze’s philosophy of immanence, where the subject is decentred subject and knowing is troubled and Barad’s notion that knowing and being are inseparable. While Fox & Alldred (2018) go as far as to describe the new materialisms as an

ontology of immanence and Mazzei (2014) views Barad's writing as an "enactment of the ontological shift made by Deleuze" (p.743).

Yet, in the writing of this thesis, I found myself increasingly troubled by Deleuze and Guattari and questioned how their work would sit with the work of Karen Barad, considering the philosophical arguments mentioned above, the fact that neither Barad nor Haraway reference their writing and that Haraway points to their misogyny disguised as an "anti- capitalist and anti-oedipal project" (2007, p.30). Cuts were made. Exclusions were enacted. Not consciously at first but it soon became clear that the decision not to use the Deleuzian concept of "assemblages" for example was an agential cut. A cut which I believe made space for an expanded exploration of the entanglements of the human, non-human, time and space on the counselling session. My final cuts came with the realisation that to assimilate and engage effectively with both sets of philosophers was an enormous task. Considering my thesis word limit, widening my scope to include both Barad and Deleuze had the potential to dilute and weaken my analysis of the posthuman new materialist perspective. However, in writing this section of the thesis, I am not only acknowledging that the Deleuzian exclusions matter but that it is clear that different intra-actions produce different phenomena which is why, despite the cuts, Deleuze is used occasionally to enrich the readers understanding of the materialities of a posthuman counselling session.

2.6 Conclusion

I suggest that exploring a posthuman counselling session from within the new materialisms provides the space to wonder about “new realities and new ways of being” (Taguchi, 2010). I contend that this provides a crucial underpinning to the concepts that ground the ideas of a posthuman new materialist counselling session and presents a new way to stand and think about counselling research. Lenz Taguchi (2016) optimistically asserts that “newer” theories, based on the new materialisms, will revitalise “older” theories. Indicating that where traditional theories can accommodate the new paradigms in research philosophy there is potential for this thesis to rejuvenate counselling research and lead to a more expansive understanding of counselling. My argument is that the posthuman new materialisms has the potential to challenge what we know, and how we understand what happens in the counselling session. This thesis aims to contribute to the body of materially informed literature by demonstrating the potential for posthuman counselling research to provide a more nuanced view of counselling experience when we acknowledge that the epistemological, ontological, ethical, and methodological are relational and inextricably bound. A performative rather than representative material-discursive practice which reconceptualises the way in which knowledge in the counselling session is understood. The following section provides a more detailed exploration of Barad’s theory of agential realism before diffractively reading this through a selection of literature on psychodynamic theory in order to advance the notion of a posthuman agential realist understanding of counselling.

Counselling Encounters with Agential Realism

In this chapter I focus more specifically on the work of Karen Barad, contour the key concepts of agential realism, outline the agential realist framework and its theoretical constructs, while threading these concepts through aspects of a psychodynamic counselling session. I do this firstly in order to find my way into a richer more textured, construction of the counselling experience but also to build an understanding of these concepts in relation to counselling to expand ideas of counselling viewed through the prism of a relational ontology within a posthuman new materialist framework and to provide the theoretical underpinning to the accounts of personal counselling experience I present in Part 2 of this thesis.

In the second section of this chapter, I make space to acknowledge the criticisms of agential realism and a new materialist position and diffractively read the criticism through my own work in an attempt to create an open dialogue, to “identify patterns of differences that make a difference” (Barad, 2007, p. 49). Working on the principle, as posited by Barad (2007), that by engaging ethically, respectfully and forensically I should be able to produce “inventive provocations” (Barad, 2007, p. 50). I summarise what I view as some of the most fundamental critiques and challenges of thinking with agential realism, although this is by no means exhaustive. In turn, I offer some considerations and ways of thinking about the validity of these assessments in relation to the ethical and practical implications for this research. To end the section, I address the specific challenges that arise when choosing not to make an ontological distinction between the macro and micro scale of intra-action in a counselling session.

3.1 Introducing Agential Realism

The principles of agential realism have been enthusiastically assimilated and integrated into the work of a wide spectrum of academics, working across a diverse range of disciplines. As previously stated, “Barad is one of the most influential and important representatives of contemporary materialist scholarship” (Lemke, 2015, p.3-25; Juelskjær, 2020). Barad’s rise in status began with a 2003 paper, when taking a shift from quantum physics to philosophy and feminist theory they offered a paper on posthuman performativity. This was the beginning of a path which led to Barad’s development of theory of agential realism, followed by meteoric rise after the publication of “Meeting the Universe Halfway”. According to Google Scholar, Barad has been cited over 32,000 times. The search term “Meeting the Universe Halfway” generates 74,400 results and the technical labels that have become the lexicon of Barad e.g., “entanglement”, “intra-action”, “diffraction”, “agential realism” proliferate in research (Hollin et. Al. 2017 p.2). A look across the range of disciplines shows that it has been applied in branches of qualitative inquiry, contemporary political theory, feminist science studies, business studies, and in more broader STS interests e.g., aircraft manufacture, assistive technologies. It is applied to the study of archaeology, to education, art, history, fashion and accounting. The applications of use are equally diverse. There are those who use it to challenge the production of knowledge, for some it is an opportunity to assert the concept of agential cuts and all the ethical implications that are inherent in these cuts, some it is the attractiveness of concepts such timespacemattering or the use of diffraction to rethink and challenge binary positioning research within a relational ontology. In short, Barad has created a diverse and engaging community (Juelskjær, 2020), including many academics with whom Barad has chosen to work

collaboratively e.g., Juelskjær, 2020; Gandorfer, 2021; Dolphjn & van der Tuin, 2012). For me, Barad's (2007) theory of agential realism provides a posthuman framework with which to understand the dynamic intra-active nature of the material, immaterial, ethics of counselling, and their "ontological inseparability" (Barad, 2007). It invites me to unknow and undo what I understand about counselling and to enter a relational ontological exploration of the experience of counselling.

Barad explores the philosophy-physics of Bohr to understand the epistemological and ontological implications revealed by quantum physics with reference to dominant discourses around the production of knowledge, objectivity, measurement, and the relationship between discourse, how it is acted on and circulated within a culture, and its relationship with the material (Barad, 2007). They reject dichotomous thinking of nature and culture, stressing instead that nature and culture exists on a continuum. Throughout "Meeting the Universe Halfway" the reader is compelled to re-evaluate matter as indeterminate, as having agency and with "an extraordinary liveliness" Barad, 2007, p91). It is understood as having agency and no longer considered a uniquely human attribute¹². Barad's (2007) theory of agential realism presents a posthuman performative approach as a tool with which to understand the dynamic intra-active nature of the material and immaterial and promote understanding of their "ontological inseparability" (Barad, 2007). Significantly, for Barad (2007) agency is both relational and

¹² This raises the ethical question of how we become consistently receptive to this non-human, affirmative life force (Braidotti, 2013).

performative, a doing, not “something that someone or something has” since agency is a quality which emerges in the intra-action, entities which do not pre-exist their intra- action. It is this understanding of the agentic nature of the material and the reconfiguration of the hierarchical notion of human/nonhuman which has led to an ontological turn (Barad, 2007, Lather,2016), and the dismissal of traditional ontological hierarchies. Crucially, it is in the enactment of agency, when the “human, non-human, more than human” (Thiel et al., 2018, p. 20) intra-act together to produce agency that we can wonder about the potential for change, for a different outcome from the session. I assert in this thesis that, as the ontological relationality of material becomes increasingly evident, the fluctuating boundaries where agencies are enacted in counselling can become a source that illuminates differences, where we can begin to understand the entanglements of subject/object/mind/body/counsellor/client.

An agential realist ontology is built on the basic units of reality, phenomena, the smallest units of analysis. While the phenomenon, in posthuman counselling terms might be considered the session, involving ontologically inseparable, intra-acting elements i.e., each of the elements, the phenomena, including the therapist, client, counselling room, memories, emotions cannot be disentangled. Indeed, both Haraway and Barad place emphasis on the idea of entanglement to understand the relational nature of the ontology and epistemology of phenomenon (Hird, 2009). In this “lively ontology” intra-acting elements disrupt ideas of causality, illuminating how discursive practices and material phenomenon are mutually entwined. Agential realist notions of intra-action help us re-work ideas of time, space, matter and ethical engagement within the counselling session to offer us a unique, and I would argue, more nuanced conceptualisation of

each session as it emerges. By rejecting dominant humanistic, binary positioning of counsellor and client, and re conceptualising this within new materialist notions of entanglement, by considering the encounter as a phenomenon, where the ontological elements are unbounded and indeterminate, where it is more than just epistemologically indissoluble but intra-active (Barad, 2007), then we can also challenge concepts of causality, explore agency, and reconsider ethics in terms of inclusion and exclusion in relation to counselling. In holding together counselling and posthumanism, or creating, thinking, remembering, the two positions, we are setting a very specific onto-epistemological task i.e., to stop thinking in the binary. No longer subject/object, client/therapist. This thesis represents an acknowledgement of what I consider the ontological inseparability of the client, therapist, space, time, room, session, human, non-human, which cannot be unravelled. An ethico -onto-epistemological position will create a fundamental shift in how we view the therapeutic relationship, newly configured as an interwoven phenomenon creating dynamic material effects as the human, non-human, more than human of the session intra-act. Significantly, Barad “emphasises the need for accountable and just knowledge production, the idea that one cannot but ethically engage with the world” (Geerts, 2016). The purpose of which is to promote productive theorising that might advance the conversation around the ethical production of knowledge, with reference to materiality and discourse. Notably, until recently what we know and understand about our client’s experience has been premised on humanistic, social constructionist and post-structural theories of knowing (Barracough, 2017), each with its own limitations on how we might understand our clients, each a theoretical contradiction of the other, as the objective source of knowledge is contested and re-positioned (Hansen, 2004). In summary, agential realism is a theoretical paradigm, a conceptual framework

which has the potential to articulate the knowing of the other, a more ethical way of knowing in being in the counselling room. “Onto-epistemologies may indeed allow for different ways of organising thought that might open up meaning” (Nordstrom, 2015, p.188).

3.2 Quantum Entanglements

The “posthumanisms assume entanglement” (Kuby et al. 2019, p.6) and entanglements are certainly at the heart of “Meeting the Universe Halfway” (2007), matter and meaning, being, knowing and doing, ontology, epistemology, and ethics, human and nonhuman each considered as inextricably enmeshed. In short, Bohr established that matter, which is generally thought of in terms of particles, creates diffraction patterns. Which, as he theorised, is an indication that particles behave as waves while waves, equally unpredictably, behave as particles. He posited that the simple act of observation “interfered” with the behaviour, of waves and particles (Barad, 2007). However, he did not subscribe to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle that the disturbance caused by the measurement of the particle was so significant that it was not possible to examine momentum (trait a) and position of the particle (trait b) at the same time. Rather it created an ontological concern for Bohr, who posited the theory that there are no simultaneous explanations for the position and momentum of the wave and particle because each does not pre-exist in a fixed state rather, they emerge through specific intra- actions. (Barad, 2007). Bohr’s epistemological determination is that both the “object” and “subject” of knowledge production are indeterminate. An assumption which contrasts with the strict determinism of position and momentum that is fundamental to classical physics, but also points us to the indeterminacy of the

posthuman counselling session, a phenomenon where the ontological elements of counselling, client, material and immaterial are unbounded and indeterminate.

However, Bohr's posthuman beginnings were hindered by his humanist tendencies that place the human at the centre of knowledge practices while simultaneously failing to explore the materiality of knowledge production (Barad, 2007). Barad addresses these anthropocentric predilections by elaborating his philosophy of physics and diffractively reading this work through that of poststructuralists, such as Foucault and Derrida, and the feminist theories of Haraway and Butler¹³. Subsequently, advancing a posthuman philosophy of agential realism as an ethico-onto-epistemological framework from where we can reject dualist positioning while emphasising the entangled, inseparable, and indeterminate yet still distinct nature of each entity (Barad, 2007, p185). Through the course of *Meeting the Universe Halfway* Barad augments this ethico-onto-epistemology, cultivating a relational ontology, positing that ethics, ontology and epistemology are "not separable" (Barad 2007, p. 90), i.e., practices of knowing, being, doing are not isolated from ethics and cannot be cut apart. Certainly, advancing the idea that our way of being and our ethical positioning is entangled with what we know and do seems to make perfect sense and it is this fundamental principle which first attracted me to the work of Barad, and to consider how it might influence our understanding of counselling, counselling ethics and

¹³ It may worth noting that some are troubled by Barad's "idiosyncratic view" and dissent from some important aspects of Bohr's theory of quantum mechanics which puts agential realism in conflict with the rest of the field of quantum mechanics (Faye & Jaksland, 2021, p.8231-8255).

research. Indeed, a critical theme of Barad's work is to question how we can responsibly explore entanglements and the differences they make, since once we acknowledge entanglement, we can no longer view ourselves independent of those we encounter, and problems are no longer uniquely of the other (Braidotti, 2011). I am drawn to notions of entanglement, to describe the knotted together, complexity of the therapeutic encounter. Where the session can be viewed as an emergent phenomena, something that did not pre-exist as a separate determinate entity but intra-acting relationally.

3.3 Agential Cuts and the Ethics of Exclusion

Barad conceptualises "intra-action", which is fundamental to the theory of agential realism, as the "the mutual constitution of entangled agencies" (Barad, 2007, p33). Setting out the important distinction between "inter", which is an assumption that the objects exists independently and prior to the event, and "intra"¹⁴ which suggests that it is through the intra-action that we come into existence. It is through specific intra-actions in the counselling session, in the agential cuts that are enacted, that boundaries between client and therapist, room, session, counsellor, counselling centre become determinate and embodied beliefs become meaningful (Barad, 2003). Importantly, agential cuts inherently involve exclusions, omissions which entail questions of accountability (Barad, 2003). It is clear there are ethical implications, as a

¹⁴ In addition to this brief introduction to her work I discuss Haraway's impact on the development of diffraction in more detail in Chapter 3. Then in the methodology section I reference Haraway's concept of situated knowledge to examine how knowledge is constructed in this thesis.

counsellor I must consider the psychological risk of the intra-action and the constitutive exclusions must be taken into consideration. Unquestionably, I am pointed to my ethical responsibility in all the lively relations we are entangled with (Barad, 2007, Haraway, 2016, Zapata et al. 2018) and the power dynamics. Of course, there are inherent ethical principles which guide professional counsellors, and many of us work within the robust ethical framework of a regulatory body e.g., B.A.C.P. which underpin our practice and standards. There are ethical considerations that arise for example around therapeutic boundaries, unconscious biases, the use and misuse of countertransference (Casement, 1985), professional competence. Undoubtedly, ethical principles are integral in establishing professional standards and ensuring the safety and well-being of client and counsellor. However, a posthuman position gives us the opportunity to rethink power relations in counselling relationships in terms of the agential cuts, an opportunity to attend to what comes to matter in the entangled intra-active nature of the encounter. Where and what cuts are made in the session. Fundamentally, posthuman ethics are “not predicated on externality but rather entanglement” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 50); counsellors are responsible to the entanglements, of which they are a part, in the counselling room. As the counsellor/client/room/chairs/lights/tissues/tears become entangled in the session, as they become the session, the deeply knotted, intra-relational nature of the encounter points us to the ethical responsibility. Post human ethics goes beyond the simple effects of our ways of engaging with the world, it is about more than just the outcomes that follow our actions as if they were determined by a linear sequence of events (Barad, 2007). Crucially, we have “irreducible relations of responsibility and that we have an ongoing responsibility in our entanglements with the other” (Barad 2014). Indeed, it is the post humanist’s “curiosity about what might be possible

that enables (counsellors) to imagine and create a different, more ethical, existence” (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p.10) in counselling.

What is ‘produced in the cuts, contours’ that “emerge as new becomings” in a counselling session, are valuable source of understanding. Cuts separate subject from object, counsellor from client, each time enacting the causal structure of the phenomenon, indeed each time producing a unique exclusion. However, the consequence of this is, as one reality is formed another equally viable reality, is prevented from forming (Barad, 2007). For example, a client may come to a session and talk almost the whole time about their relationship with their mother, who was loving, supportive and encouraging. As the material and discursive factors of the session come together (the light of the room, the response of the counsellor) in a particular way a cut has been made. A cut that excludes the anger that the client feels towards her mother for staying in a marriage with an abusive husband, her father. Importantly, what is excluded does not evaporate but persists as part of the phenomena (in this case the session) it remains as part of the client. Certainly, as a psychodynamic counsellor I would be encouraged to think about the session, wonder about these cuts what had been said and what was not said, to think about the countertransference between myself and the client. Was I unconsciously encouraging her to talk about her mother in this way because listening to her talk about her mother and father’s relationship was too uncomfortable for me since it formed something of my own past. Did my collusion with my client enact a cut which excluded the reality of her own experience. Importantly, from a posthuman position the cut is a “cutting together-apart”, so not an action that divides and cuts off, which means the exclusions of today’s session may well be the inclusions of

the next. Each week at the counselling session specific, material, agential intra-actions are enacted, and the boundaries between counsellor/ client, mother/father materialise. Each week the cuts materialise different phenomena, different marks on the body (Barad, 2007), different stories/sighs/tears/laughter/anger and exclude something else, other feelings, other thoughts, other stories; exclusions that come to matter.

Hollin et al. (2017), point to prospect for an ethics of exclusion intrinsic within Barad's work. They assert that the proliferation of academic papers emphasising diffraction and entanglement prevent an ethics of exclusion being developed and detracts from the potential of developing an ethics of exclusion, inherent in Barad's work, referring to the huge "radical potential" for theories associated with agential cuts. More explicitly they suggest we must examine the process through which material properties emerge and other realities are excluded from being (Hollin et al., 2017). Hollin et al. (2017) acknowledge that they do not develop a strategy for the way this might be done, however, I take up the opportunity to develop this idea in this thesis. I consider agential cuts within the context of the counselling session which present a valuable opportunity to explore the causal relationship of what is excluded and included during the therapeutic encounter. In agential realist terms, cuts, the results of the material-discursive practices are agentic, symbolising where the boundaries between self and other, material and non-material sit (Haraway, 1988; Barad, 2007). It is where a particular reality is brought into being. De facto, when one reality manifests itself it excludes another. By redirecting our gaze to agential cuts, we can consider the ethics of the intra-active process of coming into being. Observing the enactment of specific cuts, exploring causal relationships produced in the intra-

action, is an opportunity to respond and develop as invited by Hollin et al. (2017) to think about the ethics of what has been excluded from or included in the client's story and the implications of this, including the possibility that agency may well already been foreclosed by a succession of cuts (Hollin et al., 2017). What "obligations are created" when the session is cut in a particular way at the expense of another way of being? As counsellors we are often attentive to what is not said in a counselling session, what was the significance in what has been left out, what wasn't said in the session, what have we cut from our recollections. A client might talk about their mother but not their father, this child not that child, incomplete memories, forgotten emotions, the counsellor forgets to ask, cut from the session. Cuts co- constitutively produced by both of us in our entangled practice. There is agency (a doing or being in the intra-activity) unconscious or otherwise, involved in the manifestation of cuts and the exclusions that are produced, we do not choose the cut, the cut is enacted, but this does not mean we are free from ethical obligation. This in turn points to our responsibility and accountability when cuts are made (Barad, 2007) since exclusions matter both to bodies that come to matter and those excluded from mattering (Barad, 2007, p. 57).

Hollin et al. (2017) describe cuts as difficult to reverse, becoming fixed "as they are" (p.20) at the exact point that the material properties and other realities are excluded. However, this does not take account of the inexhaustible dynamism of agential cuts or the potential for change posited by Barad. "Cuts are never enacted once and for all" (Barad, 2007, p. 179), "future is radically open at every turn" (p.178). Change is the "iterative differentiating's of spacetime mattering" (p.179), in other words, there is a perpetual (re) configuring of space, time,

matter which points us to the idea that change (the cut) is no longer viewed as located, situated in this isolated moment in time, cuts are not fixed “as they are” but emerge entangled with space, time, matter, ethics. Ethics which are inextricable from the thought, theorising & mattering of the encounter. Entanglements are productive. That is, what is and is not said in the entanglement of the material-discursive practices of the session come to matter, different entanglements producing different phenomena (Barad, 2007).

3.4 Posthuman Performativity

Significantly, the theory of agential realism presents me with the opportunity to apply a posthuman performative approach to my understanding of counselling, to understand the experience of knowing and being of counselling not in representational terms but as “an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulations” (Barad, 2007, p.149).

Agential realism contests the fundamentals of representationalism challenging the accepted supposition that language accurately reflects what is real, including the materiality of bodies, and provokes the idea that power has been bestowed upon language to represent objects that exist prior to the intra-action (Barad, 2003). “Representationalism separates the world into ontologically disjointed domains of words and things (p.802)”. When we transition from a representational perspective of language to a posthuman performative position we can move away from “descriptions (...)to matters of practices/doings/actions” (Barad, 2003, p.803). This shifts the focus from the language, thinking about what is said, it’s meaning, how it is constructed, how this accurately describes experience, what is real, to cultivating a view of

counselling as performative, counselling as “practices/doings/actions” (Barad, 2003, p. 804). This is a performative understanding of material phenomenon and discursive practices, and points to a posthuman reconceptualisation of ontology, materiality, and agency (Barad, 2003). Significantly, Barad (2007) posits that this posthuman notion of the material as performative accounts for the materialisation of all bodies, the boundaries of which are generated in the material discursive practices. It is at this boundary that the body becomes an object of knowledge (Haraway, 1988) and finally allows examination of the practices through which boundaries between the categories of human and nonhuman are established (Barad, 2007).

However, it is worth mentioning that Calvert-Minor (2014) raises particular “epistemological misgivings”, in the paper of the same name, regarding Barad’s unique notion of the performative³, as a challenge to accepted epistemological assumptions. Calvert-Minor ambiguously states the need to challenge prevailing epistemologies in research, they assert that epistemologies have recently seen a shift in how knowledge production is understood, which takes account of discursive and social aspects of enquiry but also requires attention to the practices that produce knowledges. This places human subjectivity and the corresponding rationality and objectivity that human subjectivity brings, at the centre of enquiry. Barad, he claims, does not seem to have recognised this advance, positing that Barad’s declarations are groundless when presented without a universal methodology premised on more robust epistemological theories. Without cultivating this argument further (mirroring the very criticism he has of Barad’s work) Calvert-Minor advances with the critique of Barad as “a project against humanism” (2014), before arguing for re-positioning the human as central to rationality and

objectivity to escape from Barad's depleted idea of ontological objectivity. To support this tenet, he divides objectivity into semantic objectivity, constrained by a shared knowledge of language and meaning, and rational objectivity which can be claimed when knowledge aligns with normative assertions. To his question, why does Barad in her "anti-humanist" (2014 p.128) state fail to address these aspects of objectivity? I suggest that discursive practices can no longer be viewed as the same as linguistic expression or meaning and therefore neither semantic practices nor objectivity can be experienced as the product of words. That is, when we view discursive practices and meanings as a "singularly human phenomenon" we then need to ask the question, how do we understand the "boundary-making practices (of knowledge) by which the differential constitution of "humans" and "nonhumans" are enacted?" (Barad, 2003, p. 818). Barad is explicit in her rejection of the purely humanist elements of Bohr and Einstein's framework of ontological objectivity and offers a sound explication of how we can move past an epistemological conception of objectivity (Barad, 2007). By accommodating the concept of agential inseparability, i.e., that the agencies of observation are inseparable from the phenomena or matter they seek to study, Barad demonstrates that ontological objectivity is not based on the metaphysics of distinct separate states of observer and observed but the result of performative intra-action within the phenomena. We can further understand that the boundaries and properties of phenomena have been produced through causal relations, through specific agential interactions, and we can see that is through these interactions that meaning is produced. Significantly, Barad does not suggest that matter alone creates the agential cuts within phenomena, nor does she suggest that the human be excluded from consideration of the intra-actions that take place, they are mutually implicated. More importantly, "objectivity is about

being accountable and responsible to what is real” (Barad, 2007, p. 340) in our pursuit of knowledge and understanding, and it is this ethical imperative to engage with the entangled materiality of the counselling encounter that I apply to this thesis.

Certainly, the posthuman performativity of agential realism moves me away from representational thinking of the client and therapist encounter, forcing me to resist the privileged positioning of the knowing counsellor who approaches counselling work detached from the material, making my reflections from a distance from client or from the outside looking in (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). I can no longer think that I might “reliably narrate or interpret, “give voice” (Mazzei, 2016, p.158), when knowing, which is always situated (Haraway, 1988), can be more accurately described as differential responses to what matters, responses which are “performatively articulated”, as a “matter of intra-acting”. I understand knowledge in a posthuman counselling session in terms of material and discursive practices. During a counselling session a psychodynamic counsellor might identify recurring themes, point out defensive behaviour, interpret feelings or ideas and make links with a client’s past experience (Schedler, 2010). Posthumanism is a salient reminder of the limitations of representational thinking in the counselling session and what is lost in our understanding of our client’s experience when we think that words can truly describe and accurately represent experience i.e., “Meaning is not a property of individual words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility” (Barad, 2007, p 149). Discourse is a form of communication but it “constrains and enables what can be said”, it is “not a synonym for language” (Barad, 2007, p146). Language and discourse are not (cannot) be the same thing.

Language is performative, alive and material. Articulated words are not a narration or retelling of the past fixed in a moment of time, they do not symbolise experience, instead the “voice” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2017) in the session represents experience in an entanglement of the human and the material, neither of which precedes the other. It transcends what can be listened to, understood, or made sense of (Mazzei & Jackson, 2017) by the counsellor. Discourses are about more than what is or is not said (Allan, 2018).

3.5 Material-Discursive Practices: Apparatus Creating Boundaries

Indeed, how to adequately theorise the posthuman performative nature of the material and discursive in knowledge practices from a new materialist perspective is one of the key challenges addressed by Barad. By conceptualising the notion of material-discursive practices through a diffractive reading the work of Butler, Foucault and Bohr, amongst others, through posthuman performative principles Barad brings us to a re-conceptualised, entangled notion of matter and discourse practices. Tracking theoretical progress from the representationalism of Foucault to the performativity of Butler, Barad ameliorates their theories, re-considering materiality, discursive practices, agency and causality to present an insight of the dynamic, entangled relationship between/within discursive practices and material phenomena, presenting theories of the materialisation of both human and nonhuman bodies Barad produces an account of material-discursive practices. Foucault viewed language as a complex system of knowledge practices with the potential to shape and construct the way we think, speak, and act within particular social, political or cultural context. Foucault describes discursive practices as the specific sociohistorical material conditions that both enable and limit knowledge activities such

as speaking, writing and thinking. These practices go beyond mere descriptions; they actively produce the subjects and objects of knowledge (Barad, 2007). In this matter Bohr and Foucault concur, meaning is not just about individual words or phrases, meaning does not rely solely on language. Instead, meaning is constructed through specific material practices, not tethered to the thoughts or actions of individuals but emerging from particular discursive practices (Barad, 2007). As Barad explains, Foucauldian notions of discourse direct us to the implications of power relations, encouraging us to examine how discursive practices produce knowledge and explore the struggles involved in the creation of identity to understand this dynamic (Foucault, 1976, p11). His analysis of discourse practices invites us to question dominant discourses, challenge power structures, and critically examine the ways in which knowledge and truth are constructed in our own society. Significantly, Foucault's analysis of power connects discursive practices to the materiality of the body. He argues that the body is constituted through the continuum of culture or discourse/power regimes (Butler, 1990). Expanding on this Foucauldian critique, Butler's hugely influential work introduced the concept of gender as performative, a becoming (Butler, 1990). Butler utilises Foucault's conceptualisation of discursive practices to expand ideas of how the gendered subject is socially constructed (Barad, 2007). Linking gender performativity with the materialisation of the body they demonstrate that the materiality of the gendered body is constructed by culture, discourse and power (Barad, 2007).

However, while Barad acknowledges the influence of both Foucault and Butler they also point to the limitations of their theories. While both attend to the materialisation of human bodies as constituted through social, cultural and political forces, they take for granted the materiality of

nonhuman beings/ bodies and fail to account for the agential, dynamic nature of matter. Foucault clearly articulates the connection of discursive practices to the materiality of the body, he focuses on how discursive practices are created, maintained and de-constructed in their materiality. He has also profoundly altered the ways in which power and knowledge are currently theorised and, in *Discipline and Punish*, he sets out the relationship between power, discursive practices and the materiality of the body (Barad, 2007). Yet he is ambiguous about the “material nature of discursive practices” (Barad, 2007, p.63), he refrains from articulating the precise nature of relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena, nor does he allow for the lively, material influence the body might have in transactions of power (Barad, 2007, p.65). Equally, as Barad (2007) states, “Butler does provide us with an insightful and powerful analysis of some discursive dimensions of the materialisation of real flesh and blood bodies (p. 192). Furthermore, they present a temporal notion of materialisation, shifting the view of matter as fixed and bounded. Nevertheless, this does not bring the discursive and the material closer together nor does it account for the dynamic conception of matter as the focus is on how discourse, rather than matter, comes to matter. Indeed, for Butler matter is not an active agent but a passive product of discursive practices (Barad, 2007).

Barad contests that any conceptualisation of discursive practices must to take account of their materiality and proposes a “posthuman performative account of the material-discursive practices of mattering” (Barad, 2007, p. 146). Indeed, from an agential realist position discursive practices are viewed as specific material reconfiguring’s in relation with specific material phenomena. According to Barad, discursive practices refer to the material enactments through

which knowledge, meaning, and entities come into being. These practices are never solely linguistic or confined to verbal expressions; instead, they involve a broader set of intra-actions, including linguistic, bodily, and other material entanglements. Discursive practices are performative in nature, meaning they actively produce and reconfigure the boundaries, identities, and properties of phenomena within specific social, political and historical contexts (Barad, 2007). In Barad's agential realist framework, discursive practices are understood as integral to the processes of ontological becoming. They are not mere descriptions of pre-existing reality but actively participate in shaping reality, discourse comes to matter through the specific intra-actions. They are material enactments, intertwined with the materiality of the world, leading to the emergence of specific configurations of matter and meaning (Barad, 2007). Meanwhile, matter is always material-discursive by nature, material phenomena are inseparable from the mechanisms of bodily generation; matter emerges from, and is constitutive of, the continual reconfiguration of boundaries. Matter cannot be consigned to a supporting role accommodating a particular discourse in the production of bodies, specifically matter comes to matter through the iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming (Barad, 2007, p. 152). There is no separability between discursive practices and material phenomena; instead, the material and the discursive exist in a state of mutual implication, in a continual intra-activity. Within the context of counselling this suggests that there is limited scope for exploring the implications of the material and discursive as separate factors in the encounter. A material-discursive perspective of practices emphasises the inseparability of discourse, matter, and the production of knowledge in the counselling session.

Barad elaborates their notion of material-discursive practices through further reading and thinking through of Haraway's thinking the material semiotic and discourse (Højgaard and Søndergaard, 2011), emphasising that "discursive practices are not human based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world (Barad, 2003, p.802). (Re)turning to Bohr's notion of indeterminacy Barad illuminates the co-constitutive nature of discourse and matter, that neither is ontologically or epistemologically prior to the other¹⁵. This provides more clarity on the constitutive relationship between discourse and matter in the counselling session, acknowledging how entangled they are, always entangled, like waves interfering with one another diffractively (Murriss, 2018). Matter and meaning are mutually constituted and dynamically produced in the experience of the posthuman counselling session, entangled in the material-discursive practice of the encounter. Thus we understand that the dialogue of the session does not exist prior to the client and counsellor entering the room/the building/on the journey to the counselling centre but materialises in the intra-action. The session is dynamic, agential and it is through these material reconfigurations of the world that boundaries, properties, and meaning are differentially enacted (Barad, 2007, p.149) in the therapist and client exchange. The task in a posthuman counselling session is to remain open to the materialities of the encounter; allowing for the intra-action of space, time, matter, the organic and inorganic, the social and natural, while giving space for abstract concepts of thought, memory, imagination etc. which have in

¹⁵ Barad demystifies this concept using Bohr's analogy of a blind man using his cane to navigate a room, his sense of touch manifested through the cane as it extends into the room, the cane becomes an extension of the person. However, when the cane is held loosely it is experienced as a separate object in the room (2007).

themselves created a material effect (Fox & Aldred, 2018). In some ways this view of a counselling session does not seem far from Bion's suggestion that "in any session ... out of the darkness and formlessness something evolves". It certainly suggests that Bion's aspiration that we enter each session without memory or desire is achievable, although Spinoza views desire more positively, viewing it as an ontological force of becoming and may well have its place in the counselling room. Positioned nomadically, the counselling process becomes viewed as embodied, an embedded material structure, stressing the dynamic and self-organising structure of thought processes. (Braidotti, 2011). Counselling is not an entity with inherent boundaries and properties it is a material-discursive phenomena. Posthuman counselling sessions are articulated in more detail in Part 2, where material-discursive practices come to matter, performatively and productively as I explore the intertwined and indissoluble nature of my relationship as a client with my counsellor.

Apparatus Creating Boundaries:

It has been suggested that Barad, galvanised by the work of Haraway, Bohr and Foucault, remoulds the notion of apparatus in order to boundary the entangled underpinning principles of agential realism (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011). Certainly, an agential realist understanding of apparatus "takes seriously the epistemological and ontological inseparability of the apparatus from the objects and subjects it helps to produce, to create new understandings of materiality, discursivity, agency, causality, space and time" and how they are related (Barad, 2007 p.200). Bohr who refuted classical Newtonian concepts of objectivity, was alert to the significant interaction between the observed object and the instrument of observation. Indeed, the idea that

the act of observing fundamentally changes the nature of what is being studied has become a key principle of quantum physics. Bohr advanced the idea that apparatus themselves materialise through the act of observation i.e., it becomes the instrument of measurement when it is observed. However, Barad (2007) notes that Bohr underestimated the extent to which material-discursive practices (re) produce and maintain apparatus” and went on to reconceive apparatus. “The apparatus is where the material, the discursive and subjectivity can be seen intra-acting” (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011, p.345). No longer considered an inert tool of measurement but agentic and active, no longer viewed as having fixed boundaries but a series of open-ended practices, which themselves become phenomena. Unfixed entities, forming and re-forming, materialising through the intra-action.

It is through an agential realist view of apparatus, that is the material-discursive phenomena of the session, that we will begin to understand counselling as an indeterminate, (re)forming, iterative process. A different experience of counselling will emerge each time the counselling session is enacted. What we know and are in the counselling session will inherently be wrapped up in our ethics. The apparatuses of counselling might be theorised as the intra-active movements of the phenomena, the client, therapist, the session, the counselling space, the human and nonhuman, entangled each leaving a mark, a measurement. It is these causal relations within the apparatus, within the session, that represent agential cuts. The apparatus enacts cuts, which produce determinate boundaries, between self and other, material and non-material, subject and object, are materially particularised and defined (Barad, 2007). I suggest that this unique drawing of boundaries is a form of decision making enacted in the active listening and

empathic exploration of the session, producing differences that matter. “Different stages of becoming enact cuts that consist of erasing and recomposing boundaries between self and other” (Braidotti, 2013, p.76). In this apparatus of counselling, I can see distinct agential cuts each time the apparatus is altered; different cuts producing different results, a new material reality excluding another particular reality creating “both an ethics of inclusion and an ethics of exclusion” (Hollin, et. al. 2017, p.5). Undoubtedly, each time we come together there are multiple becomings, the counselling room will be altered, warmer, colder, brighter, emotional encounters between counsellors and client taking place in this room in our absence. We will be altered, we will have been entangled, intra-actively encountered with the “social” (Massumi, 2005), with the memories and thoughts of the previous session, with the joys, stresses and strains of the week passed. There is compelling potential for change in the cutting, re-cutting, the different agential cut, where past experience, memory, pain, happiness, emotional confusion, are reconfigured. A dynamic process of memory (re)forming iteratively in the intra-actions of discourses and materialities which takes place each time we have a session; reconstructing “material-social relations of the world” (Barad, 2007, p.35; Lenz Taguchi, 2010 p.53). Therapeutic encounters become an enactment of cuts, in the entanglements of the human, nonhuman, discourses, materialities and practices (Barad, 2007). The client’s boundaries are agential cuts performed in the counsellor/client intra- actions, they represent the, often unconscious, ethical decisions where we demarcate the line between the material/nonmaterial, self/other, past/present, counsellor/client.

3.6 Diffracting Difference

Diffraction, an optical phenomenon, describes the way in which waves combine when they overlap, apparently bending and spreading. A movement which creates a diffraction pattern, when it encounters an obstruction, water, waves, sound, light waves, counsellor, researcher. Haraway (1992), referencing Lynn Randolph's 1992 painting "A Diffraction" was the first to adopt the physics concept diffraction as a methodology in critical cultural analysis. In her seminal essay "The Promise of Monsters" Haraway (1992) turns to diffraction to encourage the reconsideration of difference and reject the oppositional and binary thinking in feminist theory. "I think the world is precisely what gets lost in doctrines of representation and scientific objectivity" (Haraway, 1992, p 137) thus, signalling a move from the practice of reflexivity in research to practices of diffraction (Haraway, 1992; Barad, 2007). Throughout "Meeting the Universe Halfway" Barad, expanding on Haraway's work, challenges the "metaphysical underpinnings of representationalism", re-iterating that "representationalism separates the world into ontologically disjointed domains of words and things", cultivating a performative alternative to representationalism in the form of diffraction and diffractive methodologies. Diffraction is a constant thread throughout the book and much of Barad's work that follows, and from the outset the reader is encouraged to be alert to its "profundity", forewarning the reader that the concept will take a full reading of "Meeting the Universe Halfway" to understand entirely (Barad, 2007, p.72). Successively applying the principles of quantum theory, Barad systematically develops a theory of diffraction with which to ethically explore entanglement and the differences they make. Fundamentally, Barad emphasises the value of diffractively reading one theory through another to expand our knowledge, to notice and understand patterns of difference, produce inspired

provocations and to explore the nature of entanglements. (Barad, 2007). Differences matter in counselling and asking ourselves how and why those matters matter is useful when it comes to understanding what is happening in the counselling room (Barad, 2003). By considering counselling processes through a diffractive lens, rather than reflexive one, we can examine the complex, reconsider the subjective and acknowledge the “relational nature of difference” (Haraway, 1992). It requires us to be open to the diffractive patterns of difference, to the intra-active flows of matter, and material-discursive practices, (Barraclough, 2017). As Barraclough suggests “a collective, diffractive process, where posthumanist notions of entanglement, dynamic relationality, and difference underpin embodied and creative practices of telling and listening, affords both generative and disruptive possibilities” (Barraclough, 2017, p.8). Importantly, a diffractive understanding of the counselling session alerts us to fresh, alternative perspectives that might not have been anticipated.

Equally, diffraction offers an exploration of the significance of boundaries, i.e., the “boundaries of the apparatus” (Barad, 2007, p.140 & p.148), where reality, and how we come to know what we know, comes into existence, depending on material-discursive entanglements. It is so much more than just the entanglement of the counsellor, client relationship, it shows us the “indefinite nature of the boundaries”, the lack of delineation between self and other, the material and immaterial; “the social” i.e., the political, economic and cultural influences (Massumi, 2005) become the “exteriority within” (Barad, 2007, p135). Diffraction blurs the boundaries, lights up shadows while dimming the bright spots. It is a dynamic process, “a doing”, it causes “the

enactment of boundaries”, boundaries where we can see the differences. Certainly, the boundaries between client and therapist, self and matter seem an invaluable source of knowledge. “Diffraction troubles binaries”; it challenges them bringing into question our traditional binary view of counsellor/client, self/other. I question how viewing the counselling session diffractively creates a relational material-discursive understanding of the encounter, which troubles the nature/culture binary. I think about the diffractive nature of therapeutic encounters and how I might frame this. The client and therapist “understood as obstacles or an interference that overlaps with our embodied encounter, our experience of being met, causing us to diffractively read one through the other.” (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.536). Through the “diffractive mapping ” of the entangled encounters we can see emergent becomings, uniquely iterative. An understanding of self, dynamically (re)forming through the therapeutic experience.

3.7 Space Time Mattering

Barad not only proposes an onto-ethico-epistemological framework to encourage an alternative conception of knowledge production but encourages us to reconsider agency, discursivity, entanglement, performativity, and ethics. Encouraging a shift away from binary thinking and a reconceptualising of philosophical, performative notions of space, time, and matter. And it is to a non-linear, multidimensional notion of space, time and matter and the role they play in entanglements that I turn to explore the significance they have for understanding experience, memory, and the potential for change in counselling. Barad’s notion of the

indeterminacy principle¹⁶ in relation to time/energy suggests a single unit can be in (a state of) superposition. That is, it exists in a state of different times which means “that a given particle can be in a state of indeterminately coexisting at multiple times, for example, yesterday, today, and tomorrow” (Barad 2017, p.64). In the quantum world that Barad posits space, time and matter are not considered as separate entities, a series of pre-existent positions, situated and contained in the world but instead they are viewed as relational and entangled (Ingram, 2019).

Spacetimemattering, a concept which suggests “neither space or time exists as determinate givens, as universals, outside of matter” (Barad, 2003, p.28), does not pre-exist but is produced and iteratively reconfigured through the material dynamics of intra-action (Barad, 2007, p.179).

Spacetimemattering, intra-actions *of* space, time, matter, is a notion which not only points us to the materialisation of relational phenomena but “blurs spatial boundaries and temporal notions of past, present and future” (Ingram, 2019, Barad, 2007).

Notably the counselling session is no longer situated in time and space but a materialisation of the phenomena, reconfigured as spacetimemattering; time, space and matter enacted together. Viewed through an agential realist conception of time in the counselling session is “out-of-joint, dispersed and diffracted through itself” (Barad, 2010 p.244). A refashioning of time and space which encourages us to re-consider the telling and (re)telling of

¹⁶ While Bohr introduces us to the theory of indeterminacy in response to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle it is Barad who coins the term “indeterminacy principle” (Barad, 2007, p.312)

experience in the counselling session, past, present, future threaded through the session. “Tenses and temporalities shift within each fragment, times bleeding through one another” (Ingram, 2019). As stories unfold, different versions of their past and desired present/future enacted in the session. In this lively intra-activity of spatiality and temporality the possibilities for change in the differentiating of spacetime mattering (Barad, 2007, p.129) create endless potential. Posthuman counselling can be repositioned to be of spacetime matterings rather than in time and space. Barad challenges notions of continuity and certainly stories in the counselling session never emerge in a linear fashion. Matters of the counselling session materialise and unfold across different temporalities. The counselling session can be viewed as “a performance of spacetime (re) configurings” not following a pre-defined path “across a stage of spacetime (often called history) (Barad, 2010), Time often deviates in a counselling session, a client’s narrative does not proceed incrementally in time, often a repeated retelling (Herman, 1992), particularly when working with client’s who have experienced trauma. It can be repetitive and stereo-typed (Herman, 1992). Early sessions can be jumbled, as the client jumps between times, places, memories, all clearly entangled and unfolding in the moment. Most counsellors will know and have experienced this (even before the call to consider theories of agential realisms) there is an agential cut taking place.

Time of the past the present and the future in the counselling room can and should be reconsidered, Barad urges the troubling of time imploring us to do so urgently. We are challenged to question ubiquitous notions of temporality that view an inevitable forward trajectory, viewing the past as something that is gone and ‘no longer with us’. On this matter the

psychodynamic counsellor certainly does trouble time. Only the most jaded counsellor could embark on a journey with a new client without some hope that their work together might initiate change in our client, we must believe that nothing is inevitable about the future for the client; time, past, future and potential for change are all common themes of exploration in the counselling room. Furthermore, there is nearly always a temporal element to counselling, clients bring the past, the past is always present, past, and present in contemplations of the future. A session is no longer viewed as an isolated spatial-temporal event, rather the dynamic entanglements of space, time and matter are viewed as an endless process of becoming (Ingram, 2019). As Braidotti would put it “all becoming takes place in a space of affinity and in symbiosis with positive forces and dynamic relations of proximity” (Braidotti, 2011, p 30). The booking of the session, the preparation of the room, the travelling of the counsellor and client to the counselling centre, the anticipation, are no longer viewed as separate, individuated events but a spacetime-mattering of becoming for the client and counsellor. Time, space, and matter troubles counselling. Counselling is a relational activity; entangled within spacetime-matterings corporeal, embodied, temporal, discursive, materialised, political; more-than-human” intra-actions (Barad 2007). There is an intrinsic temporal, spatial nature to the posthuman counselling session, counselling, different periods in time and place threaded through and with the session. Time and space iteratively produced, radically re-worked. In Section 2, I explore past, time, memory, remembering using agential realism to produce a more complex version of the past. A series of hauntings become an offering of a different time, a different space but still entangled. A dynamic present where simultaneously past, present and future memories explored in counselling are articulated.

3.8 The Micro and the Macro

“We may not notice the intimate relationships common to that level of existence, but, regardless of our blindness to them, they persist. Events that appear to us as random may, in fact, be correlated with other events occurring elsewhere”. (Greenstein und Zajonc, 2005).

In essence, this thesis posits the idea that the quantum epistemology of agential realism is a means by which we can understand the implications of our intra-action with the process of counselling. As previously stated, Barad structures her theory of agential realism around the principles of quantum mechanics but it should be acknowledged that there is some friction when it comes to applying events of the quantum world to what happens on a macro level (e.g., Faye & Jaksland, 2021; Hollin et al., 2017; Al Kahili, 2020; Ananthaswamy, 2018).

Indeed, the very notion of the atomic world, how it can be measured, and applied is still hotly debated 90 years after quantum theory was formulated. Barad is emphatic that they are not using quantum principles of the micro/macro/particles/atom/diffraction in order to draw analogies but rather to consider the epistemological and ontological implications that quantum physics present us with (Barad, 2007). Barad, with dramatic effect, refers to the absurdity of making an ontological distinction between the micro and macro reminding the reader of the global impact of splitting the atom to produce atomic weapons (Barad, 2012). Questioning how some choose to view the microworld as a separate and unique entity rather than of and in the world, as if there is a tangible line which separates micro and macro and that we can identify where one quantum physical reality ends and the other, classical physics begins. Hollin et al., (2017) suggest, there

are implications of jumping scales that they believe Barad fails to address, citing Tsing, who posits the idea that this is an epistemological phenomenon of modern research and that consideration must be given to “what is lost” and how the original framework of research can continue to be applied unaltered when making such a significant shift between the micro and macro. In my view Barad address this criticism stating that “to frame my project as the scaling up of quantum physics is to profoundly misunderstand it on so many levels” (Barad, 2020, p.181). Essentially, it misses the point of a dynamic iterative process, where in the quantum world scale, along with time, space, mattering, are viewed not as a given, they do not pre-exist the intra-action but are “iterative materialisations of specific practices” (Barad, 2020). Barad (2017, p.57) retorts, “Surely anything like some allegedly preordained geometrical notion of scale must have long ago been blown to smithereens, and the tracing of entanglements might well be a better analytical choice than a nested notion of scale”. Barad argues that it is the indeterminacy of space, time and matter that troubles the idea of scale between the subatomic and macro incidents of war, nuclear physics research and the destruction of our planet. It is “this indeterminacy of time and being that leads us to explore the essence of matter in relation to the immanent energy of being and nothingness” (Barad, 2017). It is to this this radical openness, this indeterminacy, these infinite probabilities that might, or might not emerge in the intra-action that takes place in a counselling session that draws me to agential realism. In much the same way agential realism troubles time, scale, matter. Time, space and matter troubles counselling. Counselling is a relational activity; entangled within spacetimatterings, spacetimatterings that do not exist before the intra-action (Barad 2007).

Of course, not all quantum physicists agree with Barad regarding the shift from micro to macro, it is a view that has been repeatedly challenged. Heisenberg (1962) rebuffed theories of materialism and its propensity for extrapolating everyday experience and the environment to the atomic level, stating that extrapolation was impossible since atoms are not things (Hobson, 1996). He flatly rejected the idea that quantum theory could be applied to everyday experience arguing that only the principles of classical physics could be applied. This argument is still strongly supported today in some quarters, Ananthaswamy (2020) doubts that quantum theory tells us anything about reality. Nevertheless, there is optimism, some suggest that in the coming decade we will come to realise the extent that quantum mechanics pervades life, and we will come to realise how life has evolved tricks that utilises the quantum world (Al Khalili, 2020). For example, the expanding field of quantum biology explores which processes, mechanisms, phenomena that take place within a living organism can be explained with a helping hand from quantum mechanics. Recently, quantum entanglement has been successfully used to explain how birds can successfully navigate during migration. The growing success of quantum mechanics in explaining many phenomena and its many past, present, future applications reinforces my choice of positioning my thesis within the quantum world.

The posthuman counselling session diffractively read/thought/written through quantum theory, client, therapist, session, memory, narrative, mutually co-constituted, iteratively emerging, intertwined/twisted and woven together.

3.9 Critiquing Barad's Work

Barad's theory of Agential Realism is not without criticism and certainly it engenders wide debate Braunmühl (2018); Ahmed (2008); van der Tuin (2009); Davis (2009); Bruining, 2013; Irni, 2013; Hinton and Liu, 2015; Willey, 2016; see also: Coleman, 2014; Davis, 2014; Hayes, 2019, Hollin et al., 2017. Washick et al. (2015, p.65) articulate serious concerns that the new materialisms do not account for the endemic, structurally reproduced practices of oppression and exploitation, asking how a posthuman ontology materialises politics. They express alarm at the hyperbole created by the new materialisms and the work which is associated with it as well as the implications its knowledge claims have for the world, arguing that the new materialisms overenthusiastic optimism that theory will translate into political action is misjudged (Washick et al. 2015). They express reservations about what might happen to political thinking when the phenomena is viewed as not pre-existing the intra-action, wondering whether the loosening of the definitive nature of time and space, negates the very tangible, historically situated, lived experience of those subjugated to the inequities of endemic power structures. They voice concern that, however inadvertently, the new materialisms come full circle in articulating the intrinsic nature of "responsibility" which results in an epistemological positioning that implicates the imperative for political change with the producer of knowledge i.e., there is "little but the self to work on: our only choice appears to be to opt out of assemblages we find ethically problematic and, even then, only imperfectly and incompletely" (Bennet, 2010, p. 37). This sense of threat is not shared by Frost (2011, p.69-83), a new materialism scholar, who implores feminist theorists to reconsider how they assign blame for the inequalities that exist, highlighting the opportunities for political and social change that emerge when we reconsider agency as "unidirectional". In

posthuman views of agency it becomes an enactment in the possibilities and responsibilities (Lather, 2016). I argue that posthuman ethics allows for a stronger feeling of interconnectedness of self to others, including the non-human and more-than-human subject (Braidotti, 2013). The ethics of responsibility is intrinsic to the posthuman position, which in turn is inextricably linked to our knowing and being in the world (Barad, 2007) and as I consider what it means to research ethically, it is clear ethics are not side lined. Thinking is never a disembodied, nor a uniquely human activity. In turn thinking in theory, thought and experiment are inextricably ethical.

While Washick et al. (2015) challenge the idea of the non-human having agency and Casper (1994) expresses the concern that the emphasis on the nonhuman agency “deflects attention from human accountability to other entities, whether human, nonhuman, cyborg, or what/whomever” (p.853). Bennet (2015) reminds them that there is an equally strong case for questioning the agency of the human referring to the concept of free will and choice, whether that choice is limited by the political, social or cultural factors or inherent in our genetic make-up (Bennet, 2015). However, from an agential realist perspective agency can be understood as an enactment rather than possession, which means we no longer need to think about agency as a solely human property but can consider nonhuman and cyborgian forms of agency as well as human ones (Barad, 1998).

Furthermore, there is substantial evidence that Barad has been addressing principles of ethical accountability since as early as 1998, noting that asymmetries of power, wealth, class, racial identities, etc. require us to be more vigilant and attentive (Barad, 1998). The emphasis on

ethics is a key element which distinguishes her work from others working within the same category (Hollin et al., 2017). We are reminded that we have “irreducible relations of responsibility and that we have an ongoing responsibility in our entanglements with the other” (Barad, 2014). A methodological imperative to experiment ethically emerges as a result of this ethical breakdown (Barad, 2014). It is a post humanist “curiosity about what might be possible that enables [researchers] to imagine and create a different, more ethical, existence” (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p.10). For Barad, these ethics are “not predicated on externality but rather entanglement” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 50). Researchers become part of the entanglement, to which they have an ethical responsibility (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). The research process alerts us to ask questions of the situated nature of ethics; since “ethics become borne of situated response, ethics enacted in the pulse and pause of attentiveness” (Beausoleil, 2015, p. 2). Beausoleil (2015) goes on to describe this as an ethics of responsibility, stressing the importance of “remain[ing] receptive and responsive within the encounter, despite the challenges it might present to our worldview and implication of our role within it” (p.2). It may be helpful to remember that ethical practices are not inherent in material realities rather they emerge from them (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). Barad (2007, 2010) does not abdicate us from responsibility of the knowledge that we seek nor in part for what exists, reminding us that, as demonstrated in the erasure experiment, there is no final erasure, “we cannot set the world back on its axis. The past is never closed, the traceable re-configurings of the world are, there is no inheritance without a call to responsibility, written into the enfolded materialisations” (Barad, 2010 p. 264).

Some argue that posthumanism is a much-needed opportunity to contest the restrictions placed on politics and education by critical approaches to humanism, which dismiss the discourses of women, those who have experienced colonisation, the displaced, the marginalised, the forgotten (Snaza et al. 2014; Zapata et al. 2018). Lenz Taguchi (2010) observes that research within the New Materialism's has the potential for "new realities and new ways of being, which, in a feminist and political perspective, is of vast importance" (p.540). If we do our research and analysis differently, we can "make it possible for others (humans and non- humans) to live differently in realities yet to come" (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.540). However, applying theories of agential realism, while inviting us to explore separability, does not propose that there is no difference between the two, but encourages us to think about difference differently (Barad, 2014; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), to consider the co- constitutive nature of the two, encouraging us (by applying principles of quantum physics) to move away from representationalism which "separates the world into ontologically disjointed domains of words and things" (Barad, 2003, p.811). Massumi (2015) suggests "binaries are generally distractions and are more to do with contradiction and opposition, principles which are particularly useful in my conceptualisation of intersubjectivity in a posthuman counselling session. However, a Baradian perspective on subjectivity and the subsequent rejection of binary is not without criticism. Ahmed, who is credited with opening the debate (Braunmühl, 2018), suggests (among other things) that Barad is not specific enough in their analysis of dualism and why it is so intolerable. Braunmühl (2018) points out that the theory does not offer a way to transcend the hierarchical nature of binary positioning subject/object matter/mind, simply erasing the distinctions does not overcome dualistic thinking (Gunnarsson, 2013). Braunmühl (2018) goes

on to argues that the new materialisms, and more specifically agential realism, do not present a robust argument as to why dualism is “objectionable”, accusing Barad of representing the distinction between mind/matter/animate/inanimate in “normatively negative terms” (Braunmühl, 2018, p. 235). However, Barad, specifically aims to trouble binaries in a bid to move away from modes of thinking about difference which so often start with occupied modes of thought, this is this way and that is that (Barad in Juelskjær, 2020). I suggest that Barad does not reject dualism but rather points to the weaknesses in the theoretical assumptions which lead to binary positioning (Barad, 2007) and the potential that is lost when we emphasis separability as a starting point. Barad’s work more accurately, is an entreaty to question and reconsider the nature of their material-discursive production, a troubling of binaries, driven by the philosophical and quantum imperative to deliberate what it means when we view e.g., mind/matter, counsellor/client as ontologically indistinct, consider that they are indeed emergent properties and what might be conceived when we accept the everyday nature of entanglement (Hinton, 2013, Barad & Gandorfer, 2021). Braunmühl (2018) maintains that Barad is “theoretically ambiguous” in the way in which differences “between matter and discourse” are postulated, to the extent that matter(ing)-as-doing and discursive practices become indistinguishable. Yet Barad states quite obtrusively that it is impossible to separate each out and why:

“Discursive practices and material phenomenon do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; Rather the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are

ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated” (Barad, 2007, p.152)

Braunmühl is articulating a clear discomfort with the notion of dissolving the two, highlighting the risk of “transcending the relevant duality’ (2010). Evidently, the reluctance to assimilate the inherent materiality of discourse with the agentic nature of matter positions them at some philosophical distance from Barad, who views material and discourse as “mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity and enfolding” (Barad, 2007, p.244). Gunnarsson, 2013 further argues that to discard ideas of distinction and dualism is reductionist, and that Barad incorrectly conflates these two concepts. Applying the principles of agential realism runs the risk of failing to acknowledge what is particular to each term. There is a concern that not treating each position as distinct will reproduce ‘heteronormative order” and “that one will inevitably subsume the other” (Braunmühl, 2018, p.228), resulting in a letting go of notions of subjective experience. There is clearly anxiety at the perceived sense of rejection of humanity and the risks to society when human subjective experience is brought into question by re-theorising ontology, epistemology and ethics from a new materialisms perspective e.g., Calvert-Minor, 2014; Washick et al. 2015; Braunmühl, 2018).

Certainly, Barad’s work has the potential to provoke a strong response in the reader, ranging from the enthusiastic adopters to the critical and cynical. As stated, and this may be

indicative of my naive understanding of the academic world, I have been taken aback by the intensity of the negative reactions of academics who are critical of literature invoking the new materialist theory. The default response of the counsellor in me was to be curious about what might provoke such a strong, particularly negative reaction. However, short of personal analysis I can only speculate. As an alternative I have suggested a more fruitful perspective. Firstly, citing Jane Bennet (2015) who in her response to Washick et al., (2015) argues that instead of jumping to finding fault, the new materialisms should be allowed time to experiment, to cultivate their theories, to find the weaknesses therein and reformulate them in response. As Bennet suggests, for the time being at least we should tolerate a more Hegelian approach than Kantian (i.e., be allowed to pursue freedom in order to expand knowledge rather than expect an immediate response to the imperative of morality). Certainly, there is a view that the new materialisms recognise their task of crafting new concepts (Coole & Frost, 2010). Barad is perfectly aware that agential realism may indeed fail to stand its ground in scientific experiment, “agential realism might indeed fail” (Barad, 2011, p446; Pinch, 2011).

Braidotti points to oppositional positioning in the humanities and social science which attempts to negate other points of view and endorses the “wiping out of existing conditions” promoting instead the posthuman philosophy of affirmative theory (Braidotti, 2011, p285). This conflictual positioning is something I recognise in the provocations of those who critique the new materialist thinking, an approach which is the antithesis of the new materialism’s more constructive and positive thinking (Coole & Frost, 2010). The new materialisms do not wish to replace or reject traditional views, the aim is not to develop a new “specialised epistemology”

but rather to posit an affirmative theory (van der Tuin, 2009, Barad, 2007, 2021, Braidotti, 2013). Moreover, as noted by van der Tuin (2014) affirmative critique is invaluable “reading insights diffractively allows for affirming and strengthening dynamic links between schools of thought (...) and scholars apparently working towards the same goals” (p. 234). Hollin et al. (2017), whose work I have referenced frequently in this thesis, provide a more nuanced, if at times ambivalent, exploration, acknowledging the need for a measured approach to the theories of the new materialisms. They voice concern at the propensity for the theories to be applied without due consideration by the fervent advocates, defining the elements of theory that they believe should be approached with caution while presenting a case for the potential in the theory to re-orientate relational and situational accounts of ethics. And perhaps I, and others, should have responded to the advice of Barad, as presented by Gandorfer, when they suggest that what is needed is “less a reflection on critique than an ethico-ontoepistemology” (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021).

I can relate to the criticism that Barad presents physics experiments, on which she bases agential realism, succinctly and with precision but then presents the concepts such as phenomena, intra-action, materiality, as dense and abstract (Pinch, 2011). Nevertheless, despite the failings of this still relatively new theory, my tendency to get lost in the impenetrable theory and the opaque language, the limitations the critics point to, I believe there is an imperative to explore the potential of attending to the intrinsically ethical nature of the entanglement of discursive practices and material phenomena (Barad, 2007). However, my aim in this thesis was not to get caught up in the paradox that according to Braidotti the critics seem to find themselves,

“recognising the urgency of finding a new ethical agency while being stuck in the inertia of neo-conservative thinking” (Braidotti, 2013, p.301) but to recognise the value in addressing the structural inequalities that have been created between the human and non-human. Lemke (2015) contends that the new materialisms is often described as revolutionary, a radical new way of thinking but materialism of old has always engaged in “renegotiating and updating in confronting its counterpart”. In other words, materialism is not new (Lemke 2015). Rather the use of the prefix new is a nudge to think, research and write differently (St Pierre et al. 2016) Nonetheless, the corollary of ‘new’ ontologies and what they can bring about politically (Washick et al., 2015), and a good deal of criticism of the new materialisms comes from the field of political theory (Washick et al., 2015; Krause, 2011) and academics of S.T.S. (Science and Technology Studies) who have particular political, cultural and social sensitivities (Hollin et al., 2017; Pinch, 2011). Material ontologies are reproached for depoliticizing the individual with individualistic tendencies which have questionable material consequences for human research participants (Mayes, 2019). It is argued that the act of intra-action, where agencies of matter are entangled, makes it impossible to identify where the systemic inequalities are reproduced (Washick et al., 2015), indeed dispersed agency advances a very individualistic view of action politics. Robinson and Osgood (2019) point out that the new materialisms will need to push forward and address the criticisms if it wants to maintain its political edge. However, I remain confident in the relevance of the new (feminist) materialisms in this thesis since the theory is not a rejection of existing, often defeatist, cultural or political discourses but rather a re-imagining of a different starting point (Thiele, 2015). Hinton (2013, p. v-223) responding to Ahmed’s work argues that Barad “is not (re)turning to matter to

supplement its historical disregard in the feminist canon” (nor) “for the purposes of reconceptualising “it” (but) “attends to its inventive orientations”, to the possibilities that emerge. Indeed, where critical and poststructural feminist theories have traditionally placed emphasis on practical strategies, an active process that improves the lives of those disadvantaged by dominant hierarchies, the theories and studies of new feminist materialisms emerge and continue from this tradition (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) to find a new and previously unimagined understanding. Advancing from this position I suggest that the posthuman new materialisms of this thesis has the potential to provide new and creative ways of “knowing/becoming/doing” (Kuby et al., 2019, p.6) as well as an ethical means of discerning the complexities of the counselling session where we can explore the materialities of the counsellor and client as they come into being through the entangled encounter.

However, what appears to galvanise the critics of new materialisms even more is a shared view that it is a philosophy of “abandonment”, which surrenders the advancement by feminist and postcolonial theorists, rejecting their political and ethical achievements and negating their engagement with the material (Hinton & Xin, 2015). Ahmed (2008), who postulated the claim of abandonment, stating that “posthumanist material agency is only possible through the act of abandonment” is referenced frequently in the increasing number of papers critiquing new materialisms (Hinton & Xin, 2015). This sense of threat is not shared by Frost (2011), a new materialism scholar who implores feminist theorists to reconsider how they assign blame for the inequalities that exist, highlighting the opportunities for political and social change that emerge when we reconsider agency as “unidirectional” (p. 69-83). However, as Bennet

suggests, it is not an evasion but rather motivating encouragement to challenge and reconsider unjust and hegemonic systems and organisations (Bennet, 2014). Hinton & Xin (2015) (themselves new materialists) undertake a vigorous inquiry to establish whether this evaluation of the new materialism is justified. They present a complex analysis of the conceptualisation of abandonment, a sharp contrast to the less nuanced offering in Ahmed's 2008 paper, concluding, that in their negation of the new materialisms, while simultaneously advancing their own standpoint, expose themselves to the allegation of reiterating human privilege in a repeat of the very thing to which they object (Hinton & Xin, 2015).

In addition to challenges of a philosophical, biopolitical and cultural nature set out above, Højgaard and Søndergaard (2011) question how Barad's theory of agential realism can be usefully applied to analytic research, pointing to the lack of a more elaborate conceptual framework that can be used on a practical basis. Pinch (2011) echoes this, arguing specifically that Barad fails to develop the theoretical principles of material-discursive apparatus of power or subjectification yet offers an elaborate, technical, empirical rationale for technical apparatus (Pinch, 2011).

3.10 Conclusion

I propose that counselling is intrinsically a materially discursive agential process. Drawing on the principles of Agential Realism Theory, I consider the entangled nature of the encounter and encourage thinking about the therapeutic encounter as an iterative process, a dynamic forming and reforming of the unconscious which comes into being through and within

the intra-subjective meeting of client and therapist. Ways of being and knowing are entangled and ethical by nature and cannot be separated out. The ontology of experience should no longer be viewed as separate entities but rather one where counsellor's is entangled with that of the client, who together will create a unique diffractive pattern of understanding "a direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting with the world as part of the world in its dynamic material reconfiguring" (Barad, 2007, p. 379). In a posthuman counselling session we are completely responsible to and for the world and all our relations in it. As stated, this new interest in exploring the agentic, performative, entangled nature of matter, meaning and human has produced a diverse and eclectic body of work under the banner of new materialisms. However, there is evidence of philosophical incompatibilities, theoretical challenges, and difficulties which have been articulated from various, different academic positions. However, rather than reject the theories of the new materialisms I have found it more helpful to attempt to read the theories of psychodynamic counselling diffractively into each other in the hope of producing a new understanding of counselling (Barad, 2007, p.30; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.11; Lenz Taguchi, 2012). With this in mind, I have structured the following chapter in a way that facilitates an exploration of what can be created by reading, writing, thinking the new materialisms and notions of psychodynamic theory together and demonstrates how I believe the conceptual idea of a posthuman counselling session can sit within the context of some existing theoretical constructs of psychodynamic counselling and counselling research material.

Counselling Theory and the New Materialisms

4.1 Finding the Material in Psychodynamic Counselling

In this section I diffractively read some of the literature that has until recently provided the theoretical underpinning of my approach to counselling practice through my emerging ethico-onto-epistemological understandings. I introduce postmodern psychodynamic counselling, the principal orientation of my counselling practice, not in an attempt to give a detailed historical tracing of psychodynamic counselling theory, by following its every contour (of which there are many) but to select strands of the literature that influence how I might think about counselling in terms of a posthuman encounter. My objective is to explore where the material, discursive and temporal matters might be found already entangled with existing counselling literature, to identify where theory and practice, past and present, is interwoven with matter and explore how this threading through might produce a model of posthuman counselling. More precisely, in this chapter, I identify where it might be appropriate to thread theoretical approaches through my posthuman assumptions. I establish where theory and practice, past, present, and future, engage with matter, and present a suitable entry point for threading through the posthuman, where a diffractive reading of therapeutic theories of psychodynamic counselling, through a posthuman agential realist framework could articulate an alternative, more expansive understanding of counselling as an experience.

This thesis posits that applying the framework of agential realism to psychoanalytic theory illuminates the possibilities to change our understanding of the therapeutic encounter. Indeed, the scope for exploring counselling from an ethico-onto-epistemology would allow us to

redefine the counselling relationship encouraging a shift to view it as an intrasubjective, deeply entangled relationship exposed to dynamic, iteratively forming, re-forming tensions. However, as yet few academics involved in counselling research have engaged with Barad's work, the new materialisms or posthumanism in relation to the practice of counselling. It seems that being open to new complex theories mirrors the counsellors requirement to be hold the complex messy lives of the client. Exceptionally, Wyatt (2019) and Allegranti & Wyatt (2014), working collaboratively¹⁷ advocate and encourage academics to find creative and different ways to do research in the humanities and social science including counselling research positing a 'creative relational inquiry'. He leads by example in his recent book "Therapy, Stand-Up and The Gesture of Writing Towards Creative-Relational Inquiry" (2019) where he presents an inspired, model of research within the "posts"¹⁸ as he diffractively thinks and writes his depictions of therapy and stand-up. Writing towards creative relational inquiry allows Wyatt (2019) the scope to put writing-as-inquiry at the heart of the work while effectively threading the new materialisms with Deleuze and affect theory (Wyatt, 2019) allowing Deleuze's (and his own) research to be productively "thickened" by Barad's work (Thiele, 2016) notwithstanding the "theoretical tensions" (Thiele, 2016) and unimpeded by the by the ontological discrepancies set out by others e.g., Hein (2016), St. Pierre (2018). Lafrance & Stoppard (2007) research the effectiveness of a material discursive approach to counselling integrated into narrative therapy as a way of

¹⁷ Wyatt advocates for creative, relational potential of collaborative writing as a practice: e.g., Gale & Wyatt, 2009, Davies, 2011, Alexander, 2018),

¹⁸ Posts as suggested by St. Pierre as "reading, thinking, writing, and living with theory" (St. Pierre, 2018, p.2)

understanding depression in women, however while they posit this method as a way to overcome the restraining impact of “mind-body, individual-social” dualisms, this is presented from a postmodern perspective based on the medical model proposed by Ussher & Walker (1997), rather than a posthuman perspective which might acknowledge the agentic, entangled, or emergent nature of women’s minds and bodies as it performatively intra-acts with the social. More tangentially, in the field of mental health there is some evidence of a posthuman turn Duff (2014), McLeod (2017) and Fox (2011) emphasise Deleuzian philosophy to explore assemblages of health. While McPhie (2019), also predominantly Deleuzian, performs a post qualitative inquiry into “Mental Health and Well Being in the Anthropocene”, positing the idea of transgressive-diffractive analysis as way in which to research mental health. McPhie (2019) stresses the link between the destruction of the planet and the deterioration of mental health, arguing that posthuman therapeutic inquiry can help tackle socio-environmental inequities. An alternative more critical view of the posthuman therapies is expressed by Lowenthal (2017) who equates posthuman with e-therapies and mental health apps and counters that the posthuman position blurs the reality of social inequalities (Lowenthal, 2017). Although, Lowenthal (2021) expresses a more ambivalent view on posthumanism, and in particular Deleuze, in their introduction to the European Journal of Psychotherapy edition on Deleuze and Psychotherapy. To conclude, one of the only pieces of research which demonstrates parallels to this thesis is by Barraclough (2017) who produces an “iterative post human ethico-onto-epistemological approach to counsellor training”, and applies Barad’s theoretical framework of Agential Realism, to disrupt dominant humanistic ideas of knowing in the training of counsellors (Barraclough,

2017, p10). Barraclough's work proved a primary source of inspiration and encouragement that my research topic may have some validity.

4.2 Psychodynamic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory, from which psychodynamic theory evolved, much like the New Materialisms, did not develop as “a series of neatly fitting concepts and ideas” (Spurling, 2004), in fact it has been described as a “tortuous edifice” (Bateman, et al., 2010, p.xiii). Moreover, contemporary psychodynamic therapy has been described as in “a state of flux, crossover, recombination of ideas and challenge” (Bateman, et al., 2010). Fonagy and Target (2000) argue that psychodynamic clinical practice is disconnected from clinical theory and certainly this lack of coherence in psychodynamic theory, the enormity of the subject and its relevance to my own practice caused me much consternation. Consequently, rather than attempt to synthesise this diverse, often discrepant subject area I have elected in this section to diffractively map the psychodynamic theory which best reflects my areas of clinical interest through my newly formed posthumanist understandings in order to consider the consequences of attending to the materiality of the counselling session.

Principally, psychodynamic counselling is founded on Freud's theories and his principles of psychoanalysis. Put briefly, Freud hypothesised that we are driven by unconscious processes and that our early childhood experiences impact our personality and behaviour in adulthood. His theories were later cultivated and elaborated upon by several theorists resulting in different movements, including the emergence of Objects Relations in the UK (Gomez, 1997). My own

psychodynamic training is underpinned by object relations theory which is one of the theories which evolved from Freud's early work and was developed by theorists who wished to mould and advance some of the key principles of his theory. Object relations was illuminated firstly by the theories of Melanie Klein, and later by Winnicott, Guntrip and Bion (Gomez, 1997) who posit that we experience self through contact with the other (object or part object), that our relationships in adulthood reflect our interactions with significant others during the early years of our life and that we are intrinsically relational (Gomez, 1997). Psychodynamic Theory, informed by the theories of Object Relations demonstrates that "Relationship is at the heart of what it is to be human" (p.1). It offers a position from where to explore the inner world of the client with regards to our deepest, and largely unconscious fears, anxieties, wishes, and needs (Spurling, 2004). It is based on the belief that change can be brought about by trying to understand our early relationships which have influenced our experience of internal and external reality. The principle is that through the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship and the quality of that relationship, a therapeutic space can be created that allows the client and therapist to address these internal defence mechanisms.

At first glance psychodynamic theory, is the conceptual antipathy of new materialism's philosophies. It is awash with dichotomous concepts which are viewed as fundamental to the relational dynamics of the counselling encounter; unconscious/conscious, client/therapist, good (other)/bad (other), transference/counter transference. It has also traditionally used binary thinking in relation to notions of gender and sexuality (Kupersmidt & Silver, 2013). Indeed, the dyad of subject and object is at the very heart of objects relations theory, where the object is

philosophically distinct from subject, where the object, human or nonhuman is viewed as the other. It is through the relationship with the object that we make subjective sense of who we (subject) are. Indeed, a psychodynamic perspective of counselling seems theoretically predicated on the *relationship as an entity*, based on a complex interaction of dynamic unconscious drives and processes (McLoughlin, 1995) the implication of which is that these drives are binary structures, autonomous of the relationship. Yet, this binary positioning has been challenged in a shift in psychodynamic theory towards a relational, intersubjective position. Ogden (1994) introducing the notion of that intersubjectivity is an innate human desire stated that “Human beings have a need as deep as hunger and thirst to establish intersubjective constructions (including projective identifications) in order to find an exit from unending, futile wanderings in their own internal object world” (p.105).

4.3 Inter / Intra Subjectivity

My own practice took a more intersubjective turn when I was drawn to the relationally informed psychodynamic writings of Jessica Benjamin. Benjamin examined the importance of being attuned to the inter-relational, dynamic nature of the client/counsellor relationship, encouraging a shift away from dyadic notions of “the doer and the done to” (Benjamin, 2004, 2009). Positing that the interventions of the therapist, observations, comments, questions etc. can cause the client to feel “done to”. Benjamin cautions that therapist who fails to capture and accommodate the intersubjective nature of the encounter while continuing to take the role of “the

one who knows, heals, remains in charge” will fall into a “pure complementarity”¹⁹ positioning (Benjamin, 2004 p.24) where the client and therapist become caught up in “push me pull you dynamics” where each person’s perspective on the session remains irreconcilable “either I’m crazy or you are” (Benjamin, 2009, p.2). Instead by truly taking on the position of the other and ‘surrendering” (Benjamin, 2009, 2004) in the form of letting go of self and our subjective position, along with the need to coerce or convince, we allow the potential to create a ‘thirdness’ which, she defines as an “intersubjective mental space”. In theory, this allows the therapist to stay connected to their client, alert to their uniqueness and their pain and less likely to trigger more uncomfortable feelings that result in a state of complementarity two-ness, and unhelpful power dynamics that imply that counsellor knows best (Benjamin,2004). Significantly, Benjamin places the burden on the analyst to maintain a position of thirdness suggesting it is the only way to “soothe” and help “regulate” the emotions of their clients (Benjamin, 2004). Positing that it is in the intersubjectivity that change can be achieved (Benjamin, 2004). Thirdness is a concept which entered psychotherapy through the work of amongst others Lacan, Bion, and Winnicott (Reed, 2016). As theory developed it moved away from Freudian dualistic concepts, and in particular the complimentary status of the therapist and client, to an acceptance that something symbolic (a third) is produced in the therapeutic dyad (Reed, 2016). Lacan viewed thirdness as a symbolic space between the unconscious self and subjectivity, something that materialises as it is

¹⁹ Complementarity while used here as a counselling term it does not refer to the quantum notion of complementarity i.e., the position of the client and the therapist are in a complementary state where the response of the therapist necessarily excludes the response of the client and vice versa.

articulated (Benjamin, 2004). Bion (1994), whose theories changed therapists' understanding of what was happening in the encounter (Reed, 2016), considered the production of the analytic third, as simultaneously within and outside of the intersubjectivity of counsellor and client, as the dialogue that is created through/in the intersubjectivity between the client and therapist as it interacts with the individual subjectivity of both client and therapist. However, Benjamin (2004) points to Ogden's emphasis on the binary nature of the subjectivities directing us instead to the more emergent, entangled nature of the intersubjective third: "The co-created third has the transitional quality of being both invented and discovered. To the question of "who created this pattern you or I?" the paradoxical answer is "Both and neither" (p. 18). Clearly, Benjamin views intersubjectivity as a doing, an action, rather than a thing and uses the term the energetic third to indicate the dynamic, indeed what I recognise as the on-going, performative, nature of thirdness which materialises through "early non-verbal experience(s) of sharing a pattern, a dance, with another person" (Benjamin, 2004, p.16). It influences the intersubjectivity that develops between the client and counsellor. Barad (Barad, 2007) also makes use of the language of the dance. However, while Benjamin restricts this metaphor to describe the primitive early gestures between mother and child, when entangled with agential theory the energetic third can be viewed as (re)emerging at every encounter, a material discursive encounter where the traces of those past childhood dances are seen to be interwoven and iteratively reconfigured with the dances of the future, in the intra-activity between client and therapist, "a performativity which emphasises the ongoing, dynamic, relational enactment of the world" (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015, p. 697-705) and the counselling relationship.

Reading posthumanist philosophies through Benjamin's intersubjectivity, the subjectivities are viewed as both material and immaterial, human and non-human, "a posthuman subjectivity becomes an expanded relational self, that functions in a nature-culture continuum and is technologically mediated" (Braidotti, 2013, p.61). Subject/object are ontologically inseparable. They do not pre-exist but are co-constituted through the materially discursive practices. Therefore, we can no longer understand the relations of intersubjectivity as defined interactions between isolated objects but as inter-subjectivities which are co-constituted in the intra-action with technology, discourse, matter and subjectivity (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011). Interestingly, Højgaard and Søndergaard (2011) aimed to contribute to the understanding of posthuman subjectivity by developing a posthuman framework utilising "new materialist thinking" which they then read through to post structural and STS theories. However, when reading this paper, I had a sense of their ambiguity towards Barad and the New Materialism. This may explain their interpretation of Alaimo and Hekman's work, which on the one hand they describe as having produced a sophisticated philosophical and theoretical argument for a new materiality (p339). Specifically, they point to the advantages of thinking about the subject as co-created in the intra-action with the object (the social and the material) but then criticise Hekman's lack of understanding of the "disparate" elements that play a role in the processes of subjectification. Tobias-Renstrøm & Køppe (2020) express concerns that the concepts of Agential Realism negate the traditional foundations of psychological research making it impossible to establish ideas of subjective, universal experiences of life or take a broad view of psychological processes, and these concerns may well be echoed within the realm of psychodynamic theory. This view is expanded further by Trnka (2020) to express concerns that

an Agential Realist position negates notions of a conscious self-awareness and disregards the individual's telling of their past, which in itself can be traumatising. Trnka (2020) is unsettled by the posthuman view that there is no permanence of human subjectivity and the idea of indeterminant boundaries of the human subject across time.

Benjamin's (2009) view of the third is not entirely incompatible with the new materialisms, it is clearly conceptualised as entangled and emergent, separate yet connected, i.e., the third does not disrupt the intersubjective process but rather emerges from it as a relational system. Diffractively reading Benjamin through the work of Barad, the intersubjective mental space created in the session can be viewed as the phenomena, the boundary between the client and therapist, the subjects and the objects of observation, will be indeterminate, rather than being tasked with trying to enter the world of the other there will be no inherent distinction between the two. It will be the agential cut, how and where the marks appear that the boundary of the objects, bodies, intersubjectivities will be produced through the material-discursive practices of the session. In other words, it is in the agential cuts, the articulation of the material-discursive practices of experience that thirdness will become meaningful (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011). I suggest that the intersubjective mental space will be created in and through material practices of knowing and being of the third, yet it is clear that Benjamin expresses some ambiguity about the material nature of the third, "Thus, I consider it crucial not to reify the third, but to consider it primarily as a principle, function or relationship, rather than a "thing" in the way that theory or rules of technique are things (Benjamin, 2009, p.7) yet later Benjamin defines thirdness as a "thing" that we surrender to (Benjamin, 2009, p8) emphasising again the relational, performative

nature of intersubjectivity. With this redefined notion of intersubjectivity I assert that it is possible to reconsider how the experience of client and therapist is conceptualised.

4.4 Thinking as Material

The new materialisms challenges assumptions that thought is dominant, a view which has prevailed since the work of Descartes in the seventeenth century. The “New Materialisms show how the mind is always already material (the mind is an idea of the body) how matter is necessarily something of the mind (the mind has the body as its object (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p.48). Of course, this is not a unique idea in psychodynamic counselling theory, Freud, often described as a key materialist of the 19th Century and influenced by lectures on physiology, anticipated that his psycho-physiological ideas such as drives and mental structures could accommodate a new material understanding of the mind (Gomez, 1997). Psychoanalysis has been described as an attempt to understand human subjectivity in terms of the material (Schwartz, 2018). Freud’s earliest theories demonstrated how physiological experiences of paralysis and pain have their origins in traumatic experience and specifically encouraged patients to articulate their subjective experience of this (Schwartz, 2018). Barad states “thinking has never been a disembodied or a uniquely human activity” (Barad, 2012) while Braidotti offers the concept of nomadic thought²⁰ as a way of understanding the embodied and embedded material structures of thinking (Braidotti, 2011 p.2) a process that is dynamic and outward facing,

²⁰ Braidotti posits that all thinking is structurally nomadic and emphasises the materially embodied nature of thinking (Braidotti, 2011).

emphasising the materialism of the flesh that overcomes the duality of mind and body obscuring the boundaries (Braidotti, 2011). It is this reconstruction of cognitive processes such as thinking, remembering, knowing, emotions, as material and material as performative, that has opened the potential for new psychological paradigms and “psy-theories and practices²¹” (De Vos, 2014). If we conceptualise the session in terms of ontologically inseparable, intra-acting elements, where each of the elements i.e., the therapist, client, counselling room, memories, emotions cannot be disentangled, then we can consider how emotions, anger, sadness etc. will themselves create a material effect. This in turn would suggest it is only a matter of time counselling research begins to take the material turn more seriously.

4.5 Matter That Comes to Matter in Psychotherapy

Psychodynamic theory attends to the material effects in the encounter. Material has a “a ritualised and repetitive quality” requiring for example that counselling should always take place in the same room, emphasising “the setting of physical and psychic boundaries which define that relationship” (Spurling, 2004, p.5, p.26). However, this is still very much entrenched in a hierarchical humanist positioning with little acknowledgement of the dynamic, agential nature of the material. We observe time and physical boundaries and what is communicated to the counsellor or client when they are crossed. Chair, time, clocks, cushions, tissues, space are routinely set up in a way that is reassuringly familiar each week, we recognise the need to protect the counselling space from impingement (McLoughlin, 1995). The materiality of the session “the

²¹ I examine De Vos’s (2014) exploration of materiality and technology in psychoanalysis on p.124.

spatiality of arrangements of matter” (Bondi & Fewell, 2003, p. 542), the cushions, the temperature, the light, the room, become such a political/evocative/space. Bondi and Fewell (2003), in their discussion of the material qualities of consulting rooms, premises and locations—things like carpets, cushions, paintwork, stonework, street noise and levels of natural light—and the emotional experiences of clients—suggest that practitioners represent these spaces as exteriorizations of aspects of the interior worlds into which they invite their clients”. Bondi & Fewell (2003 p.542) acknowledging “how exterior spaces are absorbed into, or impinge upon, their clients’ inner worlds” suggest we cannot ignore the material encounter with and of our client. We all have a connection to the physical world of things around us. Our relationship to the world around us, whether it is the concrete blocks of the city which become our homes, the apple on our computers, the apple in the tree. Our relationship with the material is not abstract or intangible, we are in and of a material world, an intra-action which begins in our early lives, as observed by Walt Whitman (cited by Turkle, 2007) “a child went forth every day and the first object he looked upon, that object he became”. Indeed, Turkle notes that “psychodynamics offers a language for interpreting the intensity of our connections to the world of things” (Turkle, 2007). Winnicott theorised the transitional object e.g., teddy, blanket, as the material connection between the child’s internal and external representation of the continuing relationship with their mother (Winnicott, 1953). The “transitional object” connects self and other, we seek objects which give a sense of security, representing attachment objects by evoking powerful memory. Winnicott theorised that we continue the process at every stage of life as we search for objects we can experience as both within and outside the self (Turkle, 2007).

In “Evocative Objects” (Turkle, 2007), writing as a sociologist but with Freudian notions of the object within us, Turkle uses the psychodynamic narrative to understand the complexity and depth of our relationship with both inanimate and animate objects (Turkle, 2007) as a diverse group of contributors articulate their experience of different objects in their lives. The owner of a 1964 Ford Falcon describes a car with its own identity and history becomes an “autonomous agent” when it stalls, breaks down, or stutters “a seemingly sentient creature with emotions, desires, and intentions of its own (Donath 2007). Reflecting on objects in their life as boundary making, agential entanglements, evocative, comforting, partners, the contributions to Turkle’s book seem to consider the myriad of objects as relational intimacies, while acknowledging the time, space, matter significance. Yet, the objects of the stories are not part an exploration of how matter matters, nor do the stories reflect on the material discursive forces that are present. Certainly, Turkle, acknowledges that it has been evident for some time that accounting for the agentic material object is a challenge (Turkle, 2007). As Washick et al. (2015), among others, echo, writers are troubled by what they view as an abstract notion that matter has agency. Nonhuman agency deflects attention from human accountability to other entities, whether human, nonhuman, cyborg, or what/whomever.” Casper, 1994, p.853. Krause (2011) ambivalently suggests that while the acknowledgement of the emergent nature of agency in the interaction between the human and non-human helps us identify the factors that preserve the status quo of political and social domination and subjugation it also conceivable that it presents the possibility for reducing individual accountability and responsibility to the other. In particular, Krause (2011) rails against what she perceives as the loss of the reflexive self, arguing that without an expectation of individual responsibility and normativity the new materialisms risk

undermining democratic politics. While Jane Bennet reminds us that there is an equally strong case for questioning the agency of the human, referring the philosophical renderings of free will and choice, whether that choice is limited by the political, social or cultural factors or inherent in our genetic make-up (Bennet, 2015). Certainly, as Barad (2007) acknowledges, “nonhuman agency can seem a bit queer” (p.214) from a humanist perspective and as Haraway (1989) notes coming to terms with the agency of “objects” and recognising the agency of the material world in producing knowledge makes room for some unsettling possibilities and this may well be true of the counselling world, where there is an intrinsic idea that it is the agency of the (human) client very much differentiated from the non-human which is their priority. Counsellors, working within a range of disciplines may well question the ethics of changing notions of subjectivity which disrupts their view of the client as human, conflating the agency of the client with the material. However, if “agency is understood as an enactment and not something someone or something has, then it seems not only appropriate but essential” (Barad, 2007, p.214). to consider nonhuman and cyborgian forms of agency in the counselling session as well as human ones. From this posthuman performative perspective agency is an intra-action (a doing) through which the differential boundaries between human and non-human (Barad, 2003), client and counsellor, self and other, both take root and are uprooted.

4.6 Encountering Bollas

Christopher Bollas, according to The British Psychoanalytic Society, made a significant contribution to the conceptualisation of the interpersonal, subjective experience in relationship with the world of objects. While being grounded in traditional psychoanalysis (BPS) and writing

before the material turn, his materially influenced theories share fundamental philosophies compatible with the New Materialisms, which make another useful starting point for co-thinking (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2007) the New Materialisms through psychodynamic theory. In the “evocative object world” Bollas (1987), expands the traditional parameters of psychoanalytic thinking. Moving from an emphasis on the internal object to exploring the impact of the material, external world on our unconscious processes. He describes the “ontological potential” of matter; mountains, lakes, buildings all have the capacity to take us back to our infant state. Bollas (2008, p.83) suggests that the material has the capacity to affect, with a form of agency not dependent on human initiation i.e., the material “leaving an imprint on our memory”, “being transformed by the object”. Significantly, in Bollas’ account matter is not inert but agentic. Making the use of the phenomena of spiritual encounters, Bollas (1987) articulates what Barad might describe as an intra-active becoming “such experiences crystallise time into a space where subject and object appear to achieve an intimate rendezvous” (p.31). Art and observer “evoke a psychosomatic sense of fusion” (p.31). Bollas (2009) offers an opportunity to re-consider what can be produced when the human and non-human bodies come into relationship, referring to the entanglement of the non-human and human “the object world – its “thing-ness” – is crucial to our use of it. As we move about, we live in an evocative object world that is only so because objects have an integrity of their own” (p.79). A key tenant of Bollas’ (2011) work is the unthought known, where we are offered psychoanalytic troubling of time and space “in finding something in the future to transform the present, it is an object seeking that recurrently enacts a pre-verbal ego memory” (p.2); in this there are echoes of Barad’s theory of hauntology. The past is never lost but can be found disordering the present (Barad, 2007) a present the uncanny sense of something not

cognitively apprehended but existentially known” experienced in the powerful affect (Bollas, 2011, p.3). The “unthought known” (Bollas, 1987), *an unformulated experience*, “thoughts not yet thought” (Stern, 1985, p.12) conceptualises the way object relationships of childhood, which have had the most profound impact on our development, cannot be processed, understood, or known. While a child may not have the capacity to articulate or form “mental representation” it is through psychotherapy that the adult accesses early experiences of “being and relating” to bring the thought that we know but have not yet thought, to life (Bollas 1987). Much in the same way as diffractive patterns may not immediately be seen but must be looked for (Barad, 2007, 2017), as demonstrated in the quantum eraser experiment. Bollas describes how in the secular world adults seek out external objects that will transform our internal, psychological world (2011, p.3). Although his use of the term “ontological value” (of matter) demonstrates that his theories remain committed to the prevailing hierarchical view, where human is viewed as more significant than nonhuman (Bollas, 2011, p.233). Bollas turns to Winnicott’s notion of failing to be disillusioned by the relationship to highlight the negative psychological impact where the transformational object is idealised and or fails to change either ones internal or external worlds e.g., gambling addiction. When articulating the emotional experience of a baby, Bollas (1987) provides the essence of Barad’s performative material discursive encounter in the way that the baby’s emotional needs of “emptiness, agony and rage are transformed by mother’s milk” (p.33), specifically he states “the baby takes in not only the contents of the mother’s communication but also their form (p.33). Bollas describing the “unknowable region”, where client makes intersubjective use of the therapist and the counter transference; the affects, the feeling perception, that is generated within and between the therapist and client in the counselling room

(Bollas, 1987) making the experience not only more performative than representational but causal and intra-active.

While Bollas clearly makes a material turn, he eventually returns to the intrasubjective space, where unlike Barad's use of *intra*, *intra* applies to an internalised relationship between the object and subject, a form of self-objectification, conceptualised as an altogether anthropocentric space, without reference to the non-human. The divergence between the two theories further widens when Bollas (1987) reverts to writing as a therapist in clinical practice to illustrate his theories on countertransference. Here the power dynamics of patient/therapist become more obvious in the dualistic positioning and he moves away from the idea of a session as a materially entangled encounter. However, rather than reject the relevance of Bollas' work to the new materialisms on this basis, I have begun to explore where the theories can be co-constituted to offer an expanded view of the counselling session; asking myself if I could establish a congruent position between the principles of the two theories that would lead to a more nuanced understanding of the materiality of the client/therapist encounter I can view its creative potential to (re)think Bollas' work. With an ontological shift towards a more relational view of Bollas I can see clearly that he has posthuman understandings despite writing well before the academic emphasis on the material. As posited by Heidegger, and echoed by Irigaray (Donovan, n.d.) "every age has a concept that underlies and informs its beliefs but is radically unknown to it".

4.7 The Matter of Psychoanalysis

In recent years a number of academics have explored more specifically the implications of thinking psychoanalysis with the material. Clough (2007) suggested we rethink some aspects of psychoanalytic discourse “in the context of the technoscientific experimentation and reconfiguration of bodies, technology and matter” (p.7). Later, Jan de Vos (2014) presented a line of articulation on matter and technology in psychoanalysis and while he does not characterise his study as a New Materialist interpretation, nor a view of counselling practice for that matter, it makes an interesting reference point for this thesis. De Vos (2014) recognising the significant material turn of the academic community muses that just as the human is reduced to the material, referenced as chemical, biological and quantum mechanical, subjectivity is now negotiated through the “a-material, virtual, life world of social media and online communities” (De Vos, 2014). The most rudimentary exploration of political economy concerns itself with material and the virtual, acknowledging that the material is intricately intertwined in the subjective, psychological experience. Adrian Johnston (2011) and Catherine Malabou (2007), who are referenced by De Vos, present a case for re-grounding psychoanalysis within materialism, suggesting that a turn to the material may well give it a new validity, by supplementing the neurosciences with “a rich metaphysical theory of subjects” it would prevent psychoanalysis from, what Johnston describes as, a fading away. Malabou argues that Freud’s endeavour was informed by the biological knowledge of its time. In a critical dialogue with Johnston and Malabou, de Vos questions how this kind of materialisation could be articulated, suggesting Malabou risks reproducing a bio-political science rather than a material one and that there is an intractable problem of the material-virtual vortex in the psychoanalytic materialism proffered by

Johnston. De Vos posits the idea that this vortex is created by the irreducibility of psychoanalytic dimensions. To elucidate this, he uses Freud's concept of *Spaltung* i.e., the subject divided between the political and the psychical, demonstrating that the intertwined nature means that the political and psychical cannot/should not be split, by introducing the materiality of the brain sciences, without changing the ontological nature of each. De Vos maintains that the very important role of psychoanalysis to explore the divided nature psycho-political subject would be diminished. Materialism should not be about the physical reality but should be about the "ontological incompleteness of reality" (Zizek, cited de Vos, 2014), we come to what we know fully through the material, proposing the notion of a de-centred materiality, positioning the material not of the physical but of the object (more specifically he refers to Lacan's "object a"). He relates materiality to the epistemological. Zizek in reference to psychoanalysis argues for a third position "neither natural nor cultural, a non-human and non-natural which precedes and makes possible" our ontological positioning (De Vos, 2014).

De Vos's 2014 and 2016 papers have a wider and more intricate scope than I have allowed for in this review and I have limited myself specifically to his critique of materialism in relation to psychoanalysis. However, I was challenged after reading this paper to contemplate (for a moment) what could be produced in causal relations enacted in the (re)separating out of the psychical and political, or the material and the virtual in a counselling session, but my sense is that this would reinstate, in theory at least, the dichotomies that have been rejected by my posthuman position and which would view the subject, as produced in intra-action of the political and the psychical, separately rather than intrinsically entangled.

There is clearly support for the notion of the object of object relations, or Lacan's "object a" as material, in this paper. And De Vos, in citing Žižek, clearly troubles the human/material hierarchy. De Vos's questions "which materialism?" and I couldn't help wondering how diffractively reading the theories of Johnston, Marabou, and De Vos, through the prism of the New Materialism, acknowledging the agential nature of matter and entangled nature of knowing and being, would produce more common ground and a richer theory of the materialisation of psychoanalysis and overcome the dichotomies in neurosciences which prevent their claim to materialism due to their dependency on psychological paradigms (De Vos, 2016). It has the potential to reconceptualise the dilemma caused by the dichotomous positioning of the psychopolitical subject by acknowledging that they are mutually entailed, one cannot be given primacy in determining the other (Barad, 2007). De Vos, Johnston and materialist philosophers while acknowledging the intrinsic nature of the material do not account for a more collaborative and creative encounter with matter that is offered by the new materialisms.

4.8 Summary of the Materiality of Counselling

In this chapter I have retraced, elaborated and threaded through a fraction of psychodynamic counselling theories through the prism of posthuman new materialist theories. It is clear that there are points where the material, discursive and temporal matters are already entangled with existing counselling literature. There are moments where theory and practice, past and present, is interwoven with matter and it is clear that while the theories diverge there is potential to create new theories, new ways of counselling, new ways of understanding. By diffractively reading counselling practice and theory through the new materialisms, which

encourages us to think about the ethical, ontological and epistemological suppositions then new emerging positions as counsellor/client/theory/practice/ are inevitable. “New philosophies can be engendered” (van der Tuin, 2011, p.27) from threading through the posthuman. Furthermore, a diffractive reading of therapeutic theories of psychodynamic counselling, through a posthuman agential realist framework might articulate an alternative, more expansive understanding of counselling as an experience.

Methodology

5.1 Introduction to Methodology

My ambition for this thesis was to justify my newly formed inclination towards a posthuman performativity which accounts for the material-discursive practices of writing, remembering, thinking a material counselling session. In this chapter, I elaborate more fully my commitment to research in what is referred to as the “post posts” (Lather, 2016, p.125), and demonstrate how this thesis, along with the wider field of counselling research, benefitted by attending to the ethical and onto-epistemological matterings of the therapeutic encounter. It would be incongruent, when performing a thesis with posthuman proclivities, to set out prescriptive methodologies, when in reality the research emerged iteratively and unpredictably. It represents my attention to the agential enactments which emerged in the material-discursive practices of writing the research, where I thought about what was happening in the research rather than “constructing meaning” (Mazzei, 2013, p.777). It is an acknowledgement that what I have come to know through this dynamic and mutable research, is transient, emerged and emerging at the blurred boundaries of writing.

When I set out to produce this thesis, I had been encouraged e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, to work with methodologies which echo my philosophical positioning (McLeod, 2014) and urged to set out my research paradigm before embarking on my research (McLeod, 2014, Ponteretto et al., 2005). I had a naïve, idealistic view of instrumental rationalism and the knowledge it would produce, which has undoubtedly been challenged by my growing understanding of the entangled, wrapped up in, nature of research. Moreover, Coole & Frost (2010, p.4) in their introduction to

the new materialisms suggest there is an “emergence of new paradigms for which no orthodoxy has yet been established.”, which opened up the opportunity for me to engage creatively in the development of a theory for a posthuman counselling session. To utilise the ethical apparatus of agential realism to explore the iterative, material discursivities of knowledge production in counselling. I was inspired by post qualitative inquiry and the work of St. Pierre, Mazzei, Barad, and Jackson to reject methodology and allow my thesis to unfold through the process of reading and writing. Unhindered by fixed notions of “how to do research” I was free to respond to the performative nature of this thesis as it iterates and emerges.

In the first part of this methodology section, I review the epistemological challenges that have emerged, which have compelled some, including me, to question the structures that influence knowledge production, and which indicate counselling is ready for an ontological turn. I demonstrate how current research into the experience of counselling has yet to take a move towards a relational ontology which considers the entangled, inseparable nature of epistemology, ontology, ethics, and methodology (Barad, 2007), which informs the idea that counselling and this research can be viewed as a material-discursive entangled doing, rather than a reflection of experience. I attempt to diffractively engage with the use of reflexivity in relation to diffraction as a research tool (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017), to consider how this research might overcome some of the intrinsic theoretical assumptions in knowledge production. I diffractively read the philosophical and theoretical arguments which have until recently informed the production of counselling research and knowledge before exploring how a material turn might produce a new, alternative, more ethical understanding of the therapeutic encounter.

I follow this section by sharing the theoretical uncertainties I faced as I tried to formulate my research framework and address my methodologies, including the confusion that confronted me as I tried to find a way forward with my thesis if I did not have a methodology. A confusion which was compounded by St. Pierre's 2021 paper, which sets out the theoretical parameters of post qualitative inquiry, a framework of which I seemed to sit outside. This left me with the decision of whether I should commit to a diffractive methodology given the inherent diffractive nature of working within an agential realist framework. Towards the end of this chapter, I consider what "data" produced within this posthuman paradigm might look like before bringing materialist ethics to writing, thought and theory into focus, in order to address the inherent ethical implications of the entangled knowledge practices in this thesis. I give some thought around what a decentring of the human means for research and counselling ethics.

5.2 Shifting from Qualitative to Posthuman

Evidently, how knowledge is constituted within the humanities and research can, has been, and is being questioned. The Cartesian ontological dualism of mind and matter which prevailed has long been challenged by philosophers such as Nietzsche, who paved the way for philosophers for example Foucault to conceptualise knowledge in terms of the context of power (Abadia, 2018). Foucault stressed that if we truly want to understand the root of knowledge, we must look at the struggle and power relations behind its production (Foucault, 1976, p11). This new understanding led to a rise of postmodern philosophies and related schools of thought in the late 20th Century. Post-structural theory and critical thinking further advanced these challenged notions of truth, responded to the crises in representation, acknowledged the power of discourse

to create reality and built on the emerging epistemological assumption that knowledge is intersubjective (Abadia, 2018, St. Pierre, 2000). Nonetheless, traditional research from a post-structural perspective can be reproached for merely creating “the illusion that the knowledge produced is more legitimate” (Wall, 2006). With reference to knowledge, “all that exists is interpretations” Nietzsche (1973); Tamas (2009) goes as far to say that “in these postmodern times, producing truthful knowledge seems increasingly impossible or unethical”. In 2001, Flyvbjerg made a strong case for researchers to abandon the idealisation of quantitative research in pursuit of a much deeper, richer form of research, which emphasises reflexive analysis of values, is ethically grounded and approaches knowledge with a hermeneutic lens. Flyvbjerg (2001) advocated that research knowledge should be considered hermeneutically i.e., who, why and what is the basis of interpretation of research. The postmodern movement continued to grow, researchers ranging from Foucault and Derrida in the 70’s to Barad and St. Pierre in the 2000’s, were equally committed to troubling the dualistic, simplistic positioning of ontology and epistemology (McCoy, 2012). This signalled an increasing inclination in counselling research towards the interpretative, phenomenological, constructivist and social constructive paradigms based on the ontological and epistemological position that reality, knowledge, and research, was co-created, situated contextually as an intersubjective experience (Bager Charleson, 2020, Benjamin, 2004). In short, postmodern philosophical alignment encouraged researchers to think that knowledge and research could be done differently (Wall, 2006), old ontological assumptions could be usurped by the idea of a co-constructed reality that emerged in relation to others and that qualitative inquiry could be reconceptualised. Although (Hansen, 2004) posits that the

application of postmodern epistemologies in counselling theories was still rather neglected in counselling literature.

Hinton (2013), writing from a posthuman position and echoing Barad (2007), goes as far to say that theories and interpretations are so entangled with the object of inquiry that it “is disturbed” to think of them as independent of each other. “It divides things into representations and things represented” i.e., “it assumes that which is represented is independent of all practices of representing” (Barad, 2008, p123 cited Hinton). Representationalism is the “belief in the power of words to mirror or mediate pre-existing phenomena” and the first step in research should be to consider how “representations” and what they claim to represent are understood (Barad, 2007, p121.). Yet, reflexivity, whether viewed as a methodological tool or a radical epistemology (Lynch, 2000), continues to be embraced by the world of qualitative research (Finlay, 2003; Bager Charleson, 2020; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017; Wyatt, 2019) as a path to constructing legitimate knowledge in research. Many believe it must be integral to research methods in order to “legitimise, validate and question research practices and representations” (Pillow, 2003, p.175). For counselling and psychotherapy researcher’s reflexive self-monitoring (McLeod, 2014), along with critical reflexivity are considered key components to good research (Etherington, 2004). It has been seen by many, including myself when I set out to produce this thesis, as hugely valuable in enhancing the reputation and value of qualitative research, “I believe if I approach my research reflexively it will have more integrity, provide a demonstration of the subjective otherness of humankind, and the ubiquitous nature of the diversity of experience” (McFarlane, 2017). Indeed, for a time, critical theory turned to psychoanalysis as the

“self-reflective methodology of choice” (Clough, 2007, p 5) using it to creatively think about trauma, loss, and melancholia. (Clough, 2007). Psychoanalysis, a form of intense reflexivity, was viewed as creating the potential for a “new ontology for bodies, temporality, memory and materiality” that might overcome the challenges faced by Western thought (Clough, 2007, p.5). As suggested, the psychoanalytic perspective engages us in the search for the truth (Freud, 1937). Perhaps adopting a psychoanalytic position when researching counselling would represent the epitome of reflexivity?

However, some suggest that reflexivity lends itself to narcissism, self-indulgence, a position of epistemological superiority and over self-analysis e.g. (Finlay and Gough, 2003; Pillow, 2003, Coffey, 1999, p. 133; Lynch, 2000) and it became increasingly evident to me that there were questions about how self-reflexivity could be applied with integrity to my research. How could I account for and recognise the unconscious dynamics that would be present in the research processes? The way in which the research relationship is “conceived, constructed and embodied” within the research framework would have a significant impact on the knowledge that was generated and reflexivity would not account for the emergent, intra-active nature of knowledge. Both Bondi (2013) and Rizq (2008), point to the challenges of adopting a reflexive position in research. Referring to the Oedipal position²² to illustrate their theory in

²² Oedipal complex is a Freudian concept which describes the unconscious infatuation a son develops for his mother while simultaneously viewing his father as his rival. The Oedipal position is closely related to Melanie Klein’s theory of the depressive position (Klein, 1957, p.196)

psychoanalytic terms, they suggest that our inability to take the third person position stops us being able to stand outside our research i.e., that there is a form of two-person relating where the researcher has “no sense of psychic separation and we psychically merge our own experiences and experiences of participants” Bondi (2013). When we are unable to access the third position, we are no longer able to step back and think reflectively about our work, we become stuck, find it difficult to be creative and work out how to move on. I found that the epistemological positioning of reflexivity, despite attempts to improve its veracity, was further troubled by posthuman theory, which is largely cynical about reflexivity (Hinton, 2013). Haraway suspects that reflection simply reflects back that which is already there i.e., reflexivity only “displaces the same elsewhere” and wonders about the pressure of finding the “really real” authentic experience on the production of knowledge (Haraway, 1997). Jackson and Mazzei (2008, p.303) caution the idea “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”. According to Haraway, I would understand substantially more if adopted diffraction as a way of creating and understanding difference (Haraway 1997). Haraway presented diffraction as a semiotic research tool for feminist research, a prism through which to view the way in which meaning is created and communicated in and through technoscience (van der Tuin, 2014). Barad went on to develop Haraway’s idea of diffraction (Barad, 2007) into something much more specific, developing the quantum phenomenon of diffraction to describe a method of reading one text through another where differences materialise and concepts are restructured (van der Tuin, 2014). Diffractive research illustrates the “differences that our knowledge-making practices make and the effects they have on the world” (Barad, 2007, p. 72). Barad specifically goes as far to say that critical

and post structural theories need to be revisited as reflective critique limits understanding of “thought, critique, science, and questions of matter” (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021). However, Serra Unduragga (2020) offers a position that may be useful when she suggests that instead of rejecting practices of reflection for diffraction there is the potential produce richer, more diverse, nuanced research understand if we diffractively read one through the other. Arguing that shifting our attention from reflection to diffraction enacts a cut. A constitutive exclusion that Kuby et al., (2019) might describe as too small, since it prevents the adoption of a posthuman position of reflexivity as a material, discursive and performative practice, constitutive in the production of knowledge. Sera Unduragga proposes instead a performative meta-reflexivity, a diffractive understanding of reflexivity that accounts for the intra-active nature of the two. This emphasis on the performative nature of reflexivity is not entirely inconsistent with Barad’s concept of diffraction, which is closer to work grounded in constitutive reflexivity²³ than is recognised (Hollin et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, the idea of applying diffraction to disrupt thinking in research has over recent years has become increasingly popular e.g., Barraclough, Mazzei, 2012, Murriss, 2019. Although Wyatt (2018) is frustrated by the extent that reflexivity is still used, noting researchers are still more inclined to apply reflexivity than diffraction. Researchers have clearly been

²³ Hollin et al. 2017 citing Woolgar suggests constitutive reflexivity (one of several forms of reflexivity) *offers us a way of seeing these distinctions [between ‘a thing and what is said about a thing’] as actively created achievements rather than as pre-given features of our world.*

attracted to the “vocabulary” surrounding diffraction, along with other “Baradian” terminology (Hollin et al., 2017, p.2). However, “diffraction works as an effective metaphor” (Uden, 2018), which has resulted in many researchers using it allegorically, often as a simile for reflexivity. When in fact the task should be to consider the principles of wave theory in order to find new analytic stratagems to positively critique, diffract and dissect meaning making (Hollin et al., 2017; Juelskjær et al. 2021). Barad (2007) is quite insistent, diffraction is not a metaphor but offers very real and new possibilities for a different perspective in the study of feminist theory and new materialist ontologies (Kaiser & Thiele, 2018). Yet, the use of diffraction as a metaphor remains deceptively attractive. The concept of “diffractive teacher” (Murriss, 2018) or “diffractive practitioner” is made use of in educational research, as commented on by (Hill, 2017). Indeed, in the early days of my research I was drawn to the notion of myself as a “diffractive counsellor/ researcher”. However, this positions the counsellor/researcher/ teacher as a separate diffracting object, when in fact they are “an integral part of the phenomena being investigated” impacting the “production and reconfiguring of difference” (Barad, 2007, p.232) materially entangled with client/participant/pupil. Furthermore, a diffractive counsellor is suggestive of a return to the “doer/done to” notion of counselling (Benjamin, 2004), when as cautioned by Mazzei & Jackson (2017) we can no longer think in research in terms of “doers (agents) behind deeds or actions giving “voice” to an experience” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2017, p.3). More accurately, when considering the counsellor/client relationship diffractively there will be times when the counsellor will be an object of investigation and at other times the counsellor will serve as an apparatus of investigation’ (Barad, 2007). The counsellor is not external to the diffraction pattern, “observing it, telling its story” (Barad 2014, p.181). The counsellor is part of

the diffraction pattern. A “diffractive counsellor” would not account for the entanglement that takes place in the material counsellor and client encounter, the complex intra-activity in becoming of self, practice, other, matter. In agential realist terms the counsellor, the client, the session, are viewed as ontologically inseparable materialising performatively in the intra-relational process. This may seem like semantics but was integral to my understanding of the underlying quantum principles of diffraction in research, it also highlights the difficulties of moving away from a reflexive view of the research encounter, where the role of the researcher as standing outside of the research is emphasised.

Certainly, diffraction offered me an alternative to critique (MacLure, 2015), the potential to read psychodynamic theory, counselling research and writings on counselling experience diffractively through the work of new materialist academics (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p.90) in a process that could be understood as relational exploring, ‘knowing/be(com)ing/doing together because they cannot be separated i.e., they are co-constituted’ (Kuby et al. 2019, p. 479; Barad, 2007). Mazzei (2014), described the potential of a “diffractive strategy that takes into account that knowing is never done in isolation but is always effected by different forces coming together” (p.743). There was clearly significant potential for me to use diffraction as a tool to engage with the material experience of the client, threaded through those of the counsellor, entangled with self as researcher in this thesis. I believed that if I could acknowledge the extent to which diffraction accentuates difference, alerting me to the “indefinite nature of the boundaries” the lack of delineation between self and other, the material and immaterial (Barad, 2007), I could produce a more nuanced understanding of the counselling session. As I go into in

more detail later in this chapter, diffraction became a key methodological tool which influenced how I came to understand a posthuman counselling session.

Returning to the subject of epistemological challenges in making methodological decisions about this research, it is relevant to consider the work of Haraway (1988), who predates Barad, and who was equally keen to deconstruct statements of truth. Working within the realms of feminist inquiry, she challenged notions of epistemological objectivity, suggesting that the production of knowledge is very much tied up in a knower's viewpoint i.e., where they find themselves positioned. The new feminist materialists, reject the Cartesian idea that the production of knowledge is human (St. Pierre (2010) i.e., how can we separate the knower from the known, and it this viewpoint this has, in part, led to the new materialisms becoming a significant aspect of contemporary feminist theory (Hein, 2016). Haraway (1988) asserts that feminist objectivity means situated knowledges i.e., "a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates feminist enquiry" which in turn prompts me to consider counsellor objectivity in terms of limited location and situated knowledge, "not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object" (p. 583). Haraway, referring to feminist research, believed that how knowledge was being produced "threatened our emerging sense of collective historical subjectivity and agency and our "embodied" accounts of the truth" (p590). Haraway (1988) contested that "we seek knowledges ruled by partial sight and limited voice (...) for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible" (p590). This contesting of the epistemological "verbiage" that she saw in research produced a crisis in feminist inquiry, a "self-induced multiple personality order" (Haraway, 1988, p.16); a

phenomenon that I saw echoed in much of counselling research and to which I could easily relate, as I battled between my counselling self and myself as counselling researcher. Haraway (1988) asserts “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (p.589). Certainly, forming concepts of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), along with the work of Foucault and Barad incited me to attend to the power dynamics involved in the production of knowledge in my research and reconsider the issues of ethical accountability which I was forced to confront at the outset of my research. The new materialisms rejects traditional ontological hierarchies which provokes me to ask what the implications might be for the client, and the therapeutic encounter, with its intrinsic power dynamics. Haraway is credited with introducing the notion of the interrelatedness of epistemology, ontology, ethics and politics; a relational philosophy which significantly influenced how I and many others positioned our research. Consequently, the ethico-onto-epistemology of agential realism (Barad, 2014, p. 185) was the philosophical principle on which I confidently established my research paradigm i.e., the theory that the nature of “ethics, knowing and being” is ontologically inseparable in the creation of knowledge; the practices of knowing and being, the material and the discursive, are no longer isolated from ethics. From a posthuman agential realist perspective, concepts of knowing and the creation of knowledge become a material practice, knowledge is not an external reality that I as a researcher can measure in this thesis but is something with which I am intrinsically entangled, knowledge which can be defined as knowing-in-being (Barad, 2007). Counselling is no longer about the counsellor as a separate material entity but about “nodes in fields, inflections in orientations” there is “responsibility for difference in material and semiotic fields of meaning”

(Haraway, 1988). An agential realist, ethical, relational engagement with the material encounter of counselling, experience and research, while considering the performative effects of the phenomena i.e., the sessions as they emerge in the entanglement is where I have located this thesis and is where I invite counselling research to turn.

Having set out in the introduction that I wanted to explore the entangled, performative nature of a posthuman counselling session which would explicitly address new materialist understandings of power and knowing-in-being and having positioned myself, and this thesis, philosophically within a posthumanist agential realist framework my next challenge, if I was to follow the trajectory of conventional thesis writing, was to drill down to my methodology. Having worked through my ontological and epistemological misgivings about how research should be done, how would I now define my methodology, give it a name? Braidotti (2013) suggests we are in a post theory period but how is posthuman/ agential realist/new materialist knowledge generation done? Certainly, there is no new materialist methodology template (Davies & Gannon, 2006), Significantly, I had been incited, in my reading of St. Pierre, Jackson, Massumi, Barad and Manning amongst others, to question the theoretical incongruence of aligning myself with an anthropocentric methodology, encouraged to question the appropriateness of referring to “methods” or “methodologies” as human centred activities” (Murriss, 2019; Murriss & Bozalek 2019) which would fail to acknowledge the entangled, intra-active, iterative nature of my research. Perhaps I had become a “post-methodologist” (Jackson & Mazzei, p. viii 2012)? Yet, as Jackson () suggests method is used to legitimise qualitative research, to give it integrity. I wondered how my own research would have any credibility or

meet both the implicitly and explicitly defined expectations of the academic research world of the humanities and social sciences, without a clear delineated methodology? In addition, despite being repeatedly given “permission” by my supervisor to do my research differently, my academic insecurities still drew me to the safety of prescribed methodological guidelines. Feeling overwhelmed by the task in front of me, I craved “methodological cleanliness”, a neat set of instructions that would help me do my “methods properly” (Law, 2006) and meet the expectations of others. When the reality was, my research, as it is for anyone in the world of “post”²⁴research (St. Pierre, 2004), would be a bit messier (Law, 2006). I was required, despite finding the new materialist position “confronting” and “risky” (Davies, 2020, p.6), to be “open to the vulnerability and messiness of research, staying for a while in a space of the as-yet unknown, where good research questions and the premises for the knowledge produced are shaped” (Juelskjær et al. (2020, p. 25). Despite being able to acknowledge the generative potential of the “not-yet, to-come, a force of pure difference pushing through” (Kuntz & St. Pierre, 2021, p.475), I found the lack of structure disconcerting.

Adrift in my vulnerable messiness (Juelskjær et al., 2020), I tried to find a way to stay with the discomfort of producing a PHD thesis without a defined methodology, to make sense of my entangled work, waiting for way forward to materialise. Still optimistic that there was “value in my rigorous confusion” (Lather, 2007, p.160) after all, this flaw in my knowledge, this

²⁴ Applying St Pierre’s 2004 “posts” to include posthuman, post qualitative, Post structural, postmodern (Guyotte et al., 2019)

“incompleteness and indeterminacy are assets” and my “getting lost is a way of knowing” (Lather 2007, p. 161). My early attempts at applying rational, objectivity to my research definitions had led me to a “splitting of the senses, a confusion of voice and sight, rather than clear and distinct ideas” (Haraway 1991, p590). As an alternative, Braidotti (2013) promotes following methodological principles, ethical guidelines, a “cartography²⁵” on which I could map my own “epistemic and ethical accountability”, situated knowledges of my own counselling in time and space. Certainly, this would allow for my “posthuman sensitivities” (Braidotti, 2013, p.53) of relational ontologies, entangled ethics, posthuman performativity, embodied narratives, material encounters, past understandings, the familiar and unfamiliar already intra-acting in the telling of this thesis. With time, I realised that my methodology was a becoming, not a “prescriptive device but a springboard” (Manning & Massumi, 2014) and I must begin wherever I am” (Derrida, cited by St. Pierre, 2019, p.12)).

5.3 Not Post Qualitative Inquiry?

Early in my research process, I had been drawn to the philosophies of post qualitative inquiry, which is an invitation to transcend the theoretical paradigms of existing qualitative research and to engage in the “post” philosophies (Davies, 2018). It falls within the framework of the posthuman, and I recognised parallels with the theoretical principles of agential realism. I

²⁵ “A cartography is a theoretically based and politically-informed account of the present that aims at tracking the production of knowledge and subjectivity (Braidotti, 1994, 2011a, 2011b) and to expose power both as entrapment (potestas) and as empowerment (potentia) (Braidotti, 2018, p.3)

was, inspired by St. Pierre to attempt “to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613). I aspired, through the writing of this thesis, to disrupt the traditional processes of theorising and knowledge production by thinking counselling research without method (Jackson, 2011). Jackson (2011), advancing Deleuze’s concept, thought without image, contend that thought will happen from the outside “by force”, “through an encounter” or “by chance” (p.92)? I found this unpredictable, yet organic, iterative nature of working unsettling but exciting in equal measures. The notion that modes of inquiry do not pre-exist with prescriptive methods of research design and processes (St. Pierre, 2021) explicitly defined for the posthuman researcher but rather they unfold in and through the process of inquiry seemed to fit my philosophical orientations. Furthermore, inspired by the work of St Pierre, Mazzei, Barad, and Jackson I had begun to think about methodology differently, even reject it. Significantly, I believed post qualitative inquiry (encouraged by St. Pierre and others) to be ontologically consistent with a posthuman new materialist perspective e.g., post qualitative inquiry is affiliated with posthuman methodologies (Mayes, 2016); “The philosophies of the new materialisms create an environment where method is no longer prescribed and structured but is emergent, no longer constructed with a beginning, middle and an end but a series of eruptions (St. Pierre, 2016)”, significantly it is founded on onto-epistemological principles (St. Pierre, 2021). However, St. Pierre (2020), rather disconcertingly, mid-way through my research process proffered a more explicit definition of post qualitative inquiry, which made me question if I risked being accused of ontological and epistemological confusion by conflating the different paradigms of agential realism and post qualitative inquiry. St. Pierre explicitly states that post qualitative inquiry “begins with poststructuralism” and has “an ontology of immanence” (St. Pierre, 2020, p.163),

articulating the structural significance of Deleuzian philosophies to post qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, despite my commitment to post qualitative inquiry, I have chosen not to engage with poststructuralism, nor have I placed the philosophy of immanence at the heart of my thesis, which St. Pierre (2020) considers a pre-requisite. This quite definitively set it apart from the ideological values of Barad who rejects poststructuralism and is more accurately described as presenting a “philosophy of transcendence and identity” (Hein, 2016; St. Pierre et al. 2016). So, while sharing personal fundamental philosophical principles of understanding research as a “doing” (St. Pierre, 2015, Barad, 2007), each positing a relational ontology, both materially informed, aligning a thesis predicated on the work of Barad with post qualitative inquiry seemed at best incongruent and at worse ontologically erroneous. It is safe to say that my sense of methodological “confusion” intensified at this point.

5.4 Threading Through a Diffractive Methodology

As an alternative, asserting the neat neologism of a prescribed diffractive methodology, a new materialist methodology, may well have alleviated this methodological dilemma. However, despite acknowledging the transformative impact of diffractively thinking, writing, reading through counselling research with this thesis, I was still disconcerted when urged, to apply a diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007) to my research, much in the same way as I now question notions of “data²⁶” and knowledge production. Methodology (noun) defined as a pre-existing set of methods, of academic regulatory rules.

²⁶ See p. 131 for a discussion on data and why I am troubled by it.

Of course, I can acknowledge that there are attractions of using a diffractive methodology, it “creates new and alternative realities by reading through one another” (Barad, 2007, p.25), it encourages “a rethinking of notions of identity and difference” (Barad, 2014). Diffractive inquiry produces “respectful”, “detailed”, “ethical” engagements (Barad, 2007, p.50). Nevertheless, the use of method and methodology conjure up “dogmatic images” (Jackson, 2017) of structured processes of thought in research. This feels incompatible with my post qualitative positioning, viewing inquiry as a becoming, an intra-active, emergent process. The act of defining a methodology feels tied to the restraints of qualitative enquiry (Jackson, 2017) which implies a shared understanding of a starting place, an agreed and recognised formula for carrying out research and collecting data (Jackson, 2017). This in itself is problematic as it supposes data and the research are ontologically separate (St. Pierre, 2019). My experience of producing this thesis has made me realise that I could not know where to start until I started, I did not know what my research would produce until it was produced. Furthermore, post qualitative research is “methodology free” (St. Pierre, 2019), we are implored to stay with the philosophy and to reject methodology when doing post qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2020) it therefore seems a contradiction in terms to posit a diffractive methodology. Although, many do not share my concern that a paradox is being created. There is evidence of a growing field of research in “diffractive methodologies” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, Uden, 2018, Thomas & Bellingham, 2020). In the field of education research Kuby et al. 2019; Murriss, 2018; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010 and Jackson & Mazzei, 2012 were amongst the first among the new materialists to apply a diffractive methodology to studies (Lenz Taguchi, 2012). “The concepts *matter*, *materialism*, and *affect* from philosophy have also been taken up in the social

sciences, methodologised to become *new material methodology* (from which I read diffractive methodology) and *affective methodology*, and also categorized under qualitative methodology” (St. Pierre, 2020) to this I would add, it is also being categorised as post qualitative inquiry.

I am of the view that a “diffractive methodology” implies a pre-defined methodological concept which “provides theoretical tools” with the aim of being “a method that is sufficiently robust to build meaningful conversations between the sciences and to contribute to scientific research”, as described by Barad (2007, p. 25). To set out a methodology, albeit a diffractive one, felt like a step back in an attempt to conform to orderly scientific processes. There is an expectation that in the pursuit of scientific credibility we will examine experience through inadequate established methodologies (St Pierre et al., 2016). St. Pierre cautions about qualitative methods and methodology and wonders “if something as tentative as a recognizable and containable method or methodology in the “new” can be taught and applied” (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p.99-234)²⁷ and operating within the established practices and procedures is the opposite of good research (Davies & Gannon, 2006) and it certainly seems to contradict the “new materialism aspirations for creative and experimental research practices” (Davies, 2020, p.7). St. Pierre et al. (2016) wonders if the notion of the ‘diffractive methodology’ risks spawning a proliferation of textbooks teaching and defining research designs, which would draw up methods, as if methodology is a finite process that is self-contained and independent. Posthuman methodology, as I understand it from my engagement with Barad’s work, is not an inert

²⁷ Barad sets out the step-by-step actions required in diffractive methodology that they teach students (reference)

construction but something that comes into being through the intra-actions, iteratively reconfigured through the entanglements. Indeed, when the task is to allow methods of inquiry, which do not pre-exist their intra-actions to emerge; when the first step for post qualitative inquirers is to refuse pre-existing social science research methodologies from the start (St Pierre et al., 2016), the phrase diffractive methodology begins to feel like an oxymoron.

Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that research within a posthumanist paradigm, the methodology and the production of this thesis is (and was) an intrinsically diffractive experiment. Methodology, post methodology, researcher and research were, and always are, already diffracted, cutting through each other, together-apart (Barad, 2007). I was certainly enlivened when incited by Barad (2007) to be curious, to revel in the wonder and be open to the aliveness of the world of counselling that could be viewed in my diffracted experimenting. I, as researcher/counsellor/client had become part of the phenomena which I was studying since ‘there was no inherent separability’ (Barad, 2007, p.337) between myself and my research. I was no longer standing outside of the phenomena but had become entangled, materially enmeshed with the thesis through the research. What I knew/remembered/felt about my counselling experiences did not pre-exist the production of this work but was created through the intra-action, material/immaterial, subject/object, counsellor/client i.e., “relata do not pre-exist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions” (Barad, 2007, p.334)²⁸. In other words, my process of writing this thesis was, and would continue to be, emergent. After

²⁸ Interestingly, Davies (2021) suggests that diffraction is a material-discursive methodology.

all, the framework agential realism, is not absolute and unchanging but a constant process of disrupting, expounding, theorising, in dialogue with a variety of theoretical concepts and practices. (Juelskjær, 2020, p134). Interestingly, Barraclough (2017, p.186) comments that she would have had a “different (entangled) knowing” of her research if she had gone straight to the new materialisms and used it as a position to look at her data rather than diffractively read it through the work of Lenz Taguchi, i.e., if she had failed to question how to become “thought” as described by Lenz Taguchi (p.187). This pointed me to the fact that this thesis was threaded through my exploration of post qualitative inquiry, my ambivalence about “diffractive methodology”, before emerging as a diffractive reading, writing, and thinking the new materialisms through memory, time and space in order to evoke a posthuman illustration of a counselling session. Furthermore, diffraction had the capacity to reconceptualise my researcher subjectivity, which could be viewed as a transcorporeal, embodied, becoming-with my research (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p.187); co-constituted in the research rather than of the research. It was a valuable “mutated critical tool of analysis” (Barad, 2003, p. 803) which produced emergent, unpredictable patterns of understanding of the therapeutic encounter, revealing how differences came to matter in the boundary making performance of my research. Differences which were performatively enacted in my intra-active writing through counselling, memory, agential realist theory, material, human and non-human.

5.5 Writing as inquiry

It is clear, that applying the philosophies of the new materialisms to methodology has had its challenges, finding different ways of doing research was difficult and there were risks

(Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2009, Davies, 2021). Nevertheless, “new materialist researchers need strategies for inventing” (Davies, 2021) and it has been suggested that living- and writing-as-inquiry is peculiarly suited to new materialisms (Wyatt, 2019; Wyatt et al., 2011). “Radical and provocative, disruptive and generative, writing-as-inquiry continues to open both itself and ourselves as qualitative scholars to new possibilities as we respond to the calls and challenges at the theoretical, methodological, ethical, and political edges” (wyatt, 2019, p.7). In my first supervision meeting with Jonathan, when I had still barely formed my research question, he advised me to “just start writing”, “see what comes up”. I left the meeting feeling out of my depth, I had no idea how or what to write, convinced that the abstract notion of writing-as-inquiry was not for me; I planned to take a much more pragmatic approach to my research process. I still believed rather naively that I was going to produce an abstract theory driven thesis, diffractively reading the theories of counselling through the theories of the New Materialisms. “I” wouldn’t be in my research. Now I can see that much of this was driven by my own discomfort at writing about myself, the uncomfortable feelings of solipsism and self-absorption along with crippling self-consciousness about my writing and avoiding my own emotional “stuff”. Yet, counselling and the new materialisms are about the human, more than human all of which emerged in my writing; my clients, imagined clients, other people’s clients, myself as client in the material spaces of writing and remembering²⁹.

²⁹ See Chapter 3.9 for a more detailed explication of the ethical considerations when decentering the human in research.

Undoubtedly, I have to accept, however reluctantly, that it was in my emergent writing that my thesis took shape. When I began to trust that “writing could take me somewhere I couldn’t go without writing” (St. Pierre, 2014). It became clear that in the process of writing I was able to make sense of my research, “writing is thinking” (St. Pierre, 2008), while also making discoveries about myself as researcher/counsellor/client, as Richardson (1994, p. 819) notes “writing is a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the self”, my writing (eventually) found self as researcher. Learning to write, becoming disorientated and then re-orientated as an embodied academic, in the moving in space and time of this thesis, provided me with a living illustration of entangled, material encounters coming into being. In my living, writing, and reading with and through my thesis and counselling experience, that which might be my data, “found its ways of making itself intelligible” (Maclure, 2013 p. 660). Agential data, caught up in the ethico-onto-epistemological notion of emergent, intra-active, entanglement of writing as inquiry. Data as phenomena, an “ontological entanglement”, rather than a fixed structure, which came into being in the intra-action (Barad, 2007). By avoiding structurally mapping my counselling research/experience/memories onto aspects of each theory and instead writing “through my encounters”, I allowed thought to emerge, understanding and being to form, “writing was, indeed, thinking” (St. Pierre, 2014). It would have been easy to fall into old habits of writing reflectively about sessions, thinking about the discourses and narratives of the session from the poststructuralist position of i.e., thinking about the language of the session as an area of exploration and struggle (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). However, as I considered my writing through new materialist thinking I was able to reflect on how the production of my writing (the phenomena) was dependent on the intra-active nature of counselling session/memory/reality i.e.,

my writing as data emerged from my own entanglement with the materially discursive apparatus of the encounter.

5.6 Troubling Data

As exerted earlier, my understanding of data “changed in this onto-epistemological space” (Nordstrom, 2015). When we consider how data and knowledge are constituted in the social sciences research, we need to think about the role of apparatus i.e., what set of instruments will be used to collect the data and I turn to Barad who, unlike Foucault and Butler in their consideration of apparatus, make reference to the intrinsically dynamic configurative nature of the materiality of the apparatus (Barad, 2014, p.141). As a new materialist scholar, I was no longer able to use the word “data” without acknowledging that “data”, much the same way as “methodology”, is reconceptualised. While the task of the academic might be described as producing, defining, analysing data, “data” falls very much into the vocabulary of qualitative research (MacLure, 2015) which does not have the same relevance for a posthuman new materialist inquiry. The rationale for using words such as critique, explain, interpret, analysis is challenged since they have little relevance or use in a posthuman inquiry where notions of objectivity in knowledge production are disrupted. My research data, entangled writing, thinking, understood as embodied, emergent, performative rather than definitive and conclusive. There was a temporality to my data, the way in which I made sense of my own counselling as it entangled with this more than human, materiality of theory. My writing was not situated in a place in time but enfolded in my travels through space, time, memory and matter in a constant reconfiguring. Reading data diffractively in this thesis became an exploration of differences,

creating boundaries through the materially discursive practices of remembering and writing, as I continued in a process of “becoming-with” my data (Haraway, 2016, p. 3). It produced “previously unthought questions, practices and knowledge” (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p504). In the “cutting together apart” (Barad, 2003, 2007) of this “data”, that is the intra-actions of my writing, distinctive agential cuts generated unique phenomenon each and every time, ethical inclusions and ethical exclusions.

5.7 Ethics Entangled with Knowing and Being

Quinn (2013) notes that “new materialist researchers frame themselves as part of the ethical entanglement of how matter comes to matter (Barad, 2007), creating ‘a more ethical research practice’ (p.740). Responding to this and encouraged by the theories of Barad (2007), I was able to responsibly explore entanglements and the differences they make, and ensure they formed part of my own ethical considerations in this work. I could no longer be considered ontologically or epistemologically separate from my research. This was more than simply a matter of being cognisant of responsibility but a need to be alert to the “relations of being” (Mazzei, 2013), an acknowledgement of the entangled nature of the ethical; each unique encounter disrupted and reconfigured the mattering, diffracting the intra-activity; research and researcher entwined. Moreover, there was an ethical requirement to consider the impact of material-discursive enactments on the writing of my research and what the methodology brings to matter and what is excluded. This entanglement means I was required to “explore power relationships and how they were entangled in bodies, subjectivities and identities (Barad, 2007, p.35). I had to account for the way in which my research practices

themselves, become part of the phenomenon (Barad, 2007). I could no longer be viewed as ontologically or epistemologically separate from my research. Producing this thesis involved asserting justice at every step of the research process, questioning the constitutive exclusions and inclusions that had been enacted (Barad, 2007). There was an ethical requirement to ask what comes to matter in the methodological processes as I, as researcher/counsellor/client, came in to being with the apparatus, as this thesis came into being in the entanglement of the phenomena, how I was empowered by the agential cuts I made, what I included, what I disregarded and significantly, how have I accounted for these exclusions (Barad, 2007)? This was especially pertinent when exploring the sensitive nature of the normally private, inner world of counselling, when the significance of these agential cuts/exclusions/inclusions/entanglements came acutely into view in the topics of childhood trauma, bereavement and memory that emerged in my writing. Indeed, there are those who find the watering down of theoretical distinctions between human and non-human, see Ahmed (2008) and Gunnarsson (2013). Braunmühl (2018), suggests that there is both an ethical and political dimension to consider in the conceptualisation of human subjective experience in terms of passivity in contrast with the agential, active nature of matter (Braunmühl, 2018). It became acutely evident that “it matters what we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties” (Haraway, 2016, p.12). “It matters what stories make worlds; what worlds make stories.” (Haraway, 2016, p.35). It was clear there was a requirement to justify the choices I made, to explore power relationships and how they were entangled in “bodies, subjectivities and identities” (Barad, 2007, p. 136)

including considering how my own entanglement with the research was accounted for in a way that allowed the continued integrity of the thesis.

It is clear that the diffractive approach adopted in this work and used to explore counselling as a posthuman encounter, cannot be thought of as an independently existing entity but rather as a material-discursive phenomenon, research constituted through a web of entangled discursive practices and material happenings, where matter/meaning, counsellor/client, researcher/researched are mutually implicated in the materialisation of our understanding. Since indeed, this thesis in its diffractive readings through of theory, methodology, writing and counselling acknowledges the inextricable connection between the material and immaterial e.g., objects, subjects, human, more than human, machine and it observes the “specificities” of the iterations (Haraway 2006). After all, as explained by Barad, 2012, p. “thought experiments are material matters. Thinking has never been a disembodied or uniquely human activity” but involves “stepping 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 con-secutive moves but as experiments in in/determinacy” (Barad, 2012, p.208). It is this ethical experimentation, the material-discursive enactment of the apparatus, the potential to understand each counselling session as a boundary making encounter of difference, to re-consider the intra-active nature of my de-centred role as producer of knowledge (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) that has helped to produce an ethical and more productive understanding of a posthuman counselling session and doing counselling research.

5.8 Summarising Methodology

There were many challenges to my research, not least my early desire to delineate roles and use my methodology as a form of professional containment, rather than stay close to the experience of doing research (Rizq, 2008). Some may put this down to my inexperience; Bondi and Fewell (2017, p58) might put my desire to manage and control my methodology down to my fears as a new researcher while Chamberlain (2000) describes how as a beginner researcher I risk falling into the trap of methodolatry; seeking comfort in the defined ways of “doing” research, finding describing what happens in the research preferable to interpretation. Fortunately, I was able to overcome these anxieties and see the potential that “post theory” inquiry presents (Haraway, 1989). I soon found myself unhindered by fixed notions of how to do research. I was free to respond creatively as the thesis iterated and emerged and as the nature of my research evolved. Post qualitative inquiry gave me the confidence to experiment with, and within, the becoming of my research and as a result produce a richer more ethical understanding of a posthuman counselling.

From conception to completion, I have been challenged to think carefully about methodology and the implications of allowing my methodology to emerge in the intra-action of the material-discursive practices of writing, reading and thinking differently rather than setting down strict methodological guidelines. Incited by Foucault (1994), along with Flyvbjerg (2001), I have considered the implications of power as “an ever present dynamic”, acknowledging the imperative to examine and articulate power at every stage of my research while being alert to the fact that my choice of methodology cannot but be explored from a power perspective, since the

methods in themselves become part of the “phenomenon”, different methods would produce different results (Barad, 2007). Furthermore, throughout my research I have been required to ask in “which ways can I become more responsible/response-able in (my) encounters with the human and with the more-than-human world, while not setting (myself) above or apart from it?” (Davies, 2021, p5). To be thoughtful around what a decentring of the human means for research and counselling ethics. I recognise that I have an ongoing responsibility in my entanglement with the other (Barad, 2014). As Barad states, “to the extent that humans participate in (...) practices of knowing they do so as part of the larger configuration of the world and its on-going, open-ended articulations”. Thus, I can never observe counselling from the outside, never the material as separate, the counsellor and client “already partly constitute and are partly constituted by that which they observe” (Gamble, 2019).

Posthuman Counselling

Can there be new ways of being/knowing/doing counselling sessions and understanding the experience of counselling? In this section of the thesis, provoked by Davies (2021), who asks whether “our use of new materialist concepts is just a conceptual game, or can it change the way we live and the way we do our research?”, I have explored how expanded ideas of the posthuman encounter of counselling can create a shift in how counselling is theorised. Throughout this section I take personal, sometimes painful, sometimes joyful memories of my own counselling experience then reconceptualise it by looking at it through the lens of the agential realism. By diffractively reading, writing, recalling counselling experience through the posthuman new materialisms and agential theory with aspects of psychodynamic theory I demonstrate how my exploring the experience of counselling in this thesis is located within the posthuman body of knowledge. I account for the experimental, performative processes that allowed the material discursive, relational nature of the counselling encounter to emerge. A process that allowed my ideas and theories of counselling within a posthuman agential realist framework to develop, to accommodate entangled ways of thinking about counselling experience and research and to demonstrate how my thesis might contribute to the expanding community of research academics applying an ethico-onto-epistemology. I have set out the foundations of what an agential realist theoretical conceptualisation of a counselling session might look like.

I have structured part two of this thesis firstly by positioning myself as a counsellor in practice as entangled with my research. In the first chapter I set out how the theoretical principles

that underpin my once humanist thinking in counselling practice have evolved, acknowledging that my experience as a counsellor was not erased “but threaded through one another in a non-linear enfolding of spacetime matters” (Barad, 2010, p.244) of counselling practice and theory. I cannot, could not, unknow and undo my knowing of previous encounters with clients. It was impossible to view my experience as counsellor, counselling researcher and as a counselling client as separate entities, each existing in different space and time but as phenomena that come into being through the theoretical perspectives in which I had been trained, even if my argument has been a more expansive lately, citing aspects such as newfound understanding of intersubjectivity, the healing relationship and the importance of the authentic counsellor to account for my perceived improvements in my practice.

The chapters that follow, represent a diffractive experiment (Juelskjær, 2020) reading/thinking/diffracting/ tracing the contours of my counselling sessions (as client) together and apart as I question, explore, and acknowledge the intra-active, performative relationship, between the human and the material in the counselling world in which I found myself. At many points the silence of this world emerged as a significant theme and I have explored the phenomenon of silence as a materially discursive practice as it weaved itself through the themes of each of the chapters that follow. The chapters in this section are organised into the three subjects that emerged iteratively in my writing, namely loss, trauma and difference. This became an opportunity to explore what the experiences of loss, trauma and difference look like when I cast off dominant humanistic, binary positioning of counsellor and client, as I re conceptualised them within new materialist ethical notions of entanglement and considered each encounter as a

phenomenon where the ontological elements are unbounded and indeterminate. That is, they are more than just epistemologically inseparable but an intra-active becoming of client/counsellor/researcher (Barad, 2007). Loss, trauma, and difference as material matters. In the final and concluding chapter of this section I reflect once again on the posthuman counselling session before considering what might be next steps in this area of research.

My counselling journey began in 2001, when I trained firstly as a volunteer person centred relationship counsellor, then as counsellor working within a local Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse centre. Some years later, I made the decision to work towards a Professional Doctorate in Counselling and Psychotherapy with the University of Edinburgh which in the early years involved training to work within the "dialogue" between a person-centred approach to counselling, grounded in the humanist tradition and originating in the work of Carl Rogers, and a psychodynamic approach rooted in the tradition of psychoanalysis and influenced by the theories of Freud and Kleinian object relations theory. In essence this course facilitated constructive and collaborative dialogue, in relation to the two therapeutic models, amongst students and tutors. It offered a relational approach to learning which encouraged us to critically reflect, discuss, experience and experiment with each therapeutic orientation. When I enrolled on this course, my counselling practice was firmly grounded within a person-centred framework and while I generally believed that I could create the "necessary and sufficient conditions to facilitate therapeutic change" (Rogers, 1956) by offering Roger's core conditions of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard I felt something was missing. I was increasingly aware that the lively inner world of my client's past relationships and experiences was very much present in the

counselling room. However, I did not feel I had the skills or knowledge to address these unconscious dynamics. I soon found that the different aspects of each of these orientations had become tightly interwoven in my practice and while it is often hard to identify where one ends and the other begins, I quickly found myself increasingly drawn to psychodynamic practice and it was to psychodynamic theory that I found myself turning to when trying to make sense of my encounters with clients. I believe that the benefit for my client was that by capturing Roger's core conditions within the therapeutic relationship I have a strong base from which to explore the unconscious dynamics at play i.e., those that are based on internalised representations of their object relations (Freud, cited in Spurling, 2009), and importantly those which may be being repeated in our counselling relationship.

As my journey as a volunteer counsellor continued, I found myself drawn to notions of thirdness³⁰ and in particular to the work of Benjamin (2004), who describes co-created thirdness in the therapeutic relationship as a structural condition that forms as an intersubjective space. Certainly, Benjamin in her view of intersubjectivity roots her theory in the relational, acknowledging the mutual and intrinsically reciprocal nature of interaction in counselling, which was how I experienced my counselling sessions³¹. However, the relational nature of Benjamin's

³⁰ Thirdness dissolves the binary of doer/done. Instead, there is a recognition of the mutual influence, of co-creating the intersubjective dynamics (Benjamin, 2017).

³¹ As previously mentioned, intersubjectivity formed the epistemological assumption on which I had previously planned to build my research.

work which expresses for example the need for the counsellor to have “the ability to maintain internal awareness, to sustain the tension of difference between my needs and yours while still being attuned to you” (Benjamin, 2004, p13) places the emphasis on the *a priori* distinction between client and therapist, subject and object. This puts the work of Benjamin at ontological odds with the ethico-onto-epistem-ology (Barad, 2007, p. 185) which underpins this thesis where I have placed the emphasis on the intrinsically entangled relational nature of the client and therapist. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that it was my reading and thinking through and with Benjamin’s idea of an intersubjective space in counselling that set me on the path to an ethico-onto-epistemological understanding of counselling.

Exploring counselling through the theoretical framework of agential realism, rather than focussing on the intersubjectivity of the counsellor and client I have been able to make a shift to consider the myriad of factors that intra-act in the enactment of a counselling session e.g., technology, matter, memories, room, space, time, human, non-human. Furthermore, the binary positioning of intersubjectivity is suggestive of the counsellor as the privileged knower, client, therapist, the moral third disjointed, the client othered as the therapist stand separate from the encounter. I am mindful that my ambition in writing this thesis was to be open to new, different, and more ethical ways of knowing in being. To let go of what we think we might “know” about counselling, my client experience and counselling research. To think about the entangled counselling experience as a relational ontology, one of mutual knowing/doing/becoming together, “a world of lively relations between humans, nonhumans, and more than humans” (Zapata et al. 2018), providing inspirational ways to intra-act in the ethically decentering of the

human in the counselling session. The posthuman counselling sessions I present in the remainder of this thesis are an invitation to collaborate in a mutual becoming, one that can be viewed as “a unique opportunity” for counsellor/client/researcher to collaboratively reinvent themselves, to create alternative materially discursive realities and possibilities, to generate hope and inspire as sessions materialise in the enactments.

Hauntings

7.1 Memories of Loss, Remembering, and Forgetting

This chapter represents a diffracted understanding of memory, a writing of memory threaded through a remembering of a now posthuman counselling session. A chapter written while still mourning the painful and difficult death of my father a year or so earlier. An entangled, re-turning of memories, memories which materialise, as I try to make sense of my loss, try to find a way of being in my knowing of loss. What emerges is an onto-epistemological understanding of who I am/was/ the potential for who I will be, my loss in an ongoing performativity. As this chapter unfolds, in what is now a predictably iterative fashion, it represents a threading through, entangled becoming in the intra-action of memory, of touch, spacetime-matterings, indeterminate identities, ghosted bodies, theory, writing³². There are moments of clarity, a making sense of relationship, of working out the relationship between quantum theory and mourning. Equally there are questions. What are the material and discursive exclusions in the agential cuts produced in my writing, in my grief? Remembering that, “what is excluded in the entangled practices matter” (Barad, 2007, p.570), productive exclusions must be accounted for in a posthuman consideration of a counselling session. Theorising helps me make sense of what happened and, in this chapter, it is found entangled in my writing, finding its way into the spaces (Coleman, 2014) that might otherwise be filled with too many painful memories. Barad offers Derrida’s concept of hauntology, based on a philosophical view of history, the idea

³² For ease of reading, I have indented the passages of memory.

that present and future are always haunted by the past. Hauntology, haunting ontology (Barad, 2014). As I encounter the ghosts of the past in my remembering in the present, they are threaded through the shadows of the future. In this chapter the counselling session becomes an hauntology, an ongoing entanglement of counselling, memory, of the unthought known (Bollas, 1987), spectres of tomorrow. Sessions considered as hauntological becomings.

7.2 Loss

... I waited anxiously. Expecting news. I was home for a shower, clean clothes and a few hours of sleep but I had spent the time restlessly drifting in and out, dreaming of my dad lying close to death in the hospital bed that had found its way into the living room. Why had they had been decided that his life would end there, I hadn't been involved in this decision. I hadn't actually seen the bed yet, but I didn't need to, I could picture the room easily. I know the room, it will have been altered, cluttered with nurses/carers/doctor's things, slide sheets, mouth swabs, drug boxes, but the same. Not the home we grew up in but still a family home, filled with photos of proud family events, joy filled moments, graduations, weddings, baby photograph of each new grandchild. The sadness of my sisters is palpable from where I am lying now, 15 miles between us. We share a unique anguish, we are connected by our pain, a rare connection that exists only in those private days and hours before death. I have felt this pain before. It is the pain I felt in the hours before and after my mum died....

In the counselling session I remember my mum, my dad and Anne, my best friend for more than forty years until she like my parents died of cancer. The theme is loss. Loss of those I

loved and loss of those who loved me in return. People who now can only ever be a memory. I miss them, I feel lost without them, I miss the sense of security of being enfolded in the love of parents and a best friend who knew me better than any other person. Dad's cuddle, hugs so tight I could hardly breath, how could I not know I was loved. The tenderness of my mum's hand on my hair, a touch that said everything. The laughter of best friends always being able to see the funny side, no matter how tough the day had been. Talking. Sharing. Caring. I wonder at the place they have in my life, then and now. "The dead look at us within us but they are not ours; we look at their image and we are looked at by them from the place of their "infinite alterity" (Derrida, 2001, p.161). I wrap my arms around myself, self-touching self. The bare skin on my arms feels unexpectedly warm and I remember it is still summer. I think about the incongruity, death and loss do not have a place on hot summer days. I close my eyes. I can feel them. I can hear them. An infinity of others aroused by touch (other beings, other times, other spaces) (Barad, 2012 p.206) each diffractively threaded and enfolded through the other. I am struck by the tangible nature of loss, the power of its materiality in its entanglements with bodies, skin and matter.

I am tired and worn out with sadness today, I have been avoiding counselling for weeks. Now, holding myself tight, as I sit in the counsellor's rather hard and unforgiving leather chair, I am using a form self-soothing learned in childhood, it provides much needed comfort but it also keeping me pinned to the seat, in some kind of voluntary restraint. I am not rocking but periodically I tilt forward, lift both my feet slightly off the ground before laying them back down, as if practising the art of standing up, preparing my body to leave. As if escaping from the chair,

running away from counselling would make the sadness go away. I have watched my own clients do the same thing, witnessing their internal conflict. My attention shifts back to my hands on my arms; I touch my newly turned agential realist self. A touch that defines the boundaries of self, emerging, i.e., a self that becomes real, bounded, and demarcated, at the moment of self-touching (Barad 2012) and in some quantum miracle I am simultaneously touching all others (Barad, 2012). In this moment of unhappiness, I find comfort in knowing I am threaded through the infinite alterity of others that I loved. I sense their touch; I feel held; I feel loved. For a moment, I know I am touching them, touching me and I feel a little less lost with them beside me, however ghosted they might be. Of course, touching myself does not “reduce[s] the alterity of the other who comes to inhabit the self-touching, or at least to haunt it, as much as it haunts any experience of ‘touching the other’ remarks Derrida” (Barad, 2012, p.214). Clough challenges me to ask “what kind of body is this body of entanglement? What is the ontological status of a ghosted body, of a haunted materiality” (p.7)? A different time, a different space but still entangled. For me it is consolation, holding me as I come to terms with my loss, which might describe alternatively as touching them with my receptive unconscious (Bollas, 2008) which is “scattered by the winds of the primary process to faraway associations and elaborations, reached through the private links of one’s own subjectivity” (Bollas, 1987, p.5). Quantum theory reworks the nature of touch, of the void between bodies, even those bodies non contemporaneously placed in time and being with self (Barad, 2012). Just as we no longer think about particles as separately situated in the void but formed in the entanglement, I have no need to think about self-touching as a singular, separate and detached event but as that of quantum entangled bodies.

7.3 Forgetting

.....Our family home, the one I grew up in, was an old house. It snapped and creaked as the wooden frame expanded in the late spring air. Its timber bones warming after the cold months of winter. A lumbering giant waking up again, slowly stretching back to life, a limbering giant hulk. My dad drew a picture of a giant the shape of a house with timber legs. I wish I still had the faded, crayoned drawing tucked away in some old memory box, but I don't. I have spent a lifetime tidying out cupboards and drawers, discarding the pieces, the material objects of childhood, that kept me tied me to the past. Now I wish I had something tangible to hold, to become entangled with, a crumpled, yellowing piece of paper, to be in and off the crayoned lines and shapes that he had drawn on the page. To touch the paper that he had touched. To trace the lines of a time that was different, a time of excitement and wonder at waking timber giants.....

Desire which cannot be eliminated from my core of being when it is threaded through it (Barad, 2012) “Desire is inextricable – literally inconceivable, unintelligible- without an imagining of its satisfaction” (Phillips, 2020, p.138) “Desire is affirmation therefore mourning is affirmation” (Derrida, 1996, p. 143).

And so, my desire, my fruitless, childlike longing to make matter matter, the paper more than paper; a faded, remembered drawing, an active agent in my becoming as grieving daughter, my grief becoming material. Now I understand there is no “spatial, ontological, or epistemological separation” between the material and the loss of a loving parent (Barad, 2007 p.202). I wonder aloud, to my counsellor, about my lifetime of overlooking the value of

keepsakes, as much a forgetting to keep as a throwing away of the material objects. Objects with the potential to evoke feeling, an emotional response, even a happy one: special gifts, cards, faded drawings. Bollas (2011), in his partial material turn, might suggest I am resisting their “ontological potential”, fending off objects with the capacity to return me to the infant state (Bollas, 2000, p.38). These are what Turkle would call evocative objects, objects that could be “considered companions to our emotional life or provocations to thought” (Turkle, 2007, pp.3-9). I wonder why I did not want to think with the objects. In contrast, Turkle grew up hoping the material would connect her to the world she craved, describing her weekly (re)turning to the family memorabilia box (2007) in what seems like an unconscious attempt to become entangled with the memories of her lost father, innately recognising their “ontological potential” (Bollas, 2000, p. 38), an intrinsic understanding of the “strength and power of the material to alter our thinking and being” (Lenz Taguchi, 2010 p 4). These objects, both in their absence and presence, play an active, meaning making role in the production and reproduction of our ways of knowing in being, as apparatus of bodily production (Haraway, 1988; Barad, 2007) an entanglement of body, evocative object and faded/forgotten/never known memory. Moreover, in my own material enactment of separation, of keeping and of throwing away of memory provoking objects, agential cuts creating a boundary between the two (Barad, 2007). I must address the implications of the cut, after all I cannot edit out, throw away, objects without taking account of the effects of this exclusion (Barad, 2007, p.58). Clearly, this resulted in certain realities/memories/materialities being excluded while others were pushed to the forefront (Hollin et al., 2017) but as I remember the crayoned drawing and what it means to me now, it is evident that those cuts have puzzling effects (Thiele, 2015) in the cutting together and apart, “an ever-

present vibrant ontological indeterminacy of being/nonbeing” (Barad cited by Juelskjær, 2020, p. 86). I think of all possibilities of this lost but present piece of paper which exists in its exclusion.

7.4 Transgenerational Hauntings

... I remember hot cups of tea served in front of a roaring kitchen fire. Rituals of warming teapots, setting tables and flowery China cups. I am in my great grandmother's house where there is an endless supply of coal for the fire and boiling water for the pot. Miners could take home the coal they could carry in their pocket or collect on the beach. I feel small, warm and secure. It was a matriarchal family, and I am in a room full of strong, wonderful, loving women; grandmother, great grandmother, my mum, a child herself and not yet 18, (and me the “wee tea jenny”). The tattered photographs in the photo album re-enforce my sense of wellbeing. I was happy there and this memory makes my loss a little less.

My counsellor is quiet, he is encouraging me to stay with the memories. Memories of being loved and cared for. It is easy to stay here with this feeling of comfort, this sense of well-being. If only I could hold these memories, keep them close when life without them feels dark and empty, after all “memories enact not only the past but also the future ... with the promise of potential memories” (Ingram, 2019, p.4). Because the people I have lost did not leave an empty space, what has been left behind is not a featureless gap, but a space that is full i.e., the void is never empty (Barad, 2012). Indeed, it is where the physical and virtual intra-act, a haunted “spectral space of ghosts, memories and desires for new possibilities and a new future” (Newfield & Bozalek, 2019, p44). Bodies, memories and places have bonded in mutual,

emergent alliances (Phillippy, 2020). The empty space in my life where my parents once were, can no longer be viewed as a meaningless void, but a field of indeterminant non/ being ghostly memories which teeter on the edge of becoming and not becoming (Barad, 2007). My memory a crumbled embrace of iterative intra-activity materialises in the reality of the world (Barad, 2014).

I talk about my daughter who became a mother recently and how she has generously welcomed me into the life of my grandchildren, much as my own mother shared in the early lives of my children, along with my grandmother and my great grandmother before that. I have become very aware in the first few weeks and months of a generational sharing, a passing on of mothering skills. I have shared what I remember, sensitively, tentatively, while accepting that the old and new, past, future and present views of “what is best for baby” will intra-act in my daughter becoming mother, a trace of other mothering yet to come (Barad, 2007). The past and the significance of our experiences, mothers, grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers are not lost with their death but become entangled as we come into being (Ramadanovic, 1998). The parenting of yesterday becomes a dynamic present where a different time, different space are entangled, past, present, future simultaneously articulated. How to swaddle, how to soothe, how to re-assure. After all, “what is memory for if not the future?” (Massumi, 2015, p.107). Memories threaded through the enactment of mothering, fragmented in time and space, entangled with the materialities of a baby. It has been a wonderful, beautiful and special privilege but we were never on our own. As she finds her way into becoming a new mother, there are generations of mothers present and a hauntology of ghostly effects emerge in our interactions with this new baby; a myriad of “transgenerational hauntings”, an “entanglement

beyond all possibility of disengagement” (Clough, 2007, p.7) I marvel at how instinctively she knows what to do, holding her baby as she was held, a surfacing of bodily memory (Clough, 2007, p.7) “a memory without consciousness...incorporated memory, body memory, or cellular memory...a ghosted bodily matter” (Clough, 2007, p. 6). As I remember joyful experiences of mothering, being mothered and watching my daughter becoming a mother there is an anticipation of the future in which something of the past returns (Massumi, 2015, p.107).

I'm glad I stayed with the memory, by allowing it to come to mind, I allowed my daughter, my grandchildren, mothering and being mothered to materialise and come into being (Braidotti, 2013 p. 167).

Another Session:

I have a plastic clear wallet in my bag today, it is protecting a fragile, very old newspaper cutting. It is a piece from the local newspaper reporting on the speeches made by the local suffragette committee and I found it by chance, folded inside an old book. There is a photograph with the article, my great grandmother stands on a soap box. I remember again my great grandmother's kitchen, space, time and matter reworked, mutually re(stituted) in the past and future of the memory. Politics were always in the air. Conversations were heated, exciting and loud but I had learned that the best way to avoid being noticed and potentially banished to a place in the room out of earshot, was to be nonchalant about my listening, keep quiet and be very good. I remember the room, at least I think I remember it, sitting on the floor on a rug in front of the coal fire, adults talking above me. What I can't remember is at what point I decided to pour

my own cup of tea from the scalding pot that was sitting on the fireside at arms-length or the searing pain that I must have felt as the boiling tea blistered my legs and my stomach.

This is the first time I have made a connection between the time in my great grandmother's kitchen and the accident. It is strange because the only thing I remember is being told I was a "tea jenny" now there is no one left to ask. I can only imagine my screams and the panic of the adults. There was no telephone in the house. How did they get me to a doctor? I know I was in the sick kids in Edinburgh for nearly two months after the accident but how did I get there? Was there guilt or recriminations over leaving a teapot within the reach of a toddler? Growing up I was indifferent to the traces the hot tea had left on my body, to me they had always been there, it was other people who were curious, but I only had bits of stories to tell. The blister indentations and mottled scars are numb to touch, I put my hand to my stomach as I write but like the scars my memories are faded imaginings, fractured over several time sequences (Braidotti, 2013), ghosted bodily matter (Clough, 2007). It seems to me that the memories have been lost, of parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts who might have known/remembered something of the event. Instead, I am left with haunted imaginings of my childhood pain.

7.5 Remembering Again

It was humid outside. May? There had been a spell of warm weather, the earth had warmed slightly and there was a moist almost balmy feel to the morning, memorable in its rarity. I didn't need a jacket, or my wellies, but I had to run to catch up with my dad, who had set off, impatient to get on with his day. I followed him as quickly as I could along the rutted track.

Trees the colour of the chocolate lime sweets we took with us when we went on our car trips; lime-coloured leaves unfurling on chocolate brown branches.

I was walking much too fast and I was way too young to think about the trees.

As I caught up, we turned left into the field together but now I tugged at his shirt and pleaded with him to slow down. He didn't put me on his shoulders in the way he had when I was younger. He slowed down but he didn't pick me up. He turned around, smiled and reached out his hand.

Now we were climbing across rough and boggy hillside together, but the ground was seeping slugs. Slugs out of every pore; black, oily, slimy, formless.

I was horrified, they were disgusting, and they were everywhere.

I was trying to tiptoe around each one, place my foot in the slug free spaces trying not to stand on them. There was a nauseating squelch of their body under my shoe.

I cried, my dad laughed, and I cried again.

In contrast, I have revisited this memory many times, it has never been difficult to find myself back in the field, imagine the slime of the dead slug on my shoe, to feel the sting of my humiliation in my tears. I still re-coil at the site of slugs. The impact of the material, the other, the record, reconsidered become the act of remembering (Braidotti, 2013). My sense of identity and being in the present, seem intractably caught up in this remembering, in feelings of being lost and scared without him, then and now. A common notion in psychodynamic theory, and one, however simplified, which I may well have taken to the counselling room, is that identity lies in the dynamics of childhood relationships (Drew, 1998). Freud's concepts of self as embedded in psychic structures, intrinsically related to the relationship parent and child have endured. Now I

wonder how the perceptions of self as a grieving daughter, in the counselling room, in this space, and in this writing, what is produced when memories, thoughts, conversations, time past, present, future, collapse into each other, spacetime-mattering. Space, time, matter mutually constituted in the intra-activity. To what extent have I created “illusory” representations (Fonagy, 2001) of father and daughter, a flawed understanding of our relationship as something fixed, that happened in the past. When, in the context of Agential Realism, this moment of my grieving/our relationship has in fact, as with all other moments of grieving “become a threading through of an infinity of moments – places-matterings, a superposition/entanglement never closed, never finished” (Barad, 2014, p.169). This continual remaking of space and time, blurring spatial boundaries and temporal notions of past, present and future. My remembering, and writing and rewriting, of this chapter has produced “the spacetimes, sights, sounds, and affect of multiple remembered and re-remembered worlds that matter (Newman & Bozalek, 2019, p. 45). Time has become entangled with the lingering, intangible sense of place that my whole identity and being is caught up in. The (re)writing of my memory has not produced an integrated story of self but multiple entangled narratives (Newman & Bozalek, 2019), instead a timespacemattering of memory in grief. A re-inventing of self as other in the nomadic³³ remembering (Braidotti, 2011). Stern (2009) suggests that even when others are absent, we can learn about ourselves by imaginatively listening to our own thoughts through their ears. It is clear that, when the theories of quantum mechanics are applied, notions of a unified, autonomous self

³³ Braidotti posits that all thinking is structurally nomadic and emphasises the materially embodied nature of thinking (Braidotti, 2011).

becomes problematic on both a personal and particle level (Barad, 2007), the “I” of before cannot be the same, since time and space are non-linear there are spatial-temporal differences between who I am now and who I was then (Braidotti, 2011). There is an unravelling of the idea of identities as they are disrupted by the infinite different versions of memory, that “emerge in the quantum indeterminacies” (Barad, 2012).

My memories of my dad are transient, mixed up, disjointed, entangled in time and space. Simultaneously vague but vivid, alive yet dead, true yet untrue, there is a gauzy like quality to them. Just as Barad describes the experience of the electron, I too have no sense of having a dis/continuous relationship with time, no continuity in time and place, there is dis/continuity, temporal dislocation of memory, childhood experience, relationships.

Encouraged by posthuman, and in particular Braidotti’s nomadic theory, I can view this loosening of self as an opportunity for change, for “re-inventing self as other” (Braidotti, 2011, p33), the act of remembering, a chance to create the setting, perhaps in the counselling room, that allows for affirmative, constructive change. My ways of intra-acting with both human and non-human in this session, will create different becomings. My affective remembering, (re)remembering, imagining, (re)imaging of fields, gastropods, other, stimulates endless reconstructions of self but a self that is enduring. Since remembering nomadically empowers creative alternatives I can be the same grieving daughter yet different (Braidotti, 2011).

High School

Within days of meeting each other we were both smoking, chasing boys, running wild; life had become an adventure. She didn't seem to notice, the way I did, that I didn't own any coat other than my cheap school blazer or that my only shoes were gym shoes.

My birthday was coming up and I knew my dad was working locally. I was going to ask him for a pair of "Sasha" shoes, complete with platform sole and heel and the latest must have shoe for any cool 13-year-old,

I shared my plan with Val, and we set off after school to find him. He was working just behind the high street and we arrived just before finishing time. My dad was an affectionate, magnanimous and ebullient man and although he rarely came to visit after my parents divorced, I knew that I was special to him. If I arrived unexpectedly, he would give me the biggest hug and I would, for the few hours I was with him, become the centre of his world (a pattern I took over 30 years and countless hours of counselling to recognise). I was brimming with pride as the three of us walked down Leven High Street to Saxone shoe shop. Soon he knew the shoe, the shop and shoe size and he promised he would buy them for my birthday.

A week later, on my birthday, I waited with anticipation for him to arrive with my new shoes, already determined to wear them to school the next day. I waited, certain that he would walk through the door any minute. I watched the phone, willing it to ring, he would call soon to tell me he was on his way. Even as I lay in bed at night, I still thought there was a chance he would burst through the door any minute. He didn't come. The next day I wore my gym shoes to

school, I imagine it was raining. Wet, squelching, squeaking, announcing my arrival on the pitted parquet flooring of the classroom. My head hung with shame of poverty as I walked into the class and sat down next to Val, she nudged me and smiled.

I am conflicted; this version of my dad is troubled, past memories enacted in the shifting temporalities of past, present and future, how/why/did this story unfold. There is an incoherence, a discontinuous narrative in my memories of him.

“... Your care, love and kindness as a father is something I will be eternally grateful for”

(Extract from Eulogy).

I know that I was loved, we were best of friends and confidantes, I was the eldest and as I grew older, he trusted my judgement more and more. We spent hours talking. Especially after he fell ill, he was more grounded, settled. He wanted to be with his family. But a temporal and dramatic sense of self seems to have emerged in my writing and I no longer know fact from fiction. Binaries, of course are materially troubled, memories, both and neither, truth/untruth. Nietzsche suggests that the way to whatever truth might be possible is through the unconscious and the forgetting. Given a quantum turn the forgetting will leave traces, “Permanent marks ... left on bodies” and other places (Barad, 2007, p119) scars of poverty after the divorce, the blemish of not being good enough to remember, his inability to “hold me in mind” as one counsellor had put it. I recognise my need to feel that I existed in his mind with a sense of continuity (Stern, 2009). To have been forgotten in this way makes it difficult to have any sense of our quantum entanglement, little obvious evidence of simultaneous influence when separated

in time and space! Yet, I am reminded by Barad (2014, p.179) “that which is determinate(intelligible) is materially haunted/infused ... with that which is constitutively excluded (not determined)” and I can take child-like consolation in knowing that his forgetting was always haunted by me. Forgetting is a materially discursive activity, which opens up the possibilities of new configurations and understanding in relation to specific phenomenon such as the human non-human intra-actions (Haraway, 1992) of and in his world. In the agential cuts it was not a process of cutting me off or out, the cut was a diffractive cutting together-apart (Barad, 2007, 2014). If I did become an “exclusion” I remained part of him and all his iterative enactments. For Freud, forgetting, an unconscious negation (Teckyoung, 2010) is always significant, viewed as the appearance of otherwise unconscious processes (Freud, 1995, p. 443) and I wonder.

Why do I remember his forgetting?

Do I fear forgetting him?

Will I be forgotten?

I am encouraged to ask of his forgetting what is this time of before (Massumi, 2015)? Neither remembering nor forgetting follow a straight line, like grief it does not unfold in chronological order. I cannot go back to a past that I knew, that once was, because the past is never finished but continually re-iterating, re-forming, re-turning (Barad, 2014) it is forming and reforming. A moment (an event in life) “is a diffracted condensation, a threading through of an infinity of moments-places-matterings, a superposition...entanglement, never closed, never finished” (Barad, 2014, p.169).

The Quantum Eraser Experiment

Eraser Experiment: an attempt to erase the diffraction pattern

Eraser Experiment: an unsuccessful attempt to erase the diffraction pattern.

Traces: look hard, they remain

Traces; not a signal of the past remaining.

Entanglement: a central mystery of quantum theory (Feynman)

Entanglement, a key to understanding of the eraser experiment.

Return of the diffraction pattern: not signal a going back,

Return of the diffraction pattern: the past is not completely iteratively re-configured,

Conclusion: There is no inherently determinate relationship between past and future.

(Barad, 2007)

7.6 Memory in a Posthuman Counselling Session

What happens when I reconfigure my own counselling session from a posthuman position? What are the ethical implications for memory in multiple temporalities that I should attend to? When I consider the potential offered by nomadic subjectivities which point to the creative re-invention of memory and a discontinuous, multiple self, rather than a self which is constrained by linear time (Braidotti, 2011). How do I understand the relationship between counselling, the unfolding, messy memories of my dad that emerged, of time and place that were produced through the dynamics of intra-activity? Did my counselling become a “time diffracted tale” (Barad, 2017, p81), a narrative of parent/child/material relationship interwoven, moving through different temporal moments and spaces, “a journey of returning and re-turning,

remembering and re-remembering” (Newfield & Bozalek, 2019). Memories of childhood, connections, yesterday’s counselling session, today’s writing the session, tomorrow’s thesis are threaded through, fragmented in time and location, entangled with grief to produce my experience of my counselling session and remembering. From a psychoanalytic perspective, moments of memory, remembering and forgetting engulfs the present as the past dissolves into the future (Clough, 2007) but more than this in this new post period of counselling we can view memory, remembering, forgetting as iterative pre-existing the phenomenon of the session in their own form, even if it is in the unconscious. Memories that come alive in the intra-action, dynamic and shifting. Unconscious memory, leaving imperceptible, known but unknown traces in the spacetime mattering of our world. Freud states that when bereaved, lose a person or an object, the process of grief, if successful, ends in our finding them again within us (Freud, 1995) in an intra-play of continuity and discontinuity, blurring temporalities and concepts of spatial memories across past, present and future.

The act of recalling, retelling and remembering in therapy can be difficult, much like diffraction patterns that can be difficult to identify “it takes work to make the ghostly entanglement visible” (Barad, 2010, p.240) but it is integral to the process. The inventive imagination of memory can inspire and help the realisation of the potential of the subject (Braidotti, 2013) and I am encouraged in my posthuman counselling to be creative with the material discursive practices that are enacted in the counselling room. The act of being listened to, being heard, telling our story help us make sense of what has/is/will happen(s), retelling/reconstructing memories can help them become integrated with my life story (Herman,

1992) as “the past is disruptively inserted into the present (Barad, 2007). Moreover, the state of indeterminacy of self/memory/past “co-existing in multiple times – e.g., yesterday, today and tomorrow” (Barad, 2017, p9) evokes the potential for difference and transformation in its intra-actions and relations to other bodies (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

These sessions, enactments across space and time, however painful, have helped restore a connection with my past in the present, that the grief of losing my father has prevented me from remembering. A narrative of my childhood re-oriented in space and time, as much present today, as it will be tomorrow, accounted for in the intra-action (Barad, 2007) between counsellor and client. I have been reliving the past in the present and the future, “a memory of the future” (Deleuze, 1988, p.107) moving back and forth in time, no prevailing sense of temporality, spatiality, continuity, only synchronous energies in the material-discursive enactments of the session.

Writing Trauma

A Counselling Session: As I sit silently, wringing my tissue, squirming inside, I twist and shift in my chair in the quiet, awkwardness of the encounter as I remember, just for a moment in a fleeting sense of optimism, that every time we meet, in every material encounter, in this noisy city, in this old building, in this silent room, there is potential in the therapy. Life will not always be the same. My future, the outcome of this session is not predetermined. Something different (perhaps healing) can and will emerge, every time. Undoubtedly, the pain of the past exists, it is real, the marks remain on my body in “differential patterns of mattering”, my past is embodied, the secrets and silences enfolded in my material being. (Barad, 2007, p. 394). And while, similar to the traces of the diffraction pattern my past cannot be written over, or simply erased (Barad, 2017) the indeterminacy of what will be produced in the intra-action of my therapy leaves me optimistic. The past despite the traces, can, is and will be materially reconfigured, it will be enfolded with my future in the materiality of this strange, silent moment, a future which is not pre-determined, which cannot be situated, which will not merely come to be in an unwrapping of this moment, but which will emerge from/in/through the entanglement, through the encounter of the counselling session. “Past and future enfolded participants in matter’s becoming” (Barad, 2007 234p.). I think about these intra-actions and the intensity of the countertransference in this encounter, both indeterminate, both a material, embodied, enfolding in the intra-action of our counselling session. I can see that what emerges in our session, in that raw, entwined silence is an iterative becoming, not a simple unfolding of a defined moment in time but a moment of potentiality. There is potential in the therapy, there is indeed becoming in the encounter (Parnet, 1987), a becoming of the relationship in the countertransference. Deleuze (1988, p. 292) suggests

that it is necessary that I enter this becoming, a becoming that has neither a future nor a past as I encounter the other to get out of my past and my future.

The silence of the session; a plea for understanding, a cry for help, an attempt to hide, resist, escape? It is a noisy quiet. We both sit, waiting, wondering, the air heavy and intense. There is an affective indeterminacy to the silence, there are no determinate words, only something that is neither silence nor utterances. Nothing inhabits the silence but equally it isn't empty, it is tangible, evocative, affective. A generative boundary between myself, the counsellor and the silence has emerged in the intra-action, demarcating meaning (however transiently). I can feel his discomfort in the painful quietness, the tension in our bodies, the sense of entangled self-consciousness of every move, the worry. I wonder what to say next. What realities will be excluded by my words, in the enactment of the cuts, exclusions which are productive and have implications for the reframing of this counselling session in the posthuman and which must be accounted for in the re-shaping and re-imagining of the session. I have worked with him long enough to sense his discomfort as I shift from the collaborative and reflective client to being withdrawn, even recalcitrant. I imagine he is a rescuer. I know his tension as we both search for words that might help, the infinite number of possibilities of silence threaded through us by the unspoken word which makes both everything and nothing possible. I want to say something, anything, in the hope that the consolation of words will help him escape the awkwardness, but my throat is tight and uncooperative. If we talk about the emptiness, the silence, the nothingness, our materially discursive practices will enact a cut. An agential cut which will represent an enactment of power. After all, neither the counsellor nor I can enact a cut, speak of silence, set

aside our emotions, without careful consideration of the effects since they represent decisions unconscious or otherwise, of where we demarcate the boundary between the material and non-material, self and other.

8.1 Silence

.....the silence of the session has indeed become (is) a material matter, there is an inseparability of knowing in being in this silence, the counter transference is a material matter. We can feel it, uniquely embodied; reluctantly, deliberately, unconsciously communicating (however transiently), through our bodily presence. The haunting presence of the silence (Mazzei, 2007) is yet to make itself fully known. In the counter transference, an indeterminate meaning has emerged in the posthuman performativity of the session and sense through the intra-active nature of the session, a becoming/knowing between/with/through each of us.

[Silence]: "A point of indetermination between the materiality of the body and the abstraction of meaning, quivering with emotional intensities of sense, refusing to offer itself up as signification or as "mere" bodily processes" (MacLure, 2013, p.663).

The silence feels like a physical, material space in which to hide, a void between us. Barad might ask "what stories of creation and annihilation is the void telling" (Barad, 2017, p.16). We are hiding together, trying to escape from/in the countertransference. I wondered what story existed for us in the empty, muted, material space, in that affective silence. But this is not an empty space, where we each take up pre-determined positions, it is a void, an intrasubjective

void filled with the possibilities of what may come to be (Barad, 2007), where we become, entangled in space and time, enfolded with the material in a myriad of possibilities (Barad, 2007). A “space for the silence to breathe and inform” (Mazzei, 2007b, p636) where the “silent ‘words’ are *meaning full*” (Mazzei, 2007, p. xii). It is clear that if we are alive to “the inhabited silence” of the session there is the potential to develop a more complex and subtle understanding of the therapy (Mazzei, 2007). “Traumatic memory is often wordless and static” Herman, 1992, p.174) and certainly there is a pain of/in this silence. “The murmuring silence of the void in its materiality and potentiality” (Barad, 2017, p.63). Is there something of the immanent energy of matter in its being and nothingness that would help us understand our failure not to listen to the silent calls of pain or erase uncomfortable past truths (Barad, 2017). I think about the materiality of silence, the tangible emptiness that fills the room, “the vacuum is flush with yearning, bursting with immeasurable imaginings of what could be” (Barad, 2017, p.74). The session has ended in silence.

I think about clients who come to counselling who have experienced trauma, abuse or personal tragedy. It is not uncommon for them to become agitated, withdrawn, or silent when feelings associated with traumatic memories come to the fore (Herman, 1992). There is a material essence which is important to attend to when working with survivors of abuse, the focus is frequently brought back to the embodied knowing of the client who commonly experience erratic sleep patterns and articulate their pain through substance abuse or self-harm. A survivors retelling can be “repetitive, stereo-typed and emotionless” (Herman, 1992, p.174) “traumatic memory is wordless and static” (Herman, 1992 p.174). The trauma story

does not develop or progress in time, often it is a series of still snapshots, a bit like a silent movie, counselling can traditionally be viewed as restoring a sense of continuity with the past providing a verbal account orientated in time and place (Herman, 1992). Yet, quantum epistemologies point to time that is not linear. Instead, time, space and matter are dynamic, iterative intra-actions which materialise specific phenomena (Barad, 2007). More significantly in this co-existing of multiple times e.g., yesterday, today and tomorrow points once more to the indeterminacy of self/memory/past. The entanglement of mind and body is evident in traumatic memories that remain in the body, in each of the senses, in the heart that races and skin that crawls when the memory resurrects itself. This is echoed by Barad (2017, p. 56) who points us to the possibilities that remain open for an “embodied re-membering of the past” despite our desire to silence the memories. “The psychoanalytically oriented account of trauma in order to welcome bodies haunted by memories of times lost and places left” (Clough, 2007, p.4) in the belief that in the material reconfiguration of spacetime mattering new narratives can be formed.

From an agential realist position, we can observe how the therapist navigates the landscape of traumatic memories with the client, they begin to collaborate in the spacetime mattering of the session, neither existing as “determinate givens, as universals, outside of matter (Barad, 2013, p. 28). When we think about the trajectory of the session which moves erratically, flashbacks, intrusive memories of past intruding and colouring the future plans, dissociative states, upsetting assumptions of linearity, progress, in the enactment of posthuman counselling. We can demonstrate how bodily matters comes to matter in in the relational phenomena of spacetime mattering (Barad, 2007, p135). Spacetime mattering a becoming,

iteratively unfolding as the therapist holds /contains the client, as they constitutively enact the session, the materially discursive narrative co-created in the intra-action of this indeterminate encounter between the therapist, the client, the material.

8.2 Writing

Later I feel indignant. I have been given homework (my word not the counsellors). The suggestion that I might explore my feelings through writing feels like a task. Being asked to work in my own time when all I want to do is forget, put the angst, memory and pain in a box, the one they are always in, lock it tight and not think about it again until the next session. Instead, I am being asked to give life to the memories, form something tangible, something material. No counsellor, no containment, no holding environment only paper/pen/words. Writing, remembering, re-writing have each become specific but entangled material enactments situated in this moment, in this time, in this space. Temporality and spatiality produced in the dynamic materialising i.e., in the spacetime mattering. I have kept this secret for such a long time, talking around it, avoiding it, hiding it but it has been there all along. Carried with me for a lifetime, yet I barely recognise it. Sometimes something weighs heavy on my heart, other times it is barely perceptible, but it has become entangled in who I am, who I have become, who I am yet to be. It comes along to each counselling session, in some yet unformed shape every week, a haunting becoming of the past in the present and future, each time emerging out of/in the entanglement, the melting pot that is our counselling session, a place where we could not know what would unfold because it did not yet exist, not in this shape and form, in this time and place, before this moment, this intra-active materially discursive moment.

“I suffered more from their sympathy than from the pain of my wound, and felt the misery of my mutilation less than my shame and humiliation” (Abelard, 1974; Fenton, 2006)

I am hiding from the words, from the shame, the materially discursive articulations of a past, a memory in and of a time forgotten. I know that my fear, when I acknowledge it, giving voice/words to the still unnamed, unspoken, unthought feelings will be more shameful than the faded, undeclared, unconscious, unformed memories. Yet, the “truth” of the text will not be found in the material words on paper “the truth of a text is never really written anywhere, let alone within the signifying space of the book” (Braidotti, 2013 p. 165). It will be found rather in the “affects i.e., the kind of outward-bound interconnections or relations that it enables, provokes, engenders and sustains” (Braidotti, 2011, p23). Truth is never static, it is a perpetual dynamic of intra-activity (Barad, 2007).

Why are we the one who feel the shame, who keep the secret, who are silent?

The shame I cannot give voice to.

A shame I know isn't mine.

But that's how it is. We live with the dark secret. As if...as if we have committed a wrong, we who have torn and twisted our innocence through some distorted culpability. The reality is I was only a child. We were only children. We didn't do anything wrong.

Now, as I hold the pen in my hand, hovering above the blank page in my journal, I wonder about the becoming of I, in this becoming of voice in this material encounter, what will emerge in this intra-active writing encounter? Something known but not yet thought (Bollas, 1987). Nietzsche, describes a sense of recognition despite a lack of knowing, is this what materially reconfigured memories/past feel like? It is known but not yet thought because the known, the past experience, is yet to emerge in its' form of now, in this intra-active, materially discursive encounter. An epistemological emerging, bud like, explicitly, intimately opening to thought in the experience of the moment. Manning describes knowing as being actively felt but tangled, ineffable "alive only in its rhythms, in its hesitations, in its stuttering" (Manning, 2016, p.37). When will the knowing of my experience, my knowing in being express itself in more than silence and unwritten words? It is still a thought that has no notion of itself, yet a performative impulse asserting itself, the experience becoming clear, through the act of writing, writing that is filled with a sense, a feeling, a pattern. Thoughts, memory, imagining, writing is a material matter, abstract concepts and human constructs are never disembodied (Fox & Aldred, 2018).

The traces of erased memories begin to burn as voiceless images, indistinct sounds and mercifully forgotten touch clamour to find life in this material encounter, touch, the memory of touch which acts as an agential cut, the effect of which is to produce a particular phenomenon in this different time, this different space, in this intra-activity. The void that exists is a protection from the uncomfortable memories, it is a space filled with fragments of sorrow formed in the entanglements. I know that not writing is a form of resistance. Anger, resentment, indignation,

simmer somewhere defending against the sadness, enfolded in the silence, tangled in the secret. Resistance, the “the inaccessible secret”, which “refuses analysis”, refuses to be spoken (Derrida, 1998). In the counselling room my unintentional muteness revealed a hint of what was hidden, the traces always linger (Barad, 2017) but for now, my secret remains the “verborgene sinn” (Derrida 1996).

As I write, my heart races and for the first time I find anger and I rage for the young teenage girl who, at a time when she should have been living a life of exploration and discovery had to live a life filled with sordid secrets. I had never really felt anger, or sadness for that matter, I was so consumed with shame that I had forgotten to feel compassion for myself and anger for having something so precious stolen. My writing has become “a relay point between different moments in space and time, as well as different levels, degrees, forms and configurations of the thinking process” (Braidotti, 2011 p 233). I am becoming in voice (Mazzei, 2016), voice which becomes as I silently express my voice of rage, fury and outrage. How do we account for this elusive voice in counselling, this enactment of intensities, with the power of its unspoken meanings?

Jane Speedy (2005) suggests that writing has “parallels with the conversational territories inhabited by psychotherapists”, Having been encouraged to “nurture my writing voice” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) and knowing I will write through my body (Clough, 2005) I am writing, watching, waiting, sitting. As I write I am “shifting, changing, and becoming *more than* I once was”. Zapata et al., 2018, p.481). Importantly, my posthuman ethics help acknowledge the

materially discursive nature of my writing. The material encounters and the discursive practices will have significant implications on my writing (Mazzei, 2014) and I will begin to “understand the material in discursive forms” (Mazzei & Jackson, 2011 p.118). As directed by Barad, we need to rethink the question of materiality of writing itself, and of meaning making, and of knowing ... writing, theorising, ... these are different material practices of intra-acting with the world in its iterative re-worlding (Juelskjær et al., 2020). Writing is no longer just words, my counselling session no longer simply a place in which I can explore my emotional wellbeing “but a space in which affect and intensities are produced, both producing self in a mutual becoming” (Mazzei, 2014, p.745)

Thinking about writing is so much easier than writing, I am trying to escape the inevitable, essential becoming of the writing in this obscure, optimistic pragmatism? Deleuze suggests that it is necessary that I enter this becoming to get out of my past and my future. It is in the encounter with the other. Life does not have to be this way. My future, the work of this session, is not predestined. Something different (perhaps healing) can and will emerge, every time. Without doubt, the pain of the past exists, it is real, the marks remain on my body in “differential patterns of mattering’, my past is embodied, the secrets and silences enfolded in my material being. (Barad, 2007, 394p). Yet, the past can, is and will be materially reconfigured, it will be enfolded with my future in the materiality of this strange, silent moment, a future which is not pre-determined, which cannot be situated, which will not merely come to be in an unwrapping of this moment, but which will emerge from/in/through the entanglement, through the enactment of the counselling session. “Past and future enfolded participants in

matter's becoming" (Barad, 2007 p.234). I think about these intra-actions and the intensity of the countertransference in this encounter, both indeterminate, both a material, embodied, enfolding in the intra-action of our counselling session. I can see that what emerges in our session, in that raw, entwined silence is an iterative becoming, not a simple unfolding of a defined moment in time but a moment of potentiality. The hopes and dreams I have for my future, balanced precariously between my fingers, and the more I try to hold on to it all, the closer it gets to falling away from my grasp. I understand only too well that if I drop what is left of that fragile future, it will break. Shatter into a hundred, irreparable pieces. But isn't that why I am here, in therapy? The realisation that after all these years, I might have to look at the past. I have been hiding from the words, spoken/written/material articulations of a past, a memory in and of a time forgotten for such a long time. I worried that my fear, if acknowledged would give voice to the still unnamed, unspoken, unthought feelings will be more shameful than the faded, undeclared, unconscious, de-formed memories. As the images come to mind, I take a deep breath and I begin to write, slowly, apprehensively at first then with more rhythm.

I am astonished by what I have written, I barely know where it came from. The writing seems to have taken on an agency of its own and I remember now my favourite Scottish poet Norman MacCaig described his experience of writing poems....

"Well, I can tell you what happens, I can't explain it. I feel like writing a poem the way you feel hungry or thirsty. And if it's possible, I sit down always in this particular chair, and with a particular size of blank paper, no lines on it. And I have not an idea what's coming. Not a clue.

And very quickly into my head comes a memory of a place or an event or a person or all three. But far more often it's a short line, a short phrase-four or five words, nothing extraordinary about them. Down it goes, and the poem trickles down the page until it's finished.” (Norman MacCaig, cited by Nicholson, 1989).

I think about McCaig's material encounter of pen on paper, my own scratching pencil in my notebook. Neither of us knowing. It is in the performativity, the intra-active enactment between pen, paper, laptop, self, amongst the hauntings of the past that our voice emerges. I wonder about the young girl³⁴ who emerged through/in this work, the voice of a fictional child entangled with that of this adult writer in this space and in this time, being and knowing now inseparable. Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 1) suggests that “we do not write with childhood memories but through blocs of childhood that are becoming child of the present”. My teenage self-becoming of the present. The piece of paper with its frantic scribbles, rambling becomings on paper are now a phenomenon, distinct and discrete. This writing is shaping me much in the same way as I shape the letters and words on the page in front of me. The writing becomes material, the words are material but emerge in the dynamic intra-actions with time and space in a continual processes of becoming. What will it mean in the entanglements of tomorrow, next week, next year, when this thesis is published? I have created a space, between writing and self. A space filled with a silent voice.

³⁴ This is a reference to the piece of writing I produced but chose to exclude from the thesis.

My writing disentangles something in me while producing “living textualities and embodied subjectivities” the material and the discursive filter through each other (Fotaki et al., 2014, p.1239-1263) “not surprisingly, the experimental forms of writing that mean to capture trauma often present the subject in blanks or hesitations – a topographic formulation of forgetting, loss, uncertainty, disavowal and defensiveness” (Clough, 2007, p.7). My embodied writing produces new understandings of intra-active beings, “we write not with childhood memories but through blocks of childhood that are becoming child in the present” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p.1) which Clough (2007) suggests represents a movement in thought for the writer, one which they have opened themselves up to.

8.3 Trauma Materialising in a Posthuman Counselling Session

Before writing this thesis, I might have naively wondered where the boundaries between self, thought, language, voice, writing, start and end before remembering that from this new post humanist position these entities do not begin or end in the individual, but emerged in a dynamic process, “a doing”, which causes “the enactment of boundaries” (Barad, 2007 p135). Material-discursive boundary making practices where we can see the differences. Posthuman therapy is not about what is said or heard, it is not about the counsellor or the client, it is not the time or the place, it is indeterminate, it emerges in the material-discursive enactments of counselling session. Indeed, the session is “radically open”, there is unlimited capacity for materialising (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021). This session will emerge in some ways and not others in each agential cut. The agential cut, how and where the writing marks the boundary of the self, voice, thought, language, produced through the material-discursive practices of the session, and the time before

and after the session. An array of implicating factors including the emotions and feelings which haunt me, impacting on this performative, intra-active counselling moment.

Diffracting Difference

It was our first session. It had not been particularly easy. A series of awkward silences, silences with an unfamiliar feel³⁵. I recognised my own reluctance to engage, it felt wilful, determined, and I felt unsettled, I was grasping at straws. I didn't know how to connect with my new counsellor, what to say. Derrida (1996) might have suggested that my silence was a strategic response. Reflecting on the session later I admitted to myself that I had felt intimidated. I am hopeless with silences; I feel threatened by the empty space; but there was something else. Partly it was her size, she was tall, heavy set in stark contrast to my small height and frame, but she seemed to take up a lot of the psychological space in the room, she had a strong presence. Heidegger, as posited by Mazzei (2007) might suggest, the “nothing” of the session was in fact something, an encounter, an experience. I could not name it at the time, but it had been the sense of anger that had dominated the session.

Silence set in opposition to speech

Silence as a will to say or a will to unsay

Silence as a language of its own

Silence which is subversive (Minh-Ha, 1997)

It is useful to remember that this may have not been a conscious withholding.

Nevertheless, in the “meaning full” silence of this session and it can be viewed as an essential

³⁵ This silence is materially different from that described earlier in the trauma section on p 180

element of the discourse, “a will not to say or a will to unsay” (Minh-Ha, 1997, p.417). Taking inspiration from Deleuze, Mazzei (2007b) proposes an altered notion of voice, encouraging me to move away from the instinctive dualism of speech/silence to think about a more troubling process, one that no longer privileges presence of voice but acknowledges the withheld/masked/nonresponse and its diverse, entangled nature (Mazzei, 2009). Nevertheless, my psychodynamic inclinations led me instinctively to wonder what had been happening for me in the countertransference, what had been triggered in me, what stopped me seeing her. Bion (1967) posits the idea that projective identification is a wish to project on to the other, in the object relationship, the parts of the self that are unwanted and which, ultimately threaten to annihilate the self. Was I, through this new emerging intrapersonal relationship compelling my new counsellor to congruently think and feel those undesirable aspects of my defensive self as her own? Forever mindful of Ogden’s (1992) suggestion that what the client brings to the first session is designed to help the counsellor think about what they are experiencing, it was clear we needed to give what had materialised in this encounter more thought. However, this is positioning the therapist and client in a framework of the binary when my aim is to trouble these binaries. To continue to conceive the therapist, client, session, as separate entities prevents an ontological shift to a position where the experience of the therapeutic encounter is found in the entanglement and otherings, in the spacetime mattering, where the boundary between thought and the spoken word is intrinsically blurred. Whichever way I think about it, the intra-action between us had an affect; a material communication, as Clough (2010) posits the non-human becoming of the human, the non-human becoming of all matter. A boundary, however indefinite, between

counsellor and client, the material and immaterial has emerged where the reality of the session and how we come to know it has come into existence.

By the time the second session had come around many of the feelings from the first had passed, the busyness of life had quickly replaced any lingering thoughts. It wasn't until after we had gone through the quiet ritual of meeting in reception, the hushed walk up the stairs and entering the room that I allowed myself to think about the session ahead. The chair had been moved, not by much, but enough to mean I was sitting at a slight angle to my therapist rather than facing her in the way I would expect to, perhaps it was the client before me who had moved it? The position of the chair might seem insignificant but now that she is sitting in the chair the angle is awkward and it feels too late to straighten it up. She sat with her long awkward legs crossed, hands tightly squeezed together in her lap, but the position of the chair emphasized her stature. I wondered if she was new to counselling but she didn't say and I didn't ask. I was tense, I held the arms of the chair tightly, wondering if I could shuffle it round to face her. There was a tension in the room, a bodily entanglement (MacLure, 2013) the memory of the last session, the badly positioned chair, previous clients, my anxiety, creating affective, material forces. My worry about the chair, was not only a distraction it had been threaded through the session fragmented in time and space, entangled with matter, inseparable, indeterminate. The material matter of the chair mattered as it became entangled through the session. Looking at the counselling through an anthropocentric prism, the chair, client, therapist are all without agency. Yet, if we consider agency from an agential realist perspective they become "materially assembled" (Coole & Frost, 2010, p.8), they "emerge *in-between* different bodies involved in

mutual engagements and relations” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.530). That is, we make sense and meaning of the session in the intra-action of the different material, temporal and discursive entities. The chair with plumped cushions, the light in the room, thoughts and feelings, the human and the non-human diffractively disrupting the pattern of the session as it is entangled with human and non-human bodies of the session. Emerging through iterative intra-actions which materialise as the session.

Before examining this session further, I should give it some context. These are memories of counselling sessions which took place over eighteen years ago and I haven't thought about them for a long time. I wasn't there through choice. I had been practicing as a volunteer relationship counsellor with a national organisation when after an event in my personal life³⁶, I was “invited” to attend counselling. I'm intrigued that this memory has emerged, it is clear that my writing, as posited by Richardson & St. Pierre (2005) has become an exploration, a journey to somewhere unexpected, a re-configuration of agency, space, time and matter. Moreover, my writing is already in the act, a mode of thought Manning & Massumi (2014). An agential enactment, opening up in the dynamism in the indeterminacies of the co-production and thus, “there is no moving beyond, no leaving the “old” behind” (Barad, 2014, p.168) (memories, narratives, self), memory is not a fixed past that can be erased or rewritten, “there is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then” (Barad, 2014, p.168). Significantly, the past is

³⁶ I decided to cut this personal “life event” from this thesis.

never closed, instead the past, present, future are iteratively reconfigured and enfolded through the experience of intra-activity.

As I think about the session again, it is clear now although it wasn't entirely obvious at first, despite my unease, that the counsellor had an agenda. By the end of session two I was being encouraged, subtly but noticeably, to consider my position with the organisation³⁷. As this realisation dawned on me, the tension in the session increased. I was being judged as inadequate, despite the many factors involved. I became angry and indignant; evidently, we had failed to establish an effective therapeutic relationship. I was being rejected, personally and professionally and I felt that whatever I said provoked her even more. It was clear that she had made up her mind about the outcome before we had even met. I felt judged. Misunderstood. Childhood memories of discrimination and cruel prejudice re-emerged. There had been no attempt to explore the entangled, complex nature of the situation. I left the session desperately sad, stinging from the rebuke and sense of failure. I think now about the differences between us and how particularly difficult it was for us to understand each other. It was clear we could not offer/give a space for otherness; the reality is I had become the "inappropriate other" (Minh-ha, 1997, p.419), simultaneously I was affirming I am like you, yet being steadfast in my differences and effectively reminding you by my very existence that "I am different" from you. Importantly, from a position of posthuman ethics this difficult place is not viewed as causal, while it may be easy to think of it being created through the dyad of counsellor/client or that the

³⁷ This incident predates the "me-too" movement by 20 years.

countertransference may have resulted in my experience of being judged. Agency and causality are not linear in time and space, it does not stop and start, go forward and back, pass back and forward, it is on-going, performative and relational (Barad, 2007).

9.1 Wondering about Difference

“The moment the insider steps out from the inside she’s no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at”. (Minh-Ha, 1997, p.415-419).

According to Minh-Ha (1997, p.415) “many of us still use the concept of difference ... as a tool of segregation, to exert power”, rather than as a tool of creativity to question forms of repression” “the apartheid of difference”. Indeed, the study of difference in feminist theory might be as much a driver of diffraction as physics (Barad, 2014). The new materialisms provide the possibility of reconfiguring difference, to move past the binary view of self and other (Jagger, 2015) since “there is no “I” that exists outside of the diffraction pattern, observing it, telling its story ... I am the diffraction pattern, neither outside nor inside. I am *of* the diffraction pattern” (Barad, 2014, p.181). I cannot speak of the counsellor’s experiences without speaking of my

own, they are inextricably entwined, each re-configured and re-patterned in the diffraction. As Haraway (1989, p.35) states “in difference is the irretrievable loss of the illusion of the one I”. The quantum understanding of diffraction troubles dichotomies which suggests that diffraction and therefore difference is not a singular event that happens in space and time. Diffraction is about difference at a meta-physical level it refers to the wave versus particle debate and differences in how light waves behave. Our difference is performative, relational, entangled, our experiences, separate but the same, the same but separate, cut together apart. Barad notes this is counter-intuitive since we associate difference with separation but in terms of quantum mechanics and agential realism intra-actions involve differences without separability i.e., agential separability, and can be described as a “*cutting together apart* (one move)” (Juelskjær et al., 2020, p185); in short, the differences are within the entanglements (Barad, 2007).

Our differences can be formed as both objects of knowledge and action, they are productive, they will be “re-constructed, re-membered, re-articulated” (Haraway, 1988, p.113). If we think about difference not in terms of what is similar or dissimilar between human/nonhuman, self/other, but as difference within, as a productive force then we are provoked to think about difference in a new way (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). However, it is only through the diffractive lens of interference that we can understand how (power) relations really emerge (van der Tuin, 2009) and certainly in this session, as so often happens, how difference had become a form of discrimination, formed in the intra-activity within the phenomenon that is produced in the entanglement of the session. Yet, the potential to overcome barriers of difference from a posthuman perspective are immense when we consider the

“iterative re(configuring), of patterns of differentiating” (Barad, 2014, p. 168) and consider how we can responsibly explore entanglements and the differences they make (Barad, 2014). The study of difference in feminist theory is as much a driver of the use of diffraction as physics (Barad, 2014b, p.168). Moreover, when we account for the quantum notions of diffraction, difference becomes a matter of differences within, not the apartheid type of difference (Minh-Ha, 1998) which become a tool with which to exercise power rather than as a resource to creatively explore cultural and political subjugation of the other (Minh-Ha, 1998). It is diffraction which produces differences as each interferes/troubles/disturbs the other (Barad, 2014b). Diffraction, it seems is producing differences as both the counsellor and I encounter/interfere with the materially discursive encounter of the session.

Diffraction, as stated earlier in this thesis, is a foundational principle of agential realism with significant potential for reconceptualising how we understand a posthuman counselling session. “Diffraction queers binaries and calls out for rethinking of notions of identity and difference” (Barad, 2014, p.171). Diffraction explores the significance of boundaries, where reality, and what we know, comes into existence, depending on agential cuts made in the materially discursive practices. Certainly, with hindsight, the boundaries between this counsellor and I, seem an invaluable source of knowledge, although it is worth remembering that these boundaries are permeable, transient, heterogenous across space and time. Diffraction is also an area where I see the parallels with the aliveness of a session in the counter transference, counter transference as an enactment, a dynamic process, a moment, which I interpret as an intra-active exchange within the therapeutic encounter. Significantly, diffraction is receptive to detail, which

means that even the smallest difference can have quite significant impact (Juelskjær & Schwænneson, 2012).

Equally, diffraction as an apparatus tool, is both subject and object, at times used to understand diffraction itself, at others it is a diffractive tool with which to understand difference, a relational ontology that cannot be separated from its epistemological measurements (Barad, 2014) from where we can explore the significance of boundaries. That is, the “boundaries of the apparatus” (Barad, 2007, p147), where reality, and how we come to know what we know, comes into existence, depending on materially discursive entanglements. Apparatus do not measure material realities rather they produce them, “apparatus create phenomenon but are themselves are the phenomenon” Barad (2007, p.138) I have already acknowledged that counsellor/ client dyad is inextricably interwoven, but more importantly I have begun to understand that the object cannot be separated from the apparatus, the diffraction apparatus. Counsellor, client, the measuring apparatus, the counselling session, do not pre-exist but emerge from the experimental framework” (Barad, 2007, p.138). What Barad (2007) suggests is that when humans want to understand something they do not simply bring together the apparatus, they are in fact intrinsically part of the “configuration or ongoing reconfiguring of the world” (p206), essentially we are also the phenomena. “Humans are of the world, not in the world and surely not inside looking in” (Barad 2007, p. 206). In this thesis the counselling session becomes the apparatus i.e., the thing that causes the diffraction (2007, p77.p83), creating interference of the pattern. Thinking about the session as the diffraction apparatus helps us explore nature of entanglements in counselling, space time and matter do not exist before the entanglement and moves us away

from the idea of human-centred counselling. The session is assimilated materially in the encounter, co-producing self-awareness and understanding of experience, past and present. When we read/think/remember the session diffractively through quantum theory the client, therapist, session co-existing and mutually contributing to the encounter, creating a reciprocal future intertwined/intra-acted/ twisted together.

9.2 A Red Scarf

Different Client / Different Session

It's winter and there is a bitter wind blowing outside. My client enters the room, her body rigid from the cold walk to the counselling centre. We greet each other and she smiles briefly before turning her back to me. I watch her slowly hang up her heavy winter coat. Her movements more considered as she begins to unwrap her long, red scarf. Round and round the heavy scarf unfolds. She places it quietly on the chair. No words are exchanged, I stand waiting in silence, but the materiality of the encounter is not lost. What meaning did the scarf create when she put it on when she left home this morning? Scarf, client, winter cold, therapist, material entities, not things but doings playing an agentic role in the production of knowledge/experience/understanding (Barad, 2014) each agentic, making itself known and understood. Now, in this room, in this moment, in this silent unfolding, in the iterative becoming of the material they are creating meaning, boundary making, long before spoken voice emerged as a materially discursive entity. In the intensities of affect³⁸, I could feel her heavy heart in the

³⁸ Affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (Clough, 2007)

room. The session progressed slowly and gently, I found myself tolerating long silences. I'm perfectly aware that I am often the one that struggles with silences, but my client had seemed particularly vulnerable and exposed today, when she spoke her voice was soft, quiet, low, reflecting her almost tangible fragility and I am trying to move away from binary positioning of speech and silence and think of it as enactment. I had a sense that her layers of protection had been stripped away when she had taken off her coat and scarf.

I thought about the “inseparability and entanglement” (Barad, 2007) of the material and non-material in this session, its intra-active nature, remembering that Barad uses intra rather than inter to reflect the reality that each of the entities did not independently exist prior to the encounter. The coat and scarf, as material entities, had become significant, had become her protection, matter had become part of our knowing, undifferentiated through the intra-activity, with the power to change our thinking and being (Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p.4) in our session. It seems clear our words and symbols of the counselling had become “differentially enacted”; their meaning, boundaries and properties all materially (re)configured within the session (Barad, 2007). From this perspective, matter is an active agent coming into being through a process of intra- activity. It is indeed the discursive practices of the counselling session that determine the meaning and boundaries of the material.

9.3 Voice as a Material Matter

Voice, in its absence, had become important in this session, made more significant by its long absences and our deliberation over words. Mazzei (2009) suggests that if we are curious

about the silences, we will come to know what we must attend to. What is coming into being, empty of voice? Indeed, the silence of the session was and is performative requiring us to rethink knowing and voice (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) in the counselling session. In Mazzei (2016), referring to research methods, I find “voice without subject”, representing a freeing of voice from the human, “voice of becoming” and I find what I am looking for, that is voice from an ethico onto-epistemological position, emergent, intra-actively becoming (Barad, 2007). Mazzei, turns to Deleuze’s concept of Body without Organ to ground her a new “ontology of voice”, a voice no longer tied to the individuated human subject, (Mazzei, 2016) suggesting that when voice and body are constituted as ontologically separate, voice is no longer considered the source of investigation but an enactment of human and non- human forces (Mazzei, 2016) “voice that is an expression of being as becoming, voice that produces being in its becoming.” (Mazzei, 2016, p.152).

What does it mean to think voice without subject? My client without “I” liberates her voice from the past, my narrative no longer set in stone, experience set free from those past moments in time, voice now as becoming (Mazzei, 2016) A move away from the being of “I” to the becoming of “I” challenges our wretched views of inevitability, a future no longer determined. If voice is set free from a self-conscious subject, “I’ is no longer bounded, the spoken and written words can be “de-coupled from an intentional, agentic humanist subject” (Mazzei, 2016, p.5) then we can let go of the idea of an enduring, reliable self, labelled by my past. “A voice without a subject is bound not to a memory that attempts to preserve the past, but duration, through which all presents pass” (Deleuze, 1966, p.59).

I am challenged by Mazzei's paper to think of the naivety (perhaps arrogance) of psychotherapy, to think that we might reliably interpret or "give voice" to our client's past experience, that we might know their truth, when the reality is that "the only reality I can possibly know is the world as I perceive and experience it at this moment. The only reality you can possibly know is the world as you perceive and experience it at this moment. And the only certainty is that those perceived realities are different (Rogers, 1980, p.102). In reality, we cannot give voice to what we understand of the client's experience by standing outside it because we are of the experience." (Barad, 2007). The articulated words are not a narration, or retelling of the past, they do not symbolise experience instead they represent the past experience in an "entanglement" of the human and the material neither of which precedes the other. From a new materialisms perspective, qualitative value on what is said can no longer be applied (Mazzei, 2016). Barad (2003) encourages us to move away from thinking about the representational nature of communication cautioning that "discourse is not a synonym for language" (p.819), neither is "meaning the property of individual words, but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility" (p.821). She describes knowing as differential responses to what matters, which are "performatively articulated" by both human and nonhuman. Knowing and being are intrinsically entwined which points to the limitations of representational thinking. A view that has echoes of views of Casement (1985) and McLoughlin (1995) who urge us to pay attention to the impact of the words rather than the words themselves. Patti Lather questions what it is to "claim voice, authenticity and empathy as the grounds for research" asking if we can reside in "messy spaces in between (Lather, 2016) the intersections of

interpretation, interruption and mutuality”. From a Bion (1967) perspective this might be equivalent of asking if we can tolerate not knowing, as he reminds us, no one is ever able to fully understand is happening during a counselling session.

Furthermore, posthumanism in counselling becomes a conceptual tool with which to understand “the ongoing processes of becoming-subjects” (Braidotti, 2018, p.5). Mazzei (2016) encourages us to consider “becoming” from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, who posit “I” and voice as both becoming, not halted in the past, a non-linear process, but brought into being in the here and now. In a relational ontology of counselling, voice comes into being together, where knowing, becoming, doing cannot be separated (Zapata et al. 2018 p479)

Psychotherapy may well be criticised for placing emphasis on the fixed past moments (Mazzei, 2016), memory of past where ideas of space and time are discrete, separate entities rather than entangled, intra-active notions where memories are viewed as being threaded through the session, disjointed in time and space (Barad, 2007). Yet, the countertransference we experience is indeed a relational experience, a deeply affective, unconscious, intersubjective dynamic process that we experience with our client. The countertransference of the counselling session is by nature predicated on material-discursive intra-activity, it is on-going, causal and agential. In a posthumanist sense, discursive practices of thought, of voice, of silence are in themselves material. Maclure (2013), suggests that we consider the “materiality of voice, of language, and of the entanglements with bodies and matter”. Importantly, this materiality is not an end product. It is not inert stuff lacking liveliness, it is dynamic and agentic. It emerges. We

can think of voice as an active agent, which comes into being through a process of intra- activity. We are encouraged to work with “the materiality of language itself – its material force and its entanglements in bodies and matter” (MacLure, 2013, p. 658). In short, it will be through the cuts i.e., “specific material-discursive articulations” of the session that voice will find meaning (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2011). I think now of my naivety as a counsellor, my simple belief that I might reliably interpret or “give voice’ to my clients past experience by assuming that “becoming” is a fixed past event rather than an emergent process (Mazzei, 2016).

I am challenged to think about the “privileging” of voice, the idea that it is rigid, “stable and authentic” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2017). Psychotherapeutically, the holding environment (Winnicott, 1953), where clients can express themselves freely and where their experience of being is spontaneously articulated is defined as the ideal which, I should I aspire to. Yet, it is clear that if I consider voice from a posthuman perspective where it is viewed as fluid and inconsistent, this is hardly achievable. In reality, the material my client brings to the session, the narrative she gives voice to, how and what is articulated, what is included and excluded, will be diffracted in the intra-action of my presence, how they are listened to and what I attend to, will emerge iteratively in the entanglement.

Positioned within a posthuman new materialist framework, voice is emergent, indeterminate and performative, we can view voice as becoming. Psychotherapy, on the other hand, along with qualitative research processes, may well be further criticised for placing emphasis on ideas of memory, voice, space and time, as discrete, separate entities rather than

entangled, intra-active notions. Mazzei (2016) argues that this emphasis of sequential past events means we lose sight of the Deleuzian concept of “life” always becoming, an altogether more relational and simultaneous process. More significantly for this thesis, it is not just the fact that the past is neither a given nor fixed, but that it is radically open and indeterminate which “presents an infinity of possibilities for reconfiguring the possibilities for materialising” (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021) voice in particular ways and not others.

Conclusion

The idea of positioning myself as separate to a counselling session, analysing what is happening can now be understood in terms of becoming with the client. I am no longer listening or observing my client, I am an entangled counsellor: *Being-with, making-with, thinking-with* my client (Haraway, 2016). As a counsellor I am part of a sympoietic system, an observer who has become, is becoming with my client in the threading, in the muddle, in the “material semiotic composting” (Haraway, 2016, p.31). The new materialisms radically change the role of the counsellor, no longer positioned dualistically as “doer/done to” (Benjamin, 2004) but rooted in ideas of “being with and in the world” (Zapata et al. 2018, p. 479) with the client. Zapata et al. use these posthuman philosophies to explore the implications a relational ontology might have for literacy teaching practices, they “write knowing/be(coming)/doing as one, emphasising that they are inextricable”. In turn, I considered what emerges from the knowing/be(coming)/doing of a counselling session, asking what we understand of the therapeutic encounter when it is considered as a series of “doings, actions and practices” (Barad, 2007, p. 135). Certainly, I have been encouraged in the “doing” of this thesis to account for the constant intra-activity of the material, to understand the counselling session as a “direct material engagement” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), as a materially discursive practice of doing, where matter and meaning emerge relationally in the intra-action.

As explored in the methodology chapter, the production of knowledge is challenged from a posthuman perspective. The legitimacy and reliability of knowledge production becomes

impossible when we reflect on the entangled, emergent nature of the posthuman subject.

Posthuman, is a mostly conceptual tool, which has provided a frame with which to understand the ongoing processes of “becoming-subjects” in therapy (Braidotti, 2018, p. 5). As such, Braidotti (2018) views the posthuman subject more expansively, not as limiting possibilities by obstructing the conceivable outcomes of subjects, but rather as a way “to consider the various and complex configurations, alliances, assemblages, and constructions where human and non-human subjects are formed and potentially reformed” (Zapata et al. 2018, p.478-501) pointing to the potential for re-shaping and reimagining (Zapata, 2018) our embodied self. I believe that as counsellors we must be open to new and different ways of knowing, we must let go of what we think we know about counselling and what we think about our client experience and counselling research. Adopting responsible, situated knowledge practices and “the practice of the politics of location” in counselling helps us move away from a linear narrative (Braidotti, 2013, p51) of the counselling session and to take a more holistic view of personal experience. A turn towards posthumanism is an invitation to humanity to collaborate in our collective becoming, “a unique opportunity for humanity to reinvent itself affirmatively, through creativity and empowering ethical relations, and not only negatively through vulnerability and fear” (Braidotti, 2013 p195). A materially informed posthuman project demonstrates that the traditional view of distinct ontological/epistemological positions between counsellor and client, research and participant, human/non-human/more than human, become indistinguishable; no longer discrete factors but enmeshed, forming iteratively through the process (Barad, 2007, p.136). From this emerging onto-ethico-epistemological position it is has become clear there will be no counsellor/client only

a counselling relationship constituted as an intrasubjective, deeply entangled relationship exposed to dynamic, forming, re-forming tensions similar to that of the therapeutic relationship.

While writing this thesis, it became clear to me that I was not seeking to produce knowledge, make any claim or produce a new theoretical framework. I do not claim that this thesis represents something that relates to the empirical world of meaning making (St. Pierre, 2020). That would “assume a knowing, epistemological subject who through reason could produce foundational truth” (St. Pierre, 2016, p.28). I believe my work will fall out with the established pattern of expectation of a thesis. It is an experiment of thinking through reading, writing and remembering. I accepted the challenge of post qualitative inquiry to try to “create new forms of thought” (St. Pierre, 2020). Coole and Frost (2010, p.4) suggest there is an “emergence of new paradigms for which no orthodoxy has yet been established”. Significantly, thinking from within the perspective of the new materialisms has challenged me to think about my aim of “representing” what I understand about my research (Fox & Alldred, 2018). Therefore, I accepted the challenge, as set out by Mazzei (2013, pp777, “to think about what is happening” rather than “construct meaning”. Acknowledging that what I came to know was dynamic, mutable, emerging transiently at the blurred boundaries; “a temporary knot in a field of moving forces” (Clough, 2007 pp15). I have traced, followed and diffracted the lines and contours (Barraclough, 2017) between the new materialisms and the experience of counselling in order to understand one through the other (Barad, 2007). The therapeutic engagement is no longer predicated on an *exchange of words and ideas* between counsellor and client but a discursive, iterative, dynamic and material production (Barad, 2007, p.151). Furthermore, I have

considered the counselling session as “emergent in a relational field” (Olsson, 2009, p.32) “in a space in which non-human forces are equally at play and work as constitutive factors in the client’s becoming” (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). This aligning of the counselling session with the new materialisms has enlivened the complexities of the therapeutic encounter allowing an exploration that extends beyond the dyadic counsellor/client relationship to encompass the human, the non-human and the not so human.

While I have stated my ambivalence to the notion of creating knowledge, I must come back to the subject of counselling research within the humanities and social science which is where this thesis work is located, and reflect on whether this thesis has contributed to the understanding of counselling and ask does it “help us to do better therapy?” (McLeod, 2014). As set out in my methodology, the current trend in counselling research is to question whether research generates knowledge which improves client experience (McLeod 2014). Certainly, it has been noted that psychodynamic theory needs a re-appraisal of its epistemological framework if it is to continue to contribute to psychotherapeutic practices (Fonagy & Target, 2000). And there remains a disconnect between theory and practice in psychodynamic counselling (Fonagy, 2001). Furthermore, psychodynamic theory, while referring to material effects on the encounter, is very much entrenched in intersubjective, inter-relational ideology whereas “to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence...individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (Barad 2007, p. ix). However, my aim was not to reinvent psychodynamic counselling but to consider the myriad of possibilities that were not yet known. Undoubtedly,

considering psychodynamic counselling from a post human position will give new and different perspectives. Positioned nomadically, the counselling process can now be viewed as embodied, an embedded material structure, stressing the dynamic and self-organising structure of thought processes. (Braidotti, 2011 p.2)

In short, the writing of this thesis has been an iterative, performative process neither developmentally linear nor structurally incremental. A diffractive re-telling, re-imagining, re-creating of the psychodynamic experience of counselling (my own, the other, the imagined) I have found a way to reconsider past, present, future (spacetime mattering). I am fortunate that my research has been carried out in a posthuman era where there is no longer an authoritative view on the production of knowledge, I have been able to think alternatively and creatively about my thesis. However, before concluding, it feels pertinent to mention the challenges I experienced in writing this thesis. Many of the concepts were complex and I spent hours reading, re-reading, writing and re-writing notes, every time producing something different.

Sometimes, after reading a text, a paper, a chapter in a book I wondered how much had I really understood? Had I mastered it? As Massumi (2015) asks, are there “texts I feel that I have not mastered, perhaps cannot master, and suspect are inherently unmasterable”, certainly at times Baradian vocabulary proved almost impenetrable.

Undoubtedly, it has not been easy, it was testing trying to do something new and it was tempting at times to turn to advice on traditional methods of research and thesis design. The process of understanding the world of clients, who are not yet defined by anything other than

what is yet to emerge, has been challenging and certainly the advice of Hollin et al., (2017) resonated soundly, when they advise the reader not to lose sight of themselves and their own work in that of Barad's. My hope is that this thesis "presents a way for others to work with the conceptual impossibility of the texts of Barad, Haraway and Braidotti in a way that makes something positive of it, a basis for a new construction or creation that will have a clarity of its own but at the same time remains 'true' to its precursor texts by inheriting something of their impossibility, in order to pass on to the next writer, to continue the process" (Massumi, n.d.)

In conclusion, to enter the academic world of the posthuman new materialisms is to expose oneself to an inimitable lexicon, at once intimidating and unfathomable. Yet, as I discovered in the process of writing this thesis, it is a distinctive vocabulary, perfectly formed, beautifully fashioned to articulate the concepts of this increasingly vogueish, posthuman domain. This thesis is strewn with 'iterative becomings, diffractive encounters, indeterminacies, entangled, agential cuts, ethical inclusions and exclusions and intra-active, enfoldings'. The term new materialisms itself has multiple iterations, and is often interchangeable with post human, anthropocene to name but a few. I have explored the nature of entanglements i.e., space, time and matter; self and other; arguing that client and therapist do not exist before the entanglement. I have adopted an ethico-onto-epistemological view of the counselling session where ethics, being and knowing are seen as enmeshed and it can be seen as an iteratively unique entanglement. A yet unknown, unfolding, intra-subjective encounter. It is this newfound understanding of this exceptionality, the recognition of the uniqueness and potential of each and

every counselling session, which has inspired and motivated me to produce this thesis i.e., an exploration of counselling through the posthuman framework of the new materialisms.

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