

School of Education

**Writing Voices of Poetic Vulnerability: A Phenomenological Inquiry into
Writing Voices that Resurrect the Wounded Self**

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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

HUMAN ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262). Approval Number #SMEC-40-10.

Signature



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To fully live my thesis I must first turn inwards, inhale deeply and gift life-giving oxygen to the beautiful and tender voices that rest inside me. Along the journey of resurrecting parts of the wounded self I have discovered the presence of my inner voices and by listening with intent I have been guided throughout by their wisdom, honesty and kindness.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis engages in a hermeneutics of vulnerability that unlocks the narratives that lie behind personal journal entries and transcends traditional boundaries in ways that traverse subjective layers of self where compassion lies at the centre of embodied understanding.

With an alchemic potion of vulnerability and uncertainty I find strength and move into depths of the past and bring them into present with poetic delicacy so that the self remains unharmed and instead becomes an act of “exquisite empathy” (Kearney, 2017, p. 7).

Language and words are an extension of ourselves, they come from deep within us and whilst words on their own may not fully capture the depth and complexity of the human spirit, with careful calibration of our bodies we can be transformed back into ourselves where words may then deliver us to undiscovered temporal pockets of our inner universe. Here we may find ourselves in exquisite spaces of joy, pain and suffering where, with empathy towards self, we might re-live and rewrite our past so that we are more fully aware of ourselves and our actions in the present. I explore time and its linear impression on our lived world to find ways for calling on our past, through writing, to reconstitute our memories and voices and to discover as yet unexplored narratives of our lives.

To unlock the narratives that lie behind my journal entries I engage a phenomenological and hermeneutical approach that takes me on a dialectical journey of inwards and outwards travelling further and further, reaching into places of darkness to feel the sensations of pain and joy and childhood naivety where I illuminate their possible meaning through a new narrative.

The unfolding thesis has a gestalt appearance, one in which parts of me are delivered to the reader through the different poetic voices, slipping between temporal spaces where past, present and future are suspended and presented to me in different ways. In bringing the layers of voice and story to the surface, I open pathways to understanding ways of living authentically and with integrity. To be fully human and feel alive and connected to my surroundings I embrace my inner voices. Enrapt in my song I hear and feel pain, joy,

vulnerability and suffering urging me forward in a delicate healing process. Subtle unfolding of self appears in cathartic poetics where I find openings in which spaces of silence offer fresh language and new ways of being.

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PRELUDE

Beginning and end are thus bound up with one another and cannot be separated. From where something shows itself to be a beginning and what direction it will take both depend upon the goal.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1998

BOUND UP IN BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

To find the beginning of my story of my own hermeneutic journey into writing seems elusive. I cannot catch it and sometimes when I think I have found the spot or the marker in my own history where I began to develop a more questioning approach to what was happening to me whilst in the act of writing, or indeed, the kinds of writing acts I was participating in, it vanishes, like a vapour. Unaware that journal writing became an ongoing silent companion, occasional letters to self seemed to be a natural extension of thought. I find respite with Hans-Georg Gadamer's proposition of beginning and end "bound up with one another" (1998, p. 15). It makes sense to my endless work of understanding self through acts of writing.

Before moving into the subject of my writerly world it seems appropriate to stretch back for just a moment and consider another place in our temporal timeline where communicating something to others through a script means communicating something of our human-ness. Part of what makes us human is the need to tell a story and in the telling of the story there is a transformation. It is a traditional beginning but it glimpses into the possibilities of dissolving real-world concepts and bringing us closer to making richer connections with others and ourselves.

It is astonishing to think that in such a short time, only 5000 years or so, people developed a sophisticated way of communicating with each other in the form of the written word, or writing. Its continuous evolution is dynamic in its ability to hold the essence of human thought and often with a poetic elegance that retains a life beyond that which its author originally intended. Our own narratives are time capsules that hold words that when spoken or read release fragments of our unique human experiences layered with human qualities that reach out beyond that of the event itself and make connections with others whereby they begin to stir emotions and remind us of our own fragility and our need to communicate with others.

Samuel Noah Kramer (1988) discloses the sophistication of a culture and community of Sumerians living through the translation of ancient documents in the form of clay tablets. The development of the cuneiform script as a means for communicating economic administrative data, such as the tallying of livestock and food, was an evolutionary essential in the flourishing community. As with many cultures, the celebration of life through the arts began to appear soon after and this is evident in the established Sumerian school system during the third millennium. Schools became a place where literature, creative writing and storytelling became an important part of developing their culture.

Kramer submits an essay written by a school teacher who lived in about 2000 B.C. It details the daily grind of a typical schoolboy and he describes it as “One of the most human documents ever excavated in the Near East” (1988, p. 10). He says,

In this ancient essay, a Sumerian schoolboy, not unlike his modern counterpart, dreads being late to school “lest his teacher cane him”. On waking up, he urges his mother to prepare him lunch hurriedly. In school, whenever he misbehaves, he is caned by the teacher and his assistants; of this we are quite sure, since the Sumerian sign for flogging consists of “stick” and “flesh”. As for the teacher, his pay seems to have been as meagre then as a teacher’s pay is now; at least he was only too happy to make a little extra from the parents to eke out his earnings. (Kramer, 1988, p. 10)

What makes this document “most human”? Is it the sophisticated development of writing or is it in the antiquity of the story? I am drawn to this story because the words unite my

present world with the past. The words pull the past into the present with such immediacy that I could be a part of the schoolboy's society or he could be a part of mine. For me, there is an exquisiteness about the way the schoolboy relates to those around him over 4000 years ago and the tangible context of the narrative. I feel a sense of elation and a peculiar sense of pride. Perhaps it is because I am part of the race of humans or perhaps it is because it is the realisation that we are inherently creative beings and that we are driven by the need to communicate more than just economic duties. It is this simple story, copied several times, that carries such a distinct human-ness that still translates meaning to us. This signifies the importance of stories and storytelling as part of a culture and gives rise to the power of the written word as a medium through which we can make connections with others, have a greater understanding of ourselves and prosper as a community. The Latin verb *communicare*, is to share and from this we can summarise that communicating with each other is bringing together more profound fundamental issues of what it is to be human (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.).

The link between the enduring energy of the narrative and its cultural significance is developed further by Harvard psychologist and cognitive learning theorist, Jerome S. Bruner (1986). He describes the self that absorbs in storytelling and imaginative mental acts as someone who is able to understand a 'sense of self and others'. Narrative places us in the context of the world around us and its sensitive cultural nuances. The Sumerian narrative of the schoolboy does just this. It places the boy and the people around him in a context that reaches beyond the functioning of a society and into the depths of what it means to exist as a human in this context. Bruner goes on to say,

Insofar as we account for our own actions and for the human events that occur around us principally in terms of narrative, story, drama, it is conceivable that our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us. (Bruner, 1986, Loc. 888 of 2507)

Perhaps the reason that the Sumerian essay is so delightful is that it draws me in by its connection with my own sense of self. When I read the narrative, it is immediately present and very much alive and in constant fluctuation. The fusion of the narrative and the temporal context of reader and writer seem to create something wholly unique and essential to our

human-ness. With each reading and ongoing interpretation, the narrative stimulates the reader and rouses emotions from deep within. We can be caught by surprise at our own reactions and outpouring of uncontrollable emotion and possibly for a moment we are reminded of the deep well of human-ness that lies within us, far greater than our corporeal frame can seem possible to house. We are ultimately vulnerable and at the mercy of ourselves.

ORIENTATION TOWARDS *ANAGOGIC* INTERPRETATIONS

Bruner explores what makes a narrative engaging and suggests that many linguists agree that “no text can be understood at a single level” and that “one can read and interpret texts in various ways, indeed in various ways simultaneously” (Bruner, 1986, Loc. 68-69 of 2507). He uses the example of Nicholas of Lyra who “proposed many centuries ago, for example, that biblical texts are amenable to four levels of interpretation: *litera*, *moralis*, *allegoria*, and *anagogia*, the literal, the ethical, the historical, and the mystical.” (Loc. 68-69 of 2507). As I return to the Sumerian narrative I consider the four levels of interpretation and find myself musing around the word *anagogia*. As these levels work simultaneously with each other in the interpretation there is something greater and deeper about *anagogia* that I keep returning to. Its connection with our inner selves and the possibilities that our inner selves bring to our existence is exciting and ongoing.

Gaston Bachelard’s studies of the imagination bring me closer to the vibrant, anagogic energy that surges within the narrative. Beyond the words of the narrative, our imagination can bridge the link between the past and present, and between one human to another. In describing the intimacy of a childhood home, Bachelard suggests a poet’s words can move “the very depths of our being” (2014, p. 34). He says,

All I ought to say about my childhood home is just barely enough to place me, myself, in an oneiric situation, to set me on the threshold of a daydream in which I shall find *repose* in the past. Then I may hope that my page will possess a sonority that will ring true – a voice so remote within me, that it will be the voice that we all hear when we listen as far back as memory reaches, on the very limits of memory, beyond memory perhaps, in the field

of the immemorial. All we communicate to others is an *orientation* towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively. (Bachelard, 2014, p. 35)

Bachelard suggests that our own narratives contain far more than just an experience. Narratives help reach within ourselves, to the very “limits of our memory” and bring forth emotions that contain fragments of story and sometimes untouchable, unformed sensations that in turn can teach us about ourselves but also make connections with others and our place in the world. Martha Nussbaum (2008) refers to our lives as having a “complicated temporal history” (p. 3) and one where our emotions are planted as small seeds of experience and continue to grow as our lives collect further experiences where these emotions mature and impact on the next encounter. She says, “Emotions are not just the fuel that powers the psychological mechanism of a reasoning creature, they are parts, highly complex and messy parts, of this creature’s reasoning itself” (Nussbaum, 2008, p. 3).

Our histories, our stories are more than tales. With each telling we are refining ourselves and gaining a deeper understanding of our fathomless complexities. It is a reminder that we must not discard or ignore our own stories. Our emotional connections with our own narratives only serve to allow us a richer, fuller presence and nourish our souls with a sense of greater worth. Writing takes us to new places. It stretches our temporal being to new dimensions and gives us the opportunity to live with awareness in other spaces, alongside or within our real-world existence.

THROWN INTO OUR OWN STORIES

Georgia Warnke offers a way in to establishing a context for this thesis by offering insights from Gadamer.

For Gadamer, following Heidegger, the hermeneutic situation signals the way in which, as human beings, we are “thrown” into a history or a set of stories that we did not start and cannot finish, but which we must continue in one way or another. We must always act in one way or another, because not acting or acting to end the necessity of continuing to act itself is a form

of action. Yet, in order to determine how to act, we must also understand ourselves and the set of stories in which we find ourselves. If we have to act, we have to understand, in some better or worse way, who and where we are and who and where we want to be. From the beginning then, we are involved in the practical task of deciphering the story or stories of which we are a part so that we know how to go on. (Warnke, 2000, p. 80)

As Warnke suggests, we are involved in the “practical task of deciphering the story or stories of which we are a part” (2002, p. 80). Karen Meyer says that “as human beings we belong to the world long before birth. That is, each of us is born into the course of a larger human story and existing timeline, place, culture and family” (2010, p. 85). And Robert Sokolowski points to our being and our relationship with objects and things as a bi-directional relationship.

We can evidence the way things are; when we do so, we discover objects, but we also discover ourselves, precisely as datives of disclosure, as those to whom things appear. Not only can we think the things given to us in experience; we can also understand ourselves as thinking them. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 4)

Part of Sokolowski’s understanding of phenomenology brings me to my own experiences with writing and my “bi-directional relationship” with words and language. The tangible written script captures the sometimes intangible human thought and transforms and morphs within ourselves or our reader a unique organisational understanding, almost without us being aware until it has already occurred. Writing can unlock experiences beyond our expectations. This eternal mesh of our flesh and souls and their bi-directional relationship with language through literature only encourages me to think that we are more than the sum of our real-world experiences and writing extends beyond only making sense of our thoughts and into another avenue that helps us seek out our inner world experiences and bring them to a new and fuller meaning.

As our lives unfurl and we begin to harvest and store our memories into the vast chambers that make up our being, we form our character from the memories that might be housed in rooms of grief or sadness, happiness or tranquillity. Some quarters are dark and

airless and others filled with light and expansiveness. Within the dark subterranean chambers lie memories that if unearthed might bring us “to recover the unreflected”, and as Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests we might perceive them when “the lamp illuminates them at night” (2012, pp. 250-251). The qualities and virtues that make up who we are now, in the very present-ness of the moment, grow from those seemingly weightless tomes of life experiences that we have been carrying with us until they resurge as a relived experience with blunt, full force. Throughout my writing years my own memories have come forward in ways that have delighted, shamed and perplexed me. Through practice I have learned to accept them as important parts of my being. Like a vital organ they give me life and shape me into the human that I am becoming. I allow my memories to challenge me as I question their authenticity as agents of my own character and in doing so, I learn more about myself and those around me. Jean-Paul Sartre remarks in his autobiography,

...a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it. (Sartre, 1981, in Bruner, 1987, p. 699)

And what is my own story and how is it situated amongst the thousands of stories told and not yet told that are suspended in words not yet said, waiting to be revealed, unwrapped by another and yet another? My ongoing narrative exists within me but I have less concern for its literary appeal to others than its focussing on “the practical task of deciphering the story or stories” (Warnke, 2002, p. 80) that I “did not start and cannot finish” (p. 79) but am resolved to be an ongoing part of. I want to find connections within the labyrinth of chapters and characters, scenes and dramas. Most importantly I want to continue with my own story and discover myself. To do this I return to myself and take on the task of storyteller. I draw on my experiences, for there is no greater source of truth to my narrative than my direct experiences with the world around me. Within my experiences *anagogia* (the mystical) stirs and I am drawn to its equivocal calling. It is both dark and light, spoken and silent, and its mysterious nature takes me to a history where others too have sought the understanding of self. Les Todres points to the meaning of understanding as a “journey of appropriation and transgression – an interplay of the familiar and the unfamiliar” (2007, p. 15). To understand my own story more fully I prepare myself for the tidal flow into unfamiliar, unspoken and unknown rivers but cannot help wondering if I have sufficient protection and supplies to sustain the distance of what might be an unfinished journey.

COMPREHENDING THE *COSMOS*

In focussing my attention upon origins of stories I find in Kevin Robb's article "Psyche and Logos in the Fragments of Heraclitus, The Origins of the Concept of Soul", wise connections between ideas that I encounter and wish to venture into. Robb poignantly attributes the depths of relationships between them to Heraclitus of Ephesus, a pre-Socratic Greek Philosopher. Robb emphasises the "actual [embodied] human situation as the starting point for an authentic philosophy" (1986, p. 315). He brings Heraclitus to us in this way.

...the *psyche* of a living person has a *logos* which is 'deep' and 'self-augmenting' and that its discovery requires extensive exploration on the part of the individual. Moreover, this is a cognitive and linguistic task, an effort of intellect, which is accomplished only as an individual becomes 'awake' or comprehending of the [*cosmos*] around him as well as in him, and only when that individual learns to listen to, and understand, a proper language or discourse *logos*. (Robb, 1986, p. 315)

(The original text by Robb makes attributions to the translated original *Fragments* of Heraclitus using line numbers. I have omitted them here for ease of reading and understanding).

My "extensive exploration" of self comes through the task of both writing journals and returning to examine them. It is both "a cognitive and linguistic task" (Robb, 1986, p. 315). Writing journals has become part of who I am. At an early age I found gentle comfort in the autonomy of writing and the subject of self and my surrounds seemed an easy choice and now my return to my journals and my attitude towards them suggests that my hermeneutic journey began at the onset of the original writing. Over the years I have carried them with me, I have been aware of their presence but it is only recently that I have truly been attentive towards them. My attention has focused through "self-augmenting" and newly discovered belief in myself as a carrier of the truth. Merleau-Ponty points out that "the perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence" (in Langer, 1989, p. xii). My perception of my world is the foundation from and to which I draw attention and allows me to "listen" and "understand". The journey back into my world of

journaling has given me the opportunity to rediscover and find “*cosmos* both around [me] and within [me]” (Robb, 1986, p. 315).

22nd November 2005. Japan.

Spent the afternoon at Matsue Castle. Built in the 17th century it is a fantastic example of a true fortress that has been restored in parts to absolute authenticity. As we climbed to the top of the castle I was overwhelmed by a sense of time and how quickly life passes and some things stay stable. At the top window I watched kites, the birds of prey, constantly circling and circling and I thought that someone else must have watched the same as me, many times before, a long, long time ago. This sense of ageing is pronounced, I think, because of the season of Autumn. There is a stillness, a crispness and the strikingly beautiful colours of decay, foretelling the future of bare limbs. I feel very real.

As I read the extract from my journal I recall this period of time in Japan. I feel the Autumn wind blow my hair about my face and up into the air. My hands are tucked into my jacket as I struggle to keep warm. The group has dispersed around the castle and there are minutes that stretch into lapses of solitude. This is my memory and imagination that brings to life events from my past. Memory and imagination fill in gaps that may cause the story to hiccup into being and instead give it a sequential timeline and flow of logic. This makes my story worthy of being described as a narrative but Heraclitus reminds me that there is a *psyche* and *logos* that is deep within me and can offer something more to me if I am attentive and “listen”.

My journal opens me to my perception of time and its ceaseless momentum. Merleau-Ponty suggests that “consciousness” is “the very movement of temporalization and...of flow; it is a movement that anticipates itself, a flow that never leaves itself behind” (2012, p. 448). I am aware of my present-ness in amongst a past and future and this is realised against the background of the castle which is “stable”, solid and unmoving since the 17th century with a host of lives being lived in and around it. I am only one story in amongst many. Just as the castle represents stability, a place of permanence and protection, it is subjected to

arsenal from battles, seasons and the perils of age. It can become unstable and requires restoration in order to bring it back to its original condition. Heraclitus says,

The river
where you set
your foot just now
is gone—
those waters
giving way to this,
now this.

(Fragments, 41, Loc. 320-322)

Matsue Castle looks as it may have in the 17th century. It stands in the same position and has the same dimensions but in spite of its restoration it is not the same castle. Walls have been replaced, floorboards have been pulled up—it has been reconstructed rather than restored.

I might view my journal in much the same way as I have viewed Matsue Castle. My journal summons memories and imagination but on closer inspection time has worn away its crisp meaning. It has passed through time and been ravaged by my own eyes. My attention is to restore it to something that may resemble the past but with meaning “lived freshly” (Gendlin, 1997, p. 37). In her article, “The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion”, Ruthellen Jossleson reflects first on a hermeneutics of faith that aims to restore and deepen original meaning and understanding. Following Paul Ricoeur, she says that when we aim to restore meaning to something, we address

the interpreter in the form of a message. [This] is characterized by a willingness to listen, to absorb as much as possible the message in its given form and it respects the symbol, understood as a cultural mechanism for our apprehension of reality, as a place of revelation. This type of hermeneutics is animated by faith. (Jossleson, 2004, p. 3)

It is with faith and a phenomenology of the imagination that invite both myself and my reader as interpreters into reverie to assist in the ongoing restoration of my journal, a “symbol”, a “cultural mechanism for [my] apprehension of reality” into freshly remembered selves.

I find in Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*, that symbol, that cultural mechanism, for restoring to myself the reality of the time and space that my journal occupies in my lived experience.

Bachelard introduces me to what becomes in my thesis powerful imagery for reconstituting the authentic self that began the story of my journal. “A house”, he says, “constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing a veritable psychology of the house” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 39).

Bachelard imagines a house “as a concentrated being. It appeals to our consciousness of centrality” (2014, p. 39). And which house, in what room or what corner might I find my *psyche*, my soul dwelling? For Bachelard, “verticality” confirms “the polarity of cellar and attic”. He sees the attic as a place of “rationality”, “up near the roof [where] all our thoughts are clear” (p. 39). The cellar is the “*dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there,” says Bachelard, “we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths” (p. 39). My journey seems to be an intertwining of light and dark and a living in between. I enter spaces of intimacy, places to call home and then to escape, to seek new places and travel to become anonymous. In both the familiar of home and the unfamiliar of outside adventure, my journal reveals hermeneutic possibilities for connecting me with freshly felt intimacy where I am able to return to continually restore myself to myself.

24th January 1997. Fern Tree.

The entrance to the herb garden will have stone steps that lead up to the perennial border. The steps will flow through to the top and here we will place a large sitting step. The site is fabulous. It is an excellent spot for thinking. Just perfect.

If a restoration must do more than address the aesthetic, if a restoration of authenticity is to examine the foundations to ensure longevity, what of my own foundations, deep below the cellar, where lies the subterranean? Might it be possible for me to daydream in a place without light, a place that is the “dark entity”? There, in the deep, might *cosmos* wrap around me and instil me?

The Greek goddess was driven mad with grief as she searched far and wide for her daughter, Persephone, stolen from her by Hades, god of the Underworld. Demeter charged Zeus with the return of her daughter by threatening to refuse the earth to fruit. Zeus bargained with Hades to allow Persephone to return. But Persephone had already tasted the fruit of Hades' pomegranate and became forever destined to spend winter in the Underworld. Did Persephone know primordially her need to enter darkness in order to find and nourish her soulful human-ness? There is something about Persephone's destiny that reassures me that falling into the subterranean world is necessary to confirm our wholeness. And this is why in my thesis I wrest my fragile self into the darkest chambers of myself and in restoring meaning freshly to my journal I rekindle the lamp that illuminates my darkest nights. I remember that Persephone always restores herself to us as Goddess, Queen of the Underworld, wife of Hades, often depicted holding sheaves of grain and a flaming torch.

I see Persephone as a personification of solitude. She plunges alone, to me not as victim, but as one with courage to face her destiny, her humanity and her flesh revealed in all her vulnerability. Alone she survives travelling through *cosmos* unencumbered, strong, to herald her arrival on earth to announce Spring. My journal in this thesis constitutes the Ancient Greek seasons, Winter, Spring and Summer during which I travail in learned solitude.

In my solitude, I find my life in words. To sit and write is part of my being. I write journals and they form part of my history and my story. My own boxes of journals have been with me for many years. They have been carted around un-read and un-opened much like old photo albums. They don't mean much to others but when opened they unlock something from within me. I did arrive at a point in my life when I decided to throw many of my journals away. At the time, I could have easily argued that the reason for doing this was to de-clutter however, on reflection, it would be more honest to say that I threw them away to try and rid myself of that part of my life that I considered to be shameful. Somehow, I felt the physical action of destroying what I wrote would leave me feeling cleansed from unwanted memories. Gradually I accepted that the memories would still lie within me but they would remain dormant and unlikely to be resurrected. The literary artist, Virginia Woolf in *Orlando* wrote, "Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works" (1985, p. 103). Woolf reminds me that I cannot

hide from myself and perhaps writing is my way of being accountable to the truest part of my being.

The solitary connecting of the slipperiness of memory through written narrative engages me throughout my thesis. My physical body and my place in my world is infused with sensory delights as well as demons, with restored and new understandings that come from me transcendently from contemplating that in myself there is something deeper and possibly richer to discover.

To understand this world that I inhabit with words, I adopt a phenomenological attitude as writer, reader, researcher and interpreter. The phenomenological attitude is a deliberate shift into an alter perspective allowing fresh insight into how the world is perceived. Sokolowski distinguishes the phenomenological attitude from the natural attitude,

The natural attitude is the focus we have when we are involved in our original, world-directed stance, when we intend things, situations, facts and any other kinds of objects...The phenomenological attitude, on the other hand, is the focus we have when we reflect upon the natural attitude and all the intentionalities that occur within it. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 42)

Along the hermeneutic course of my inquiry I shift, adjust and reposition myself to see what lies within, around and underneath not just the words that are cast onto paper, but the living being that thinks and acts within the writerly space. I am the Persephone of my thesis narrative who comes fiercely to traverse the seasons of my life.

I

MY CORNER OF THE WORLD

Arrange whatever pieces come your way.

SOLITUDE AND REVERIE

My story stretches across vast horizons and up into the clear blue heights of the heavens and down into the depths of the underworld. My story houses secrets and songs from the past and promises for the future. It is within my writerly world that I find a palette of colours with which I might paint further dimensions into my simple narrative. I blend the subtle hues of temporality, memory, perception, conscious and unconscious revelation and solitude together and seek to reveal something of my own identity. My tools, like that of an artist, are uncomplicated. I sit with pen and paper, keyboard and screen but there is a painterly technique that manifests deep within my inner world, where darkness may reside and can only be brought to light and reconstituted in my writerly space. Just as an artist might search for a studio with light, I search for a writerly space that offers illumination from within.

If there is a beginning to my thesis then perhaps the beginning is to invite my reader to explore with me the space that I have privately sheltered for my entire memory of life in this world. My reader may not be a visitor to whom I will point out objects of belonging, the vague signifiers of my past and present. But rather she may go deeper with me into a space that offers rich intangibles. She may cross the threshold of my house, and into my corner of the world. Bachelard (2014) offers the warmth and intimacy of the home as a metaphor from which to indulge in daydreaming and explore our inner worlds. He says, “For our house is our corner of the world,” and he continues, “As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (p. 26). My own “house” or my “universe” is filled with memories but also contains boxes and rooms still unexplored as their contents may invite unimaginable surprise. Bachelard uses the “solidarity of memory and imagination” as a way “to make others feel all the psychological elasticity of an image that moves us at an unimaginable depth” (2014, p. 28). For me there is no better way than to open to other my “first universe”, to offer to other an uncovering of my space of intimate solitude an “inhabited space [that] bears the essence of the notion of home” (p. 27), than through writing into my dreams, my memories and my imaginations of my past, present and possible future.

I have always enjoyed being in the company of myself. In solitude, I find an escape from the imposed conditions of a society where I have sometimes felt as though I exist on the edge. In my culture, I am unwittingly handed titles that point towards a way of defining who I might be. I am a mother, a daughter. I am middle-aged and I worked in education as a teacher for many years before I opened my own business. I am a gardener and I believe in the preservation of this planet and its inhabitants. Perhaps you are gradually building your own understanding of who I might be and as I continue to layer the titles—animal lover, optimist, highly organised—you might even imagine the conversation we could have should we ever meet. As labels and titles are passed to me I find I am unable to reject them but rather awkwardly attach them to me. As much as I wish to remain free, I am bound somewhat to the constraints of my society. It is in solitude though where, like others, I find freedom from the judgement of others and instead am able to be unconventional and undefined. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his mature years writes of freedom found in his solitary wandering. In the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* we read,

These hours of solitude and meditation are the only ones in the day when I am completely myself and my own master, with nothing to distract or hinder me, the only ones when I can truly say that I am what nature meant me to be. (Rousseau, 2004, p. 35)

Solitude is not always comfortable and the freedom sought in solitude is not always found. In seeking the freedom from labels bestowed upon and received by me I, in turn, give myself the label of “fringe-dweller”. This is the term I use to describe my place in the larger context of the community. I neither wish to be in nor do I wish to be out. As a fringe-dweller I skirt the outsides of groups and fleetingly take up the threads of their defined existence and then quickly retreat into solitude where I reflect and consider the ongoing question of who I am becoming. Like a Bowerbird I return to my nest with objects and collected thoughts of my world where I place them for rumination and consideration.

This thesis introduces my private space, and the objects and associated tendrils of my being that are housed within it. It bears witness to the rawness that unfolds from my journals. Featured throughout are journal extracts, pieces from the last twenty years of my life that sometimes passively and other times oppressively have shaped my being into versions of

me. This thesis offers me a clean sheet of parchment where I write to begin to understand my journaling more fully and in doing so allows me to continue to write my ongoing narrative. My new writing transforms into deeper understandings of my fragility and vulnerability. I embrace them with the kinds of intentionally interpretative inquiry that will bring deeper understandings of self and other. Thus, I embark on a unique yet time-honoured journey towards self-discovery.

Exploring and reflecting on my writing opens me to a possible fusion of conscious and unconscious in my writerly world. I look to Edmund Husserl and his understanding on transcendental phenomenology. Max van Manen distils Husserl's thinking by saying,

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, and the phenomena are someone's experiences – belonging to someone's stream of consciousness. For Husserlian phenomenological inquiry, experience is the thing and "how" the things of experience appear to consciousness is the focus. (van Manen, 2014, p. 91)

How do I write about my writing experiences as "phenomena" whilst remaining authentic as author and simultaneously opening myself to new discoveries about myself? How do I release myself from the social binds that ask me to be stable, controlled and contained and return to my writerly world as I experience it? How can I bring the constructed, carefully regulated narrative to unite with the unpredictable nature of my writerly world as a way of conveying my experiences?

The act and art of being within the writerly world have combined with grace in bringing what is unconscious into conscious. Woolf's aphorism "Arrange whatever pieces come your way" (Woolf, 2003, p. 80) has become the way I have arrayed my writing within my writerly world as I might arrange furniture in the corner of my house. As I reflect on Bachelard's words I find the connection between the spaces where I find solitude and comfort and those that Bachelard refers to as "house" or, more intimately "home" (2014, p. 28). Both Bachelard and I immerse in a space where the "integration for [the] thoughts, memories and daydreams of mankind" (p. 28) can be pondered. Crucial to my space is the harmony of solitude and reverential silence that allows for *rêverie* to develop and deepen.

Bachelard says, “The house, quite obviously, is a privileged entity for a phenomenological study of the intimate values of inside space” (2014, p. 25). It is in my writerly space that I now examine with interest the activities that occur within the walls that further allow for a freedom to be realised that manifests in reflection and writing. As I observe the objects on the shelves, the pictures on the wall and even the pencils in the container, I become aware of my connection with these objects. I have placed them here, with deliberation. They hold a value that might be aesthetic or historical but within gentle reverie, I loosen my grip on the tangible connection with the objects and move towards deeper associations. Within this space objects dissolve into something beyond my reach and instead I travel further into the corridors of my memory and imagination. My objects within my space stimulate my imagination and pull me towards another world in which I am eager to travel. Bachelard emphasises that the study of “intimate values of inside space” means to “take in both its unity and its complexity and endeavour to integrate all the special values in one fundamental value” (p. 25). Finding the “fundamental value” of my writerly space lies within the complexities of the multidimensional space. The solitude and retreat that the writerly space and its objects offer might relieve me from my self-imposed anxiety about the way others may see me but I sense there is a further primal intimacy and possible freedom that can be reached through the act of writing.

COMPRESSED TIME

The space of “daydream” where, for Bachelard, shape, formation and sensory interpretation are liquefied into something with a purer meaning is also where Sokolowski invites me. Sokolowski suggests that if we can remove ourselves from the objectiveness of “transcendent time” and instead towards “immanent time” where our imagination, senses and memories lie and then even further to “internal time consciousness”, we may discover “the origin of the deepest distinctions and identities” (2008, p. 131).

My writerly space contains objects but at its centre sits me, its subject. If I am to attempt to reveal what is internal to the external then the way I perceive of both my inner and outer world asks for closer inspection. Merleau-Ponty says of subjectivity, “The interior and the exterior are inseparable. The world is entirely on the inside, and I am entirely outside of myself” (2012, p. 430). Within this space I allow myself to challenge who it is that I think I am both “inside” and “outside” and if there may be an intersection at which other might be revealed. It is here, within my state of reverie, that I arrive at temporality and its fickle nature. Merleau-Ponty reminds me of the “intimate relationship between time and subjectivity” (p. 432) and as I consider my ageing body I am unable to escape the concept of time captured in the slow withering of my skin, time’s ongoing reminder of its persistent presence. To understand my perception of self I seek to regard temporality in ways removed from my subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty invites me to “consider time in itself”, and to “follow[ing] its internal dialectic” (p. 433). As I release my grasp of time’s tight, lineal construct and let its delightful slipperiness become part of my understanding, new openings make themselves known. Light shines through thin apertures beckoning me to explore the inseparable worlds of interior and exterior.

When I step outside of my writerly space, I come out of reverie and move into another space where I fall into step with a socially conditioned environment. I follow the footsteps of millions of others as I carry the banner that heralds social media as society’s vehicle to shape me into an idealised being at the expense of my individuality and uniqueness, qualities that are the very essence of human-ness. As I rapidly scroll through the screen on my device, images and words subliminally reinforce ideologies that shape our community and our culture. Over time I have gradually morphed into a person that might be described as organised. This has been my deliberate response to a type of social human conditioning where, it seems, we value having some sort of control over time, albeit a false sense of control and perhaps a false understanding of the concept of time. Being organised was never a natural way of being for me but one that I have learnt so that functioning in my environment is less stressful. Being organised gives me the false illusion that I am on top of things although I fear that the pace to keep on top of things is relentless and if I stop, I may fall behind. Being organised is my constant preparation for the future and in doing so I have some sort of control over my future. But it is the present where the glory of living is at its fullest, the senses are excited and fill me up with experiences that nourish the imagination in preparation for the future to draw into the past again.

Henry Thoreau's famous retreat into solitude whilst living at Waldon Pond gave him time to develop his own spiritual and philosophical understandings. Among detailed observations of his natural environment he is often brought to sublime revelation. A diary extract reveals his own transcendental ascent from temporality when he writes on 24th April, 1859,

Take time by the forelock
Now or never.
You must live in the present
launch yourself on every wave
find your eternity in each moment

(The Morgan Library, 2017, p. 52)

Thoreau grasps temporality and takes its power of control over humanity and delivers it to us as something we can choose to own. He tells us to ride temporality like a steed and steer it through our own lives pausing to find "eternity in each moment". My own exploration of temporality and the futility of running along the never-ending tightrope of the lineal construction of past, present and future might be reconsidered to allow the writerly space to be realised at its fullest. Like Thoreau, I might discover that within the writerly space temporality might be reconstituted in new ways to find the authentic and delicate poetry of my own existence in the present.

As I incline towards exploring temporality as a potential freedom and not as a rigid construct of time, I allow Bachelard to poetically lead me to see that a being "when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to 'suspend' its flight" (2014, p. 30). Further, my writerly space allows for the investment into the pastime where temporality can be made supple and malleable in order for it to help me shape something from my ineffable past. Bachelard says, "In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for" (p. 30).

STRETCHING TEMPORAL PERCEPTIONS

My ongoing exploration of self in my journal finds me traversing between searching for home and places of adventure, "an interplay of the familiar and the unfamiliar" (Todres,

2007, p. 15). I wish to expand further on this theme in this thesis but here, tension between the familiar and unfamiliar demonstrates the elasticity of temporality and how this tension plays a pivotal role in revealing myself within the writerly space. The adventure of travel is where I am released from temporal ties. The feeling of being foreign and alien, where everything, from the simplest activity, is new and demanding of my full attention, frees me from the anchorage of my place in the past, present and future. I am delightfully lost and without routine and somehow the suspension of time becomes easier to employ. Nothing is familiar and I am able to remove myself with greater ease from the objectiveness of “transcendent time” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 131). It was on holiday in Vietnam that I played with my temporal daydreams and let them appear, unrestrained by syntax, on paper. I open the space to release “compressed time” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 30) and it comes to me exhaling in a rush of tumbled tenses. Todres says “the relationship between experience and language becomes a pivotal enquiry” (2007, p. 14) and reminds me of my own attempts at understanding my embodied experiences and my efforts to explain in words the unfolding of the relationship between my perception of things, my experience and language.

6th October 2014. Vietnam.

unedited thoughts...

See here it is, right before me. Already the first problem strikes with the movement from mind to paper—the flow. The flow is stopped and jammed by the distractions of noise and light. This is not right - not like the comfort of early morning quiet - early morning when it is not really morning and not quite night. It is something in-between and it is sleepy and ready to turn and settle in its sheets. And I am its witness—alive, patiently waiting, breathing...it is then, in this precarious time that a sliver appears, a small aperture for the restless mind to wander. My body is relaxed, unmoving but my mind is alert and heaving and it unfolds itself with words. Words and images together ride in tandem, like proud horses pulling a carriage forward into the deeper parts of my mind. And there I sit, high in the carriage, not a care for the racing danger ahead but instead let myself be moved forward with the strength and power of my chariot pulled by steeds of imagination and time. Where will they take me? I don't ask, I don't predict, I let them take me to wherever with no thought as to where it will end...because it will end at a place of childhood memory. It always does.

As my mind unfurls, I open my eyes in the heat of the stillness. My daughter, after a fitful sleep lies there wrapped in her sarcophagus of white sheets. I want to move, to get up, to write—such is the power of my mind, to gather and collect these fleeting thoughts of past as they come to me in the present. A surge of feeling of being present, and then pulled back to a time, where I am a small child without control of my destiny. This momentary state of being reminds me that what I once was, I am still—it is only my body that has decayed. My mind seems to move with fluidity and speed between past and present. This space, where a shard of understanding can let me be in that present moment again, briefly—to realise it fully and then it moves forward quickly, it rolls into something else, seamlessly and effortlessly completely without control but somehow with meaning and connection to my whole being.

In this journal extract I challenge myself to alter my perceptions of long held understandings of past, present and future, to allow them to be released and reformed into something else that consents me to make meaning of my own internal insights. This altering of perception starts with a vulnerability towards self. In the early hours of a morning where I could not sleep because the movement of clock handle or digital numbers to accommodate a different time zone plays no part in the living body, I wrote

27th September 2014. Vietnam.

-Last night we...no yesterday late morning we arrived at Duc Nuong hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

-Warm, hot busy and slightly edgy. The tension and rush of anything possible at any moment is felt like a slight vibration on the skin. The kindness of the staff prompting us to keep our bags close to us... as though to remind us that we are foreign sitting ducks, our white skin and western clothes like beacons to those who melt into the streetscape and move with deft skill.

We slept well—to the sound of air conditioners, traffic and rain. We were still tired. But early morning I woke to absolute stillness, it was as though the entire city had put itself to sleep and it felt humble to be in amongst 7.5 million people resting quietly.

It is here that the arrest or suspension of time becomes apparent. The words hover, there is no sense of urgency or of anticipation and I wonder if it is in the absolute present-ness of time that time seems to stand still, like the stillness within the eye of a storm. Perhaps our relationship with the self and the world can be, for a moment or two, so perfect that we are no longer victim to the barriers of time and instead move independently from it. Time does not dictate to us our movements rather we move in tandem.

My journal extract shows a gentle sway between Sokolowski's "transcendent time and immanent time" within what Bachelard's refers to as a state of reverie. The focus on the world experience, the encounter, is primary but a sense of self, as an isolated being from the world is recognised. Sokolowski says "the internal flow of consciousness is nested within the processes going on in the world, but it also stands over against the world" (2000, p. 132-133). Sarah Bakewell describes how Merleau-Ponty sees this kind of consciousness and she recalls the beautiful metaphor he uses,

...consciousness, he suggests is like a 'fold' in the world as though someone had crumpled a piece of cloth to make a nest or hollow. It stays for a while, before eventually being unfolded and smoothed away. (Bakewell, 2017, p. 235)

In thinking of myself through the writing I begin to glimpse in the nested folds of my consciousness a self that is soft, quiet, heartfelt and humble.

If I am to recognise the possible problems that exist living within the constraints of a temporal existence then I must also look at the possible new discoveries that temporality may offer. Other cultures and their understanding of time only serve to remind me that time is a concept and therefore can be viewed in many ways. If I am perhaps to alter my own perception of time and its rigid nature in my cultural context (Lederach, 2005), then perhaps I can allow time to become more fluid and elastic, a constantly shifting membrane which is

housed within me rather than being an external condition of which I feel the need to control, as Michael Flaherty's book title suggests, like *A Watched Pot* (1999).

John Paul Lederach (2005) highlights how a culture operating with a different perception or construct of time develops other attributes of personal character that allow us to live with greater awareness of ourselves and our place in our culture. His exchange between his teacher, Andy Shogreen, son of a Miskito-Creole marriage and superintendent of the Moravian church, demonstrates this,

I wanted to control time. Andy let time come to him. I was pushed and was pushing to get things done on time. Andy read time, as in paying attention to the *coyuntura*, the meaning of the moment. He commented as much to me. 'You know the difference between you guys up north and us guys down south', he once said with his big chuckle and East Coast English accent, 'you have the watches, but we have the time'. (Lederach, 2005, p. 132)

Lederach (2005) says that Andy "saw himself in an expansive present in which he moved towards much that was unknown, little of which could be controlled directly" (p. 132). In my times of travel and within my writerly space I catch myself in glimpses of the same sense of present-ness. I aspire to draw these moments out in to wider, fuller capacities where present-ness mingles with the unknown. I begin to slowly understand the ties between the pressure of temporal obligations and our need for certainty and how embracing the uncertain is a way of freeing ourselves from the constant burden of the worry of the future.

I am confronted by the paradox of the lineal construct of the word in my Western world. In our society, we write forward—with blankness, or openness before us, the future uncertain. Into an open landscape I can take myself off into any direction that I may choose with my written destiny remaining uncertain. The written word, my past is behind me. The path has been made with markers in the form of words indicating where I am currently situated, with the horizon of the future ahead of me. But the past informs me of my future. The words that I create, that mark the paper with a type of permanence, serve as a reminder of my utterances, released from the chaos of my mind and made clear and defined on paper for the world to see. The words run from left to right, mapping out the past, present and open future, but temporality still resides in dimensions and layers that blend and predict and cross-pollinate. The memory of the past is owned by the present.

Lederach (2005) gives another enlightening example of our culturally imposing understanding of temporality towards other cultures that have a different, but conceptually beautiful and functional understanding of temporality. A group came together to discuss ongoing peacebuilding efforts at Nairobi Peace Initiative, Africa, 2002, as Lederach tells us, Harold Miller, a steering committee member of NPI-Africa, long-time Africanist, and vocational philosopher shared with the group that the Mbiti people in Africa say, “time moves from the present towards the past and that collective memory is accessible through the wisdom of the elders” (p. 136). A member of the group from Kalenjin, Jebuwot Sumbeiywo, demonstrated her own understanding of her people’s concept of time. She started, “the past that lies before me and the future that lies behind me. They point ahead of them when they talk about the past. They point back when they refer to the future” (p. 136). After further discussion Sumbeiywo explains, “This morning I understand that what we know, what we have seen is the past. So, it lies before us. What we cannot see, what we cannot know is the future”. She then stood up and began to walk backwards saying, “So the past we see before us. But we walk backward into the future” (Lederach, 2005, p. 136). I turn once again to my handwriting and wonder about my own left-handedness. As I write, the words fall behind me into the past. As I consider my left-handedness I wonder, to be right-handed you draw the words with you into the present. Your hand leads and guides the words as though unravelling a thread. van Manen says, “The etymology of ‘draw’ does have associations with pulling, bearing and carrying (Klein, 1979, p. 228). As words draw us and carry us away, they seem to open up a space: a temporal dwelling space where we may have reality experiences, ‘realizations’ that we never imagined possible” (van Manen, 2014, p. 360).

Ironically, though my journal represents in many ways the chronicle of my lived history, it is in its pages that I begin to perceive and sense time as something from the past that I see before me. In my writing, multi-dimensional layers of time come from within me.

This new way of understanding temporality also has bearing on my journals and my interpretation of their contents. The memory, the past, opens onto and becomes part of my vast present-ness. The memories of immanent time somehow negate the time flow of the transcendental time, the real-world time and thus allow a suspension of time to occur in which hermeneutical contemplating can begin. In this suspension might be the “place from where understanding begins and the place to which understanding returns” (Todres, 2007,

p. 14). In this suspension of time I might lose myself in order to find myself again. Here is where I might surrender, and allow myself to submerge into the ebb and flow of time.

Rebecca Solnit, in her book, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, reminds us of the important discoveries that can be made about ourselves through being lost and losing ourselves.

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more," says the twentieth-century philosopher-essayist Walter Benjamin. "But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling." To lose yourself: a voluptuous surrender, lost in your arms, lost to the world, utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away. In Benjamin's terms, to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery. (Solnit, 2006, p. 6)

When I read back on my journal I find my writing is full of gaps and holes and poorly cultivated with words of empty meaning. I feel shameful towards my efforts and I wish my journal pages were nourished with fresh ideas and insight. But I know the meaning of my journal does not rest only within the words and the potential interpretation they hold. The act of writing situates me in a different temporal layer. The act of writing gives me always a place to breathe, to be alone and to be solitary. Writing allows me to exercise my curiosity about my place in this world through immersion into a reflective world. This is immersion into a space where, Merleau-Ponty says, "The world is entirely on the inside, and I am entirely outside of myself" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 430). A gradual calm descends and the rigorous function of the outside world is pushed to the background. My writing world is a space where thoughts tumble about in my mind and in my heart where they eventually fall out onto the paper disguised as words. It is a space where I can allow myself to be lost in my own thoughts, in delightful, unrestrained reverie where I may wander around my heart, soul and mind and ruminate on loose threads of events to try and make meaning or understanding of myself and my place within the world. Writing allows me to be immersed in the present and it is from this state from which fragility, pureness, and honesty may emanate.

DISTURBANCES IN WRITERLY SPACES

As this thesis develops I begin an internal struggle. I want to separate and recognise the singular elements of my writerly space so that I may come to understand them more deeply but at the same time, the writerly space exists only through the ongoing blends of reverie, language, temporality, and memory, reading and writing. I find it hard to make sense and reason of this space that I inhabit. I begin to understand that the frustration that comes from facing the boundaries that language and writing bring to my writerly space represents possible important junctures in my understanding of the writerly space. The frustration that I experience forms part of my writerly world. I have the urge to compartmentalise my writerly world into neat rooms that connect by well-lit corridors but this leaves my writerly world stagnant and flat and does not open the possibilities that stir in the darkest corners of the cellar. My writerly world is densely complex and beyond conformity. It is a chaos of colour, of dark and light and it holds a mysticism that is part of what I want to embrace more fully. I wish to move forward into the uncertainty of darkness where I might find an oracle of a truer meaning, greater than might be found in transcendent time.

It is Monika Langer in her project that guides me to understanding Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, where he helps me understand this frustration as "disturbance" to which he attributes acute significance in phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty, she proposes

...aims to draw our attention to the always presupposed and actually present background of our actual experience. It [his phenomenology] dispenses with the traditional mystifications in so far as it refuses to regard experience as an entity which can be analysed into its component parts, and refrains from constructing a basis for it in a transcendental sphere on the hither side of all actual experience. (Langer, 1989, p. xv)

Experience for Merleau-Ponty "is a process of transcendence". For him experience is encapsulated in a transcendent "primordial dialogue between body-subject and world" (p. xv) and what disturbs the primordial dialogue is what becomes worthy for phenomenological study. My task then is to reveal what my frustration conceals.

As I return to myself and the writing before me, I wonder about the words I have chosen to use and what meanings they have. Am I writing a narrative, and in doing so moving towards an uncertain future? Or, am I trying to rediscover something of myself by turning

towards my past? I shift from temporality towards the work of Roland Barthes who directs a brighter, somewhat harsher light towards the possible meanings of my writing. Barthes distinguishes the difference between what he calls a “readerly text” and a “writerly text” in his work *S/Z* (1974). He argues that most texts are “readerly” texts. They follow the traditional forms of narrative texts and thus their meanings are often fixed so that the reader is led to a pre-determined interpretation. “Writerly” texts, by contrast, are unstable as they give the reader greater control in the construction of its meaning. He describes the writerly text as one where the responsibilities and relationship between reader and writer are blurred,

...the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable...the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. (Barthes, 1990, p. 5)

Barthes’ fusion of writer and reader and the chaotic energy that builds between them in the writerly text reminds me of my own see-sawing of energies between my inner and outer self, and my roles as both reader and as writer and the constant inner dialogical exchange that occurs between the two. The unification creates an ever-present world of language and words that constantly change in their dimension and meaning. In this space, multiple things occur simultaneously. It is dynamic—this is my writerly space.

To find a way into this thesis is to rediscover my writerly world and its quiet chaos of words and thoughts. As I bring myself to a position of listening to inner thoughts I am reminded of the patience needed for writing. There is something there, waiting to form into a meaning but there can be no urgency. Soon, a pleasing rhythm is created in the gradual dulling of the world around me and the soft unfolding of embryonic words, yet to have a meaning that can be used to communicate to others but there is something alive and pure about the carelessness of them. It is as though I am only partially responsible and I am merely only here, in this writerly space to “arrange whatever pieces” (Woolf, 2003, p. 80) come my way. This is an aspect of my writerly world that is real and part of my experience.

When I begin to think with awareness about what occurs when I begin to write, I realise very quickly that it will not do to just accept that I want to write something. Much more occurs before the pen has struck paper and it is an understanding of removing myself from the natural attitude, the one that I live with in every daily task, and embracing a phenomenological attitude, one that impels me to contemplate the life that flows before me (Sokolowski, 2000), that is the first shift in my being.

With the fusion of dimensions that the writerly space brings and the “infinity of language” (Barthes, 1990, p. 5) that is presented to the reader and writer it appears there is no definitive point at which to enter the writerly space with reflective phenomenological awareness. I recall Warnke saying that “For Gadamer...the hermeneutic situation signals the way in which, as human beings, we are ‘thrown’ into a history, or set of stories that we did not start and cannot finish, but which we must continue in one way or another” (2010, p. 79). For my own stories, I feel as though there is no true beginning except to say that my beginning is an awareness of the phenomenological attitude and how the deliberate shift and alteration of seeing things can possibly be the mark of a type of beginning within the story. The interpretation begins at a place that cannot be defined as a beginning but perhaps better described as an awareness, a kind of disturbance. I attempt to write about this opening or aperture into a beginning-less time.

February 2017. Home.

To examine the writerly space and its beginning-less time is to give it both an internal and external context, a physical dimension and a transcendental dimension. My experience lies not exclusively with the written word and the rolling, fluid meaning of language and its precarious placement, but also with the palpable act of writing and its discernible connection to the inner with the outer. I am seduced by the potential sensorial experiences that stationery holds. I smooth my fingers over the starchy, stiff, creamy parchment the manufacturers describe as “Ecrú”. I fold and unfold the paper as though rehearsing for a play. Finally, without wanting to disturb the purity of the page I lift the weight of a carefully chosen pen between my fingers and position it carefully. I strike the page with the nib and feel its graceful roll over the surface. I admire the depth of blueness in the ink that verges

on indigo. I am careful that the ink must not bleed, smudge or scratch its way across the page but instead be fine and consistent. The aesthetic balance of paper and stationery on the square of the desk...the physical movement of the hand and its masterful control over the pen...creating...making meaning...the pleasure of forming neat letters...the frustration at the untidiness...the crisp curl of pages as they turn...and the production of pages and pages of words.

This writerly space and its possible physical pleasures cannot be satisfied without writing words. Just as an artist cannot be content to only mix colours on a palette, the paintbrush must connect with the canvas to produce art. Something of the physical self and the surrounding environment must fade or become transparent to allow for the transcendental to come forward and shape the words. The physical world and its structures and concepts begin to partially dissolve and lose their grip on the physical self. van Manen (2014) introduces me to the metaphor of the “textorium: the virtual space the words open up” (p. 358). Through this metaphor van Manen examines the meaning of space, “Etymologically the word ‘space’ does not just refer to physical extension and perspective. Space possesses the meaning of lapse or duration in time as well as distance; it carries the meaning of temporal and physical expanse as well as time spent in an experience” (van Manen, 2014, p. 358). van Manen’s textorium is my writerly space.

My writing, over time, and through closer examination is my conduit, my vehicle, for actualising my awareness of my internal temporality. It is the writerly space that delivers me to a third level of temporal structure where a deeper conscious connection between the first and the second level is contemplated with awareness. What is this space where elusive qualities of my being are housed? It is this level of temporality that excites me and it is at this level that temporality forms the strongest relationship with my writing. Writing is a way of acknowledging my “consciousness of internal time” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 130), and what lies within this space.

I draw parallels with van Manen’s account of the interlocking of the three levels of temporality in his description of writing and reading. He says, “the self retreats or steps back, as it were, without completely stepping out of his or her social, historical or biographic

being” (van Manen, 2014, p. 359). He goes on to say that the writer becomes “depersonalised” and references Maurice Blanchot who sees the writer as an “‘it’ or neutral self- a self who produces scripture” (van Manen, 2014, p. 359). Barthes also attests to this idea in his famous essay, “Death of an Author” (1964) but I subscribe to hold on to my position as a personality deeply involved in all aspects of writing inquiry. The balance can be tenuous but I accept my ownership and will not relinquish the importance of my roles in the writerly process. To do so, for me, would mean I may lose integrity within the writing.

My relationship with the real world, with immanent time, retreats and another version of self comes to the fore and presents itself, thus adjusting my context. This version of self does not wear the cloaks of social responsibility but instead questions the ideologies of my own history through reflection. It is in this position that I ask; what occurs in this consciousness of internal temporality and how can we make sense of it in “world time” where our very existence is bound by mechanics of constructed time? Again, my writing is a way of perhaps adding order, through the lineal execution of words, to the boundless chaos of my internal thoughts. If I am to be aware am I not bringing or demonstrating my awareness through to “world time” via the written word? In what ways might this bringing of awareness challenge the integrity of what it is that occurs within the multiple confusions of internal temporality?

When we practice phenomenological reflection, Husserl says we must “go from words and opinions back to the things themselves, to consult them in their self-giveness and to set aside all prejudices alien to them” (1983, p. 35 in van Manen, 2014, p. 93). In the work of Martin Buber, we come to see how the interlocking levels of the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude can exist communally. According to Kenneth Kramer (2003), translator of Buber’s *I and Thou* (1937), “...Buber was pointing towards – not to a concept but to a living dialogue by listening faithfully and by responding authentically, heart/mind to heart/mind” (Kramer, 2003, p. 5).

Buber describes the “two-fold world”—the I-It world set in the context of temporal and spatial networks and the I-Thou world where one is fully present. These worlds can switch, “This switching can be almost instant or gradual, and it reflects a transformation of one’s life orientation...” (Kramer, 2003, p. 30). The notion of orientating my life dialogically

within my writerly world is appealing as it embodies the elements of temporality and the phenomenological attitude. There is a deliberate sense of shifting and altering perception or ways of seeing and being and it is this tilting that opens opportunities for exploring the experiences that occur in my writerly space.

TOWARDS A HERMENEUTICS OF VULNERABILITY

The first part of this thesis introduces my corner of the world, my writerly space. Through reverie it weaves suggestions of the ambiguity of temporality, the union of memory and imagination and the ineffable into the writerly space. Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as a perceptive being and Bachelard's inspiration to daydream unite to bring me to embrace instability and openness to the concept of temporality and body as a perceptive being. Todres (2007) invites me to embody freedom and vulnerability as a way of deepening my understanding of my own existence and allowing my own spirituality to develop and integrate into my unfolding dimensions of self.

Through the revealing of the stories within my journal this thesis feeds and grows and presents ongoing challenges. I am conscious of the continual effort to embody the fragile elements of my being and bring them to a light where they might become instruments for revealing the darkened rooms of my internal world. The compassion that comes from embracing a vulnerability, fragility and uncertainty seem in contradiction with society's emphasis on impenetrable strength and certainty as preferred embodied ways of being. This thesis, in its exploration of my past, continually navigates me towards questions around the social expectations that I grew up with and how these expectations gradually, forcefully latched onto my being and slowly began to suffocate a sensitivity towards myself and perhaps towards others. The voices from my socially conformed surroundings urge me into being a strong and resilient person who should seek certainty and finitude. The same voices also direct me to remain focussed and alert only to my lived world and reject other possible worlds where I might fall into unconstructive reverie, "Don't daydream", "Get back to reality", "You live in a dream world". They ask of me to be in constant company of others, "Why do you spend so much time alone?" "Get out and be social". They ask me to be strong and resilient, "What are you crying for?" "You need to toughen up", "Don't let them see

that you're upset". They question my fragility, "You are overly sensitive", and they tell me to "grow up", as though being in a state of childhood is something that I must leave in the past. I ask what these expectations demand of me and how they may have fractured my own being, making it difficult to stride purposefully with my own authenticity through life.

The questioning of these social expectations leads me to consider more deeply the set perceptions about the world around me, how I live and move through time and the way I perceive myself in the world and relate to those around me. I challenge my own strength and vulnerability by acknowledging and nurturing my soul. I wish to accept and release the mystical wonder of my own spirituality and see it as real and subjective and that subjectivity is rich and valuable. Rising to these challenges and altering perceptions to recognise the potential of seeing the self in different ways give me an opportunity to empower my self to live fully and independently.

There is pain associated when we activate unused joints and muscles in our bodies. Over time, if we keep exercising, our muscles will adjust and eventually become supple and we will move with greater ease. My vulnerability has, over time, become like an unused muscle. I have refrained from exercising its full capacity and instead guarded myself against the inner pain that comes from exposing one's vulnerability. The protection against being vulnerable has come at a cost. There is pain at rediscovering vulnerability and there is deepening and ongoing pain in living with embodied vulnerability. This has been gradually realised from the onset of this thesis and the choice of revisiting my past through my journal writing. Embodying vulnerability asks me to remain open to the pain that I might be subjected to as I relive my past with new awareness. Just as there is pain in remaining open to myself and others there is also the opportunity for a joy that moves beyond happiness and deepens into a spiritual joy that in turn becomes embodied into my being.

Todres introduces me to "belonging to wound" where I too begin to "touch on the nature of a 'wounded' kind of freedom" (Todres, 2007, p. 115). Todres takes us through the story of Narcissus and his "flight from openness, relationality and vulnerability" (p. 117). Here Narcissus is in denial of his subjective self and attempts to recreate himself into an objectified beauty where he identifies, as Todres says, "with another or group who seem fixed, strong, ideal or special" (p. 117). My own journals resonate with the story of Narcissus. As I read I discover my own futile search for fixed, strong and ideal. Whilst, in some

versions, the story of Narcissus ends with the finality of death, Todres also points to the possibilities that might be inferred from the story. He advocates for the “existential task of embodying openness and vulnerability, the possibility of bearing this wound and even finding it as a gate and passage to that which is humanly possible”, a gate through which Todres says we may find, “soulful space” which he says is the “intertwining of freedom and vulnerability” (p. 117). My identification with the story of Narcissus finds its way past the passage that ends with the pursuit for certainty and approval from another and instead on towards the gate at which I might find my soulful space where, Todres reminds me, “always includes the possibility of pain” (p. 117).

In my state of returning reverie within my soulful space I consider the possibilities of belonging to wound and remaining open to the pain that may arrive and stay and how I might find an inner strength to accept it belonging to me. Deeper into reverie I realise a synthesis between my temporal history, my present self, and the life forward direction (Gendlin, 1997) and the unifying object of my journal. Not only do I see myself in the handwriting and the narratives of my past within my journal, but I see another, the person who wrote her journal. This version of self has her own complexities as she acts as a kind of gatekeeper between inner and outer, lies and truths, certainty and uncertainty. Finally, I arrive here, now, as interpreter with my increasing understanding of ways of seeing myself and continuing forward into an ongoing passage of potential darkness and light where the soulful self resides. My complex journey asks of me to embody a hermeneutics that I may use to guide me forward.

The interpretative stance that I wish to develop is through the work of Ricoeur’s (Josselson, 2004) hermeneutics of faith, “which aims to restore meaning to a text”, and hermeneutics of suspicion “which attempts to decode meanings that re disguised” (p. 1), with Todres’ work towards “locating human embodiment as the integrating ‘place’ where both human vulnerability and spiritual freedom can happen” (Todres, 2007, p. 124). Todres leads me into “an existential stance of ‘belonging to freedom-wound’, also metaphorised as ‘soulful space’, between sky and earth embracing ambiguity” (p. 111). From this orientation, I wish to offer a hermeneutics of vulnerability as a way of opening up my writing within the writerly space.

Through a hermeneutics of vulnerability a discovery of versions of self becomes illuminated. The soulful self, the writer, the researcher and interpreter are the chosen selves through which this thesis focuses. Their presence interweaves throughout the presentation and interpretation of my journal through a dialectic unfolding of the selves.

FIDELITY

Within my journey towards developing my hermeneutics of vulnerability I constantly revisit my attempts at uncovering my own authenticity. Paramount to my truthfulness is openness to vulnerability and its constant request to ask of myself to be unguarded and open to unexpectedness and unfamiliar happenings. Here I may find an authenticity in the form of truth emerge. By breaking my own conformity through the uncovering of self through vulnerability in search of an authenticity or truth of self, reminds me of Parker J. Palmer's, *To Know as We are Known* (Palmer, 1993) where lie the words of Leslie Dewart. He says that truth "is a *fidelity* rather than a *conformity*" and that "*Fidelity* is a relation towards another which one owes to oneself by reason of one's own nature. Conformity obligates from the outside. Fidelity...obligates from within" (in Palmer, 1993, p. 90).

A hermeneutics of vulnerability that embodies fidelity asks of the self to embrace uncertainty and instability as a way of maintaining a type of truth. Chris Lawn quotes Gadamer, "The fusion of the horizons of interpretation is nothing that one ever reaches" because "the horizon of interpretation changes constantly just as our visual horizon also varies with every step that we take" (2006, p. 66). I choose to continually reach towards the constantly changing horizon of interpretation and in doing so realise the complex beauty within my ongoing human story that Todres suggests, "can constitute a sense of self-forgiveness about being the way one is" (2007, p. 71). This thesis is a journey of rediscovering the darkest parts of me where I have become lost, and a quest to disclose my self to me as I unfold my crumpled self from old journal entries, like writings of ancient times inscribed on parchments, rubbed smooth and re-inscribed with new interpretations, written over with new understandings, palimpsests that still bear the traces of my lineage.

The identities of my soulful self, myself as reader and writer, and the relationships that develop between these entities through the growing awareness of their presence are woven into the ongoing narrative. They come into presence and mingle with each other in dialogue and just as quickly make themselves absent again. The interplay brings to light the complexity of my human-ness and within each version of self there are still more complexities that continue to give the narrative its pulse, its ongoing life. Understanding this means to recognise that writing my own narratives asks me to be open and accepting of my human-ness in ways that can be beautiful but also in ways that can be painful. As much as there is a beauty to my humanity there is an ugliness that cannot be ignored but, like the story of Narcissus, may imply a different possibility. There are other ways I may attempt to unlock my own truths and see other, hidden sides.

Bachelard says, “The corner is sort of a half-box, part walls, part door”, “the dialectics of inside and outside” (2014, p. 156). For many years I turned myself into the corner of my writerly space and firmly shut the door. Perhaps I had created a space of imagined security where I replaced being open to being closed. Throughout this thesis I resolve to keep my corner of the world, my writerly space, open to the outside. I wish to allow the breeze from the trees to keep my space fresh with oxygen and lend my ears to the wisdom of other voices so that we might celebrate my writerly space as a place of discovery and intelligent thought.

II

A CHORUS OF DISSONANT AND MELODIC VOICES

INTRODUCING THE CAST

If I were to be thrown into my story as I may envisage myself in Ancient Greece, might I imagine my narrative be revised as a tragic play not written by a man such as Aeschylus, but instead a woman whose own tenderness is realised as she scripts the story of my life? Might she write with passion and forgiveness towards myself and all women whose voices have been altered, suppressed or forgotten in their lives? Might people gather to listen and watch my own tale of tragedy unfold with women, rather than men as performers? In my narrative, the female protagonist does not succumb to disaster because of her own personal failings, instead, she searches for ways of encountering her imperfections knowing that this is her source of truth. Her search is aided by her chorus made up of three Goddesses—Fragility, *Ethos* and Honour. Together the chorus of voices interacts with the audience as they journey with the protagonist. Along the pilgrimage the chorus can be heard offering the protagonist words of unified, lyrical comfort and at other times they disagree and voices of dissonance may be discerned. The journey ends when the protagonist and the chorus realise that her imperfections and weaknesses are the source of her strength. She is not a tragic figure but one that is heroic.

With present openness, I search for a new voice with which to continue my narrative, this thesis, and acknowledge the Goddesses as selves as they surface. Through writing within the writerly space their voices slowly emerge as part of my ongoing inquiry. According to Laurel Richardson (1994) a researcher's self-knowledge and understanding of a topic

develops through writing. She therefore seeks to encourage individuals to accept and “nurture their own voices” (p. 963). Richardson uses the metaphor of a crystal as a “central imaginary”, in which we might validate our acts of writing. She says, “Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963).

Seeing my writing through the crystal prism opens me to hear the voices within my writing from a multitude of angles. My writing is not fixed but rather “crystallized”, drawing on different light sources and fracturing in different directions. For my journey of rediscovering my authentic voice I nurture a self-forgiveness towards self that might allow for voices long suppressed to hear themselves once again, this time with greater strength and a consciousness of care towards maintaining dialogue between inner and outer, both reflecting and refracting, thus deepening the writing experience.

I recall Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty and realise that I have found myself “thrown in[to]” my narrative and have arrived at a disturbance. For many years I developed a voice or a timbre of voice that mimicked my own and disguised a truth. I wrote in a way that represented who I may have wanted to be in my own attempt to be, as Todres suggests of Narcissus, “fixed, strong and ideal” (2007, p. 117).

In the search for my authentic voice I turn once again to the writerly space to examine the interactions that occur as I place myself within my corner of the world and submit to the experience of it. As I place myself in front of my journal and examine the words I am reminded of my fragility and the importance of accepting this as part of the hermeneutic experience. My fragility holds an honesty that reflects my staggered learning and my sense of incompleteness. Through the interpreting I wish to show compassion towards myself and others and of course, to be erudite in the way I convey my experiences. I also wish to make known the pain and discomfort that comes from disclosing one’s fragility to another human. I want to have a voice that emanates from this thesis and connects with others, a voice that is not afraid of fear and one that embraces passion and humility.

These reminders allow this thesis to begin to emerge and the authentic voice to become stronger. I have learned that there is a language that I need to employ that can allow ways to discuss, philosophically, my experiences and that by employing the language associated with phenomenology and philosophy, I can begin to engage not only in richer dialogue and thinking but can begin to see how I can live with greater phenomenological awareness and discovery of self. With these words, I hope to maintain the mysticism of the writerly space as a place where the ineffable is also encountered. There is something about my experience that once conceptualised into words is dissolved. For me, there is a delicacy about how we work phenomenologically with respect to what it means to be human.

As I begin to focus on the connections with the experiences in and around my writerly world questions begin to stream forward from within and challenge my quest. I find myself asking, what do I feel when I enter this space...? What happens inside of me when I write these words...? Who am I, what identity, if any, do I hold when I am in this space? The questions ask me to examine my intentionality towards an experience with greater consciousness and at different angles, which allow me to find other ways into the space that opens a phenomenological awareness and provides me with a language that attempts to harness some of those experiences. van Manen gives intentionality its context by writing,

Intentionality describes the ways we are “attached” to the world and how consciousness is always being *conscious* of something. All our thinking, feeling, and acting are “orientated to” or “with” things in the world. This also means that we can never step out of the world and view it from some detached vista. We are *au monde*, meaning simultaneously “in” and “of” the world. (2014, p. 62)

I am guided back to Gadamer and wonder, what do I bring with me to my writerly space? What of my own history and experiences do I bring and how? Can I remain impartial and set aside all prejudices that I may bring to my writerly space? The complexity of my task pushes me further to position myself in such a way that addresses the intentionalities of my inquiry towards writing, reading and the writerly space that I inhabit. At this moment, I make a new journal entry,

April 2017. Home

I invite myself into a state of reverie and with silence I bring myself into inner-focus.

As I sit in the afternoon sun I draw as much complete attention to myself as I can. I inhale a breath of air into my lungs and marvel at the miraculous automated mechanics of my body. Before I have time to consciously be aware of it I have already begun to exhale, I have blinked and crossed and uncrossed my legs, I sneeze. All this seems to be happening to me unwittingly, yet I am still in control. I am a blend of voluntary and involuntary actions.

I look down at my hands and examine the faded scars that could tell stories of childhood motorbike mishaps, risky youthful escapades and the soft breath of age sinking slowly into my epidermis. My skin has become thin and dry, like parchment. I clench my hand to make a fist and watch as the thick blue veins run their course up and over the bone-white knuckles that sit like barren boulders in the unforgiving landscape that is my hand. As I lament on the process of ageing and the changes that I see, I say to myself—, as an act of kindness, “but I am still the same person I was ten years ago on the inside”. Sometimes, if I walk past a mirror and catch sight of myself unexpectedly, for a moment I don’t realise it’s me, and then I am shocked by my own image. It is in these thin, slice of moments that I think, “that is not who I imagine myself to be”. In those moments, I have a sense that I am merely occupying the house of this decaying body and that something greater and more infinite lives within. This is what some may refer to as the soul but I cannot quite allow this other part of me to be reduced to an entity on its own just yet.

I cannot ignore my corporeal frame. It is the thing that allows me to exist so that I may relate to others. I can see, touch, communicate and connect with others. My body is the thing that allows me my passage through the real world. It is through my body that I experience life and so therefore it is part of my identity. Ricoeur’s authority on selfhood anchors me to my body as its own entity when he says, “One’s own body is the very place - in the strong sense of the term - of this belonging, thanks to which the self can place its mark on those events that are its actions” (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 319). My body is not something that I merely inhabit but is the vessel that helps to show the complexity and the fusion that exists between the different perspectives of my own selfhood. Versions of self, including the version that shows itself as my corporeal body, are not layers of self that can be peeled

away to reveal another, distinct layer. They are fusions of multiple versions of self that are in constant dialogue with each other in a chaotic harmony that has the potential to sing.

As I consider my body, my presence and the objects that surround me in the writerly space, I recognise I am both my own subject and object, the observer and the observed, the writer and the author. This equivocal position returns me to Merleau-Ponty's experience of the body and his extension beyond the representation of the body as a subject-object seesaw into the realm of the body as "knotting together of essence and existence" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 148). I am taken with his metaphor that my being is as if it has already been, even if uncertainly, sketched by an artist,

I have no other means of knowing the human body than by living it, that is, by taking up for myself the drama that moves through it and by merging with it. Thus, I am my body, at least to the extent that I have an acquisition, and reciprocally my body is something like a natural subject, or a provisional sketch of my total being. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 205)

Through my own hermeneutics of vulnerability, the tangible and accessible identities that I hold, such as female, Australian, mother, daughter, teacher, partner and friend gradually dissolve to reveal fragile, emotive selves. These are sometimes voiceless apparitions but maintain an internal dialogue that I yearn to understand.

The versions of selves that sit within the pages of my journal have mercurial qualities. I open the pages of my journal and there, in the handwriting of a young girl, lies a tangle of thoughts and words that evoke another me. I close the book and move to another journal where I read the words of a woman, a version of myself as an independent and spirited person who writes with such enthusiasm it becomes exhausting to read. I consider my reaction to my journal and acknowledge another me, myself in the very present-ness of time. I am surrounded by versions of self. It is undeniable that my inquiry into the writerly space returns inevitably to its central character, that is, the selfhood in all its various forms.

My journal opens a way to reveal some of the perspectives of my selfhood. It circumscribes somewhat stable boundaries within which densely rich, intersubjective conversations may occur when entering the writerly space. I often turn inwards to seek

clarity about my actions or experiences and I find myself at a strange place of feeling, both unfulfilled and fulfilled. There is a yet to be understood spark that ignites inside of me and send signals to untapped parts of my inner universe, calling on forgotten memories that send through unexpected sensations, realised and experienced through my body. Ricoeur's denial of the self as being a type of metaphysical entity and his assertion that the body is the very place of the self's belonging leads me towards an affirmation of who I am as I experience and perceive the real world from within my visceral being. My body presents itself as something with a limited capacity but my inner experiences and my increasing attention to them show that within me, there are no limits. They come from a place that is fathomless and anagogic. The fulcrum of my journal acts to stabilise me back to the real world and presents me with a portal through which I can see an objectified version of myself. Just like the shock of confronting a version of myself in front of a mirror, my journal initially shows me who I am, then who I think I am, and it has the potential to reveal more than what I might initially perceive.

My journal reveals a community of selves that exist in the writing space. As the selves emerge I become conscious of their existence and I deliberately let them inhabit the space uninterrupted by logic or reason. The versions of self blend and merge with each other and at other times are lost and forgotten only until they are realised once again through another interpretation. Sokolowski reminds me, "An important constituent of our personal identity is found in the interplay of memories, imaginations and perceptions, and in the flow of awareness into interior time" (2008, p. 32). I cannot begin to move forward without first reflecting and revisiting my own short journey into finding my community of selves that exist in the writerly space.

It is only through, what may be described as "reverie", which for me is a state of meditation, contemplation and transcendence within the writerly space, that a realisation of the multi-dimensional self exists. With heightened awareness, I move into my space of solitude. I pick up a journal and look at the handwriting. Immediately I am returning to the past aided by my fervent imagination. It may be my memory that draws from images and moments from my past but it is my imagination that gives image, colour and vitality and context for understanding the meaning of memory when imagining takes on a logic that may be transferred into the real world. Key to this transformation of understanding is my

imagination and its ability to interpret ideas, words or images that may appear before me and give them meaning through language.

The relationship that forms between my journal and the versions of self that the narrative represents, and versions of self that present themselves to the narrative begin to open further modalities of self. At this point, the relationship of selves circulates around three identities. Through the interpretation of my journal, a greater understanding of how the three identities interact develops, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes dissonantly.

UNSCRIPTED INTERSUBJECTIVE DIALOGUES

As I grapple with the constantly changing dynamics of beginning to understand both real-world time and an internal consciousness of time I am aware of how the two dominant forces continue to pulse and interweave amongst other layers of being or consciousness. Like temporality, nothing is completely still and so my observations also take on a life rhythm. With each new observation comes a new breath, a new vision and a new understanding. van Manen highlights the intricate path of hermeneutic reflection when he says, “Our lived experiences and the structures of meanings (themes) in terms of which these lived experiences can be described and interpreted constitute the immense complexity of the life world” (1990, p. 101). Through this lens of reflection, it becomes apparent that my writing is a source of deep self-understanding if I, when I am reader am able to orient myself to “be prepared to be attentive to what is said *in* and *through* the words...Certain meaning is better expressed through *how* one writes than in *what* one writes” (p. 131).

Whether my writing is dark or light, chaotic or ordered, falsely or honestly harmonious, or falsely or honestly dissonant, a symphony becomes audible. I tune into the melodies sung by the voices of an internal community of selves that interplay with the score of my journal in its original form and in its reconstitution, which takes place within this thesis. Everything is inextricably bound. Todres (2007) says, “phenomenologically orientated thought approaches the tension between psychological and spiritual levels of discourse, finally locating human embodiment as the integrating ‘place’ where both human vulnerability and

spiritual freedom can happen” (p. 126). My own writerly space is a place where writing allows me to bring the “psychological” and the “spiritual” together in embodied, symphonic “tension”, in a dialogue, “where both human vulnerability and spiritual freedom can happen”.

GODDESS OF FRAGILITY - THE SOULFUL SELF

Initially moving into my writerly space, entities begin to emerge and make themselves known. I am aware of myself in my corporeal body in this space. Other versions of self are present but hidden. I rest my hands on my heart, as though this is the source from which *anagogia* and purity emanate. The Latin root of the word ‘heart’ is *cor* and as language weaves its way through time and across vast lands it finds a morpheme in French as *cour* from which we find ‘courage’. I write with courage, “the seat of feelings” (Online Dictionary), from where my heart reveals pain, grief, joy and hope. My heart and soul intertwine from where I am compelled into a place where profoundness resonates. Todres (2007) might describe this as “soulful space” where, an “existential achievement...provides human spirituality with a creative ‘wound’, and this provides a foundation for interpersonal empathy and care” (p. 127). With Todres’ words and my hand on my heart I am brought closer to understanding what I refer to as the soulful self. The soulful self is not tangible—it is *abstracta* (Sokolowski, 2008). It is present but absent. I cannot look directly at it. Although it is housed within my skin, it is from a depth that seems infinite. It is as though my body were a universe and my soulful self the internal celestial body around which stars and planets orbit. In my celestial body dwells an energy with an unknown potential and the source of the chaos of my being, a blend of memory and imagination. Within these dark inner realms, I seek out the state of “soulful space”, “an embodiment of both vulnerability and freedom; a freedom-wound that grounds interpersonal empathy and openness” (Todres, 2004, p. 116). It is in the writerly space that I can come closer to uniting with my soulful self.

Within the writerly space comes my time for what Bachelard describes as “poetic reverie” (2010). For me, this is the state of the transcendental shift between the real world and the world of dreams and inner imaginings. Bachelard describes this state as a “sort of stability or tranquillity. It helps us escape time,” and “the entire soul is presented in the poetic universe of the poet” (Bachelard, 2010, p. 14). By removing myself from time and its real-

world impositions and entering my own state of reverie, I find my soulful self waiting to be invited into a dialogue. What manifests is an act of writing where my soulful self finds opportunity to emerge and engage with real-world time and real-world experiences, although not always is the soulful self revealed in the narrative. It is in the dialogue that occurs through moments of reverie where “memories arrange themselves in tableaux” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 14) and, as Bachelard most importantly sheds light on,

...that reverie gives us the world of a soul, and that a poetic image bears witness to a soul which is discovering its world, the world where it would like to live and where it deserves to live. (2010, p. 15)

Through the act of writing, I can acknowledge my soulful self and carefully release her untainted truths to reveal real-world experiences. When travelling, the ultimate suspension of being neither here nor there, I find myself writing these words,

9th October 2014. An Bang Beach, Vietnam

The clarity of chaos at An Bang Beach. Small laneways of cracked concrete and seemingly dishevelled houses, it looks and smells like poverty. With each journey on my pushbike, head high and with growing familiarity and comfort, the sophistication of the streets begin to make themselves known. Dirt tracks reveal a clever system of connecting roads, perfect for bikes and walking. Neat vegetable gardens and clipped hedges behind small fences often cleverly created from recycled bamboo or other objects found washed up on the beach previously discarded overboard by faceless humans. I am delightfully surprised at the apparently empty French bakery where food miraculously appears from behind counters (pineapples, eggs, tomatoes). I discover beauty salons (The Mango Spa) and not one but two barbershops. I stop outside one of the barbershops to hear classical music and see a man in full recline being carefully attended by the barber. This is indeed a sophisticated community. Their pride now so obvious to me that only days before had seemed so primitive. I am humbled but also deeply ashamed at my misunderstanding.

In this journal extract the soulful self can be faintly heard. She is often quiet and her voice is only just discernible. She is intelligent and perceptive to the world and opens herself to

the subtleties of the human condition. For many years she remains mute but always present. Rediscovering her voice is my personal, ongoing quest within this thesis and this is achieved through acts of writing within the writerly space. Artist and writer Salomé Voeglin suggests that by listening to the body in silence we may have an opportunity to hear beyond the “authoritative ‘I’”, beyond the ‘I’ “whose status and reality is so pervasive as to be transparent” (n.d., par 3), the ‘I’ that I can hear every time I speak. We can reposition ourselves and acknowledge other possible ‘I’s.’ Voeglin says,

I see the focus on the body not as a subjective indulgence, but as a necessary relocation of authority, pluralising its possibility and putting its nominal position into doubt, as well as demanding responsibility. The ‘I’ that is audible to itself acknowledges other ‘I’s’ and at least understands if not hears their audibility. (n.d., par 4)

Voeglin continues and suggests the value of acknowledging or understanding other ‘I’s’ places the authoritative ‘I’ in a position of “humility or responsibility...that makes the self doubt and the other count” (2016) n.d., par 4).

The act of writing with acknowledgement of the soulful self affords me the opportunity to embody my own vulnerabilities and make them known to others through writing. Tordes goes on to explain that embracing our vulnerability may take us further on “a journey that is potentially the source and depth of human compassion” (2004, p. 2). The soulful self that emerges in the writing is the self that is from within, the one that harbours pain and suffering and embraces vulnerability through its authenticity. This version of self is difficult to capture. She is elusive and must be treated with respect and honour if she is to reveal herself at all. The soulful self is the keeper of memories and nurturer of the imagination. She is truth and honesty. Only the writerly space, the place of solitude that I have created, allows for the emergence of her identity.

GODDESS OF ETHOS — THE SELF AS WRITER

The self that is writer has the ominous task of transcribing the truths of the soulful self into a language that resonates with the real world. The writer self is logic and reason and seeks clarity that can sometimes be at odds with the wishes of the soulful self. The union of the two selves, of writer and soulful self, and what manifests in the writing is the will of the

writer in agreement or in discord with the soulful self. Within the writerly space an existential relational connection between soulful self and writer self exists. Combined, they are agents of truth. From the initial vulnerability of soulful self comes a truth that asks to be heard through the hand and heart of the writer. If the writer complies a union occurs that may evolve into a compassion for self and others. It is cyclic in form, always changing and with constant movement.

The understanding of the two presences of soulful self and self as writer have unique characteristics that ask to be honoured. A constant transference of placement between soulful self and writer self is part of their chaotic relationship. The soulful self is fragile and loose, juxtaposed with the self as writer who is rigid and armed with a toolbox of words and temporal constructions. There is a juggling act that occurs between the two selves, one vying for a more authoritative voice over the other at various times. Sometimes my writing is layered with heavy structure and a formalisation of language that allows for manipulation of truths and gives dominance to the position and power of the role of self as writer and suppresses the soulful self and her voice. The protocol of living in the temporal world and the necessity to assimilate with a community of sometimes harsh beings has held me from revealing my private truths. The self as writer is protective and unwilling for the soulful self to be damaged. In the following journal entry I write with the shielded words of self as writer. My gardening journal is used as a way of grounding myself in a space where I find comfort and respite but I am unable to release the soulful voice at this earlier time in my life in my writing.

21st February 1997. Fern Tree. Garden Journal

Today I sent off two orders:

Digger's Club - \$367.50

Bulb Express - \$16.50

I'm so excited about getting my perennials. I can't wait to plant my lavender and curry plant.

Bad news in the family:

Anthony - aeroplane crash

Petra – burgled

Dad – scans

I'm sure that it's an unfortunate but quickly passing stage.

Today I bought an Alpine Strawberry for the rockery.

Throughout this thesis I return to this single journal entry as it was written. There are dozens of entries before and after filled with more details about the progress of the garden. The entry is distinct as it makes a cursory but important note about my family who I had moved away from to begin a new chapter in my life. The physical distance and lack of contact with family members left me with a deepening sense of loss and pushed me into my own urgency to create a home. I challenged myself to become strong, fearless and independent and in doing so I lost something of myself. This thesis will return to tenderly unearth and gently till the soil around this journal extract until new shoots of hope and clarity might emerge.

In her journal entry, the authoring voice is fully present. She is not willing for a crack to be opened in which the soulful self might come tumbling out. She is wise enough to know the damage that might come from the soulful self being made audible through her journal. If the soulful self chooses the words they might be messy, chaotic and senseless. Once the words have been cast their permanence leaves the soulful self and the writer vulnerable. Once the wound is opened the damage might be irreparable. The Goddess voice rises, makes an ethical decision to be the stoic protectress of her family and of her soulful self, to keep herself from harm. Her voice of responsibility is heard in her insistence on mentioning what she would prefer to be unmentioned, the 'bad news in the family' and in particular 'Dad-scans'. The writer knows that the soulful self only needs a trigger, the smallest of reminders to bring back the full force of the memory of her relationship with her father and the pain that comes with it. Her *ethos* ensures that this moment must be marked in time for her wisdom suspects that one day, her journal will be revisited. I applaud the writer and her authoritative and deliberate manner with which she shields the soulful self and reminds the future reader of what was once held in those moments.

The self as writer has an ambiguity about her. She chooses to suppress the voice of the soulful self but she also allows for it to be heard through her own voice in her short, sharp sentences. The self as writer understands the importance of memory and imagination and does not wish to bury her past yet she stifles it in her words enough so they are covered. Her dry, emotive words hint at hiding the truth but she never lies.

A way of seeing my relationship between soulful self and self as writer appears in the abstract of Linda Finlay's article, "Dancing Between Embodied Empathy and Phenomenological Reflection".

In phenomenological research, layered understandings emerge from a complex process of experiencing and reflection, engaged in by both researcher and participant. Researcher and participant engage in a dance, moving in and out of experiencing and reflection while simultaneously moving through a shared intersubjective space that is the research encounter. (Finlay, 2006, p. 1)

It is the "shared intersubjective space" where the soulful self and self as writer preside along layers of temporality within the writerly world.

The self as writer struggles with her position as meaning-maker. She struggles with finding the right words and the right phrases. Some days, the weight of responsibility as writer is too great and the words are forced and misconstrued. Other days, she relinquishes her responsibility and lets the soulful self show herself through the words, irreverent about grammar and its rules.

Barthes, in his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author" challenges the authoritative voice of the author and lets free the words to become "eternal written here and now". He distinguishes the author and the "modern writer (scriptor)".

The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book: the book and the author take their places of their own accord on the same line, cast as a before and an after: the Author is supposed to feed the book – that is, he pre-exists it, thinks, suffers, lives for it; he maintains with his work the same relation of antecedence a father maintains with his child. Quite the contrary, the modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously

with his text; he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is written here and now. (Barthes, 1967, p. 4)

Barthes' words ask me to think of the self as writer not as an entity on its own but one of the blends of self that cannot be untied from the other versions of self. The narrative is only brought to life by the eyes of those who choose to read it. As I read my journal I am aware of the writer, as she is me, and I have a leaning towards her protective words and their possible hidden meanings. I know that she might chose to offer only what is safe and submerge other more fragile narratives. As much as the writer is part of the soulful self, they have different voices and this is fully realised when the self as interpreter rises fully to the present and reflects on what she sees before her.

Mark Danielewski's foreword in *The Poetics of Space* (2014) ask us to "risk to a mind just mad enough to make out of one world another world" (p. vii). Like Barthes, Danielewski dissolves the "being which preceded or transcends his writing" and allows the being that is present to "make out of one world another world" (p. vii). The self as writer is a risk-taker.

The dangers of writing are a constant theme in the dialogues of Plato and account for the fact that Socrates never wrote. The real fear is that words, once frozen in written form, will be misunderstood and misrepresented without the presence of the speaker to clear up ambiguities and unintended meanings. (Lawn, 2006, p. 81)

Compelled to write, and as her way of not forgetting, the self as writer is wary of the dangerous nature of her task, of casting her words into frozen moments of time. She knows that she cannot write with absolute authenticity for fear she might be misinterpreted. But she also knows that her journal holds a truth that can only be discovered when reunited with its owner. Yet, Lawn says "Gadamer regards the real task of his hermeneutics as revitalizing the written word in such a way that it returns to the condition of speech" (Lawn, 2006, p. 81). The writerly self is a custodian of the past. Without her diligence of recording, the revitalising of her journal may not happen.

The Goddess of Honour is me in absolute ongoing present-ness. As I seek to find and listen to the voices of my fragility and *ethos* I am aware and consumed by my constantly changing self and my ability to honour the voices of the selves. With each moment that passes I move forward into new ways of knowing that invite strength into the voices of the selves. Equally, with each moment, I am sensitive to myself and the “open-wound” of fragility that I have come to wish to wear with courage and an open heart. Some days I feel its burden like a shroud wrapped tightly around my heart. I fear I cannot shift the cloth and let a truthful voice come from within. The burden is felt when realising that my years of journaling hold a greater significance to my being than merely superficial observations. Interpreting my journal requires a responsibility and a deeply compassionate and sensitive position to both my inner and outer worlds, my spiritual and my physical being.

29th August 2016. Home.

Initially, as I began to hover closer towards the object of the thesis, the examination of my personal narratives, I can sense my hesitation. Again, the notion of vulnerability begins to form shape but this time it is focused directly at myself, the interpreter. I recognise that the thesis does not rest entirely within the narrative but the way in which the narrative is handled. It is at this point that I begin to consider my own stance, as the interpreter, in the absolute present, and what this effect may have on the interpretation of my personal accounts spanning over thirty years.

Another challenge for me as the interpreter is the ongoing revisiting of the narrative. With each new reading comes new understanding. The power of the narrative lies within the reading and this keeps the narrative alive but at what point might the interpreter shift its meaning? At what point can the narrative be left to rest and remain unresolved? My own journal has lain idle for over fifteen years and I wonder, during this period of gestation, how I have changed and what this brings to the interpretation. Now I question myself as interpreter and my ability to honour my journal. I feel the weight of the narrative, as the subject shifts towards myself, the interpreter.

With each new reading, I am open to understanding more aspects of the self. Stages of shame, hurt, anger, frustration are emerging but also small doses of compassion. This is profound and a new experience. A feeling of compassion towards self without the bitterness of guilt or self-indulgence wrapping itself around this gentle way of being is almost sublime.

This thesis yields to the voices of the soulful self and self as author and writer and now I attempt to tune in to find the voice of my present self as interpreter. What biases, as an interpreter, might I bring to the interpretation? I am wary of the arbitrary nature of interpreter as the one who carries the eternal present and allows the reshaping and on-going retelling of the narrative. Hers is a delicate position that comes with its own responsibilities.

Todres calls upon aesthetics when communicating the richness or “texture” of an experience to the reader, thus giving the reader “the possibility of intuitive empowerment” (2007, p. 47). In the ongoing narrative I am encouraged to bring “texture” to my writing as a way of deepening my interpretation and allowing others to develop a personal connection with the narrative. Conversely, Todres then introduces “structure”, a distancing in which the “inner logic” and “inner relationships” of the phenomenon is described. He goes on, “In communicating our research discoveries, the challenge is to find some degree of balance or harmony between communicating the ‘texture’ and ‘structure’ of human phenomena” (p. 47).

Within the exploration of the phenomena of my writerly space I find the balance between texture and structure within the voices. The self as interpreter is questioning and wishes to remain slightly removed from the soulful self and the self as writer. She is aware of her intertwining relationship with both soulful self and self as writer and has empathy for both voices. She wishes to care for them both and honour their individual voices in her interpretation. She is also aware of her present ownership of the narrative. The relationship between the self as interpreter, writer and the soulful self is one that is filled with compromise and challenge. Like any relationship that comprises a group of three, there is one that feels left out. The harmony between the soulful self and the writer might be dissolved when the interpreter, a speculative identity, questions the motives of the writer or the authenticity of the soulful self. The interpreter asks whose intentions are being

represented in those words—is the writer being fair to the soulful self or is the ego of the writer dominating the words? She seeks in and around the words to find any hidden meanings. The irony of the self as interpreter is reading the narrative of herself and this creates the circle of selves that continue to examine each other and the problems that arise through the hermeneutical process.

Josselson (2004) distinguishes two forms of hermeneutics in Ricoeur's work, "a hermeneutics of faith which aims to restore meaning to a text and a hermeneutics of suspicion which attempts to decode meanings that are disguised" (p. 1). This distinction between the hermeneutics of faith and suspicion offers me a way of examining my own personal narrative as the reader and consider more fully the possible biases that I may bring to the interpretation. Josselson refers to these two ways of approaching text hermeneutically as one that is restorative and the other one of demystification. From which distinction do I hermeneutically approach the text of my personal narrative?

I see my journal as an authentic construction between the soulful self and self as writer. It is written in such a way that I am able to absorb and restore its message "in its given form...understood as a cultural mechanism for our apprehension of reality, as a place of revelation" (Josselson, 2004, p. 3). My journal relates events and experiences that allow me, the reader to shape a history into the narrative. During the interpretation, I bring my own experiences to the text before me. It brings my narrative to life and long-forgotten feelings and memories resurface. It is in the arrival of my realisation of my immersion in my journal that I begin to question the authority of the writer. I ask, why did she not let the soulful self have a voice more often? Why did she choose to increasingly suppress the soulful voice? Why does the original writer adopt her own tuneless and dissonant voice?

Josselson says, "Ricoeur's analytic distinction allows us to conceptually address the question that most narrative researchers, both neophyte and experienced, inevitably address—Can we read in a text what is 'not there?'" (2004, p. 4). This places me as the reader in a delicate position that comes with its own vulnerabilities.

The contrast between the hermeneutics of restoration and the hermeneutics of demystification, however, refers not to a property of texts

but to the stance of the interpreter: whether he or she conceives of the interpretative process as being one of distilling, elucidating, and illuminating the intended meanings of the informant or of discovering meanings that lie hidden within a false consciousness. (Josselson, 2004, p. 5)

The contrast of which Josselson speaks constantly challenges all three of my identities. I know that not all is being revealed as I am privy partly to the re-remembering of what has not been written. My self, as writer may not always disclose aspects of my soulful self, deliberately or knowingly. This is surely taken into account during acts of interpreting. Much of the magic occurs when we revisit our own narratives, re-reading can jog the memory. This is a reason for writing many of my accounts, I want to give of myself something to my future self.

As the interpretation continues to undergo shaping as time moves forward, new ways of seeing make themselves known to me as the reader or interpreter. I return to Todres (2007) and ask of the self as writer and the self as interpreter to look inwards to the soulful self for assistance in finding my vulnerable self and sustaining this position with human compassion.

Whilst the vantage of hermeneutics that we adopt, faith or suspicion, can alter our interpretation, Josselson considers “ways in which they can be interlinked in the practice of narrative research,” and suggests, quoting Ricoeur, that, “Understanding the opposing stances and adopting them both as a form of analysis allows us to ‘recognize the contours of the hermeneutic field’” (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 9, in Josselson, 2004, p. 4). The ways in which the hermeneutics of faith and suspicion can be interlinked into my own research is by bringing the version of selves together and allow internal dialogue to occur, tempered carefully so that each version of self, each aspect is shown and respected. Acknowledging the complexities of the research relationship between interpreter, soulful self and self as writer and “effectively bracketing these contexts or at least noticing them, a purer distillation of meanings is achieved” (Josselson, 2004, p. 7).

To return to Gadamer and “revitalizing the written word in such a way that it returns to the condition of speech” (Lawn, 2006, p. 81), I herald the presence of the interpreter and her manner in which she brings the voices together in understanding the meaning of her journal.

To have the versions of self unite and sing together in unison, in harmony, to present this thesis, I examine my stories and “As I increasingly face the themes and details of my life, I develop a particular kind of relationship to my own experience, one in which I am both observer and participant, commentator and actor” (Todes, 2007, p. 52).

The Goddesses of Fragility, *Ethos* and Honour and their identities as the soulful self, the writer and interpreter and how they are woven into the narrative, coming into presence and just as quickly making themselves absent again, brings to light the complexity of my humanness. Within each version of self are still more complexities that continue to give the narrative its pulse, its ongoing life. Understanding this means to recognise that writing our own narrative asks us to be open and accepting of our vulnerability as a way of unlocking our truths. It asks us, as Lawn (2006) suggests, to “bring the words on the page to life; to do this we need to treat the text not as an inert repository of fixed meanings but as a partner, a partner in dialogue. And a dialogue is essentially spoken not written” (p. 82). Writing to be read is thus to imagine a reader as a partner in dialogue, a reader whose empathy, compassion and intellect I can touch as I write.

III

INNER CELESTIAL NIGHTS

You darkness that I come from,
I love you more than the fire
that rings the world,
because it shines
only for a single orbit,
and of this creature knows nothing at all.

But the darkness holds everything together:
forms and flames, animals and myself,
all thrown together,
humans and powers-
and it could be that a great strength
moves all about me where I am.

I believe in nights.

Maria Rainer Rilke 1830

SUBMERGING INTO DARKNESS

Maria Rainer Rilke embraces the night as something enormous and intense that extends beyond his human form and wraps throughout the world, its contents and “holds everything together”. Rilke’s words bring me back to a memory “that I come from” where I too am held together by darkness. Rather than Rilke’s world where “animals and myself, are all thrown together”, I am alone and unaware of the world outside and remain housed in a dark womb. I wrote the following journal entry when becoming more alert to my temporal fluidity. In breaking down the structure and formality of time, I seem to be able to reach further into tenebrous places where memories lay dormant.

5th June 2014

I have extracted something from my memory from somewhere so deep that it has no name. It is bottomless, it is a deep, repressed breath slowly being exhaled onto paper. It is sound and texture and it weeps with heartache.

...As a small child, after being put to bed, I would close my eyes and wait for sleep to come. Gradually sleep would slowly drag me towards another world where nothing was stable and time was liquid. In my dream-like state I become aware of this new timeless world and alert to its surroundings.

My childhood memory in its soft, formless ambiguity brings me to a place of awareness without understanding. As I deepen into re-remembering I realise my sense of self in childhood innocence. Moving further into my childhood dream I become increasingly less grounded, as though I am entirely sure of my presence but remain unconnected to my surroundings, as if, recalling Merleau-Ponty, “The world is entirely on the inside, and I am entirely outside of myself” (2012, p. 430).

I continue with the memory...

...At the onset of the dream I find myself in a cube, not a room. The cube slowly tilts forward and back. The sound made by the movement of the cube is magnified, as though it moves over amplified sandpaper.

My dream is one that recurred often throughout my childhood. I feel myself again within the dream space and my giddiness comes from a realisation that within this temporal layer between daydream and real-world time, I have no past, no history with which to recognise myself. I feel as though this is a type of enlightenment, an entry into something new. I now wonder whether the dream might be the moment I exited from my mother’s womb from darkness into the soft, diffused light of the birth canal where I wait whilst the “cube slowly

tilts, forward and back and side to side” like the rolling waves of labour. I wonder if this is the moment in which I came into a consciousness of being.

From these diffused, embryonic beginnings, seeds are planted from which the roots of memory will grow. In time, an understanding in the shape of language will extend memory and its possible meanings. For now, I make reflective notes in my ongoing journal of my reaction to my earliest memory, “I am unable to express the emotion that circulates around the dream in its dream state or in its remembered state”. For many years this childhood dream and memory remains suspended in a darkness, not a forgotten place but instead a place where the ineffable is housed. My inner rooms of darkness are “like a great strength moves all about me where I am” (Rilke, 2004). They are both filled with wonder and pain.

My memory is vast, mysterious and forms a glorious part of my being. It is full of truths and possible misperceptions. It can be whimsical, surprising and full of joy but equally as brutal when it surfaces something that shocks me with flashes of undesirable, unwanted moments. Imagining takes hold of the flashing recollections that are my memories and shapes them into something tangible with accessible meaning. It gives image to my nebulous, distant and out of reach sensations and builds a narrative where objects, people, sets and scenes play out in a temporal context. Imagining shores up what might be uncertain into a certainty by reshaping the narrative. The ambiguous capacity of imagining, like the inner voices, has a responsibility to remain truthful to the self. How can I remain not just sane but confident that my memory and imagination are working for me rather than against me? Are my inner voices, my sonorous chorus, enough to both protect and incarnate my authentic self?

Imagining with its reshaping capacity has many functions. It may choose to reshape my memories to alleviate the pain, to give humour to an awkward moment, to dull overwhelming sensations. It may steer me away from something black and dark and instead let me see light and beauty. Imagining may serve to protect or ruin me. Memory and its constant companion, imagination, interweave into my writerly space. They dance between the pages of my journal and into the self as interpreter and self as writer. As I try to remain objective to my journal I am drawn into the narrative not only through the words but through the tug of memory and imagination into making the present self permanently

embedded in my journal. In rekindling a kinder relationship with my writerly self and my journal I become both excited and anxious at what my journal ignites within me. What might surface? What might be disclosed?

As the fusion of the selves continues to reappear, grow and develop, a levering of constant, re-remembering and renewal of memories refreshed in the present carries the versions of selves into other dimensions. My memories are fragments of image and sound but mostly, when I wait and listen intently to my inner responses, it is feelings and emotions from the past that wrap themselves around me and hold me tightly. It is in times of solitude and silence that I withdraw into myself and find memories waiting to be explored. Bachelard says that in solitude “memories arrange themselves in tableaux” (2014, p. 14). In my present reverential solitude, I sense my face soften and my focus on the outside world blur as I leave to journey inwards. I arrive to feel dark forms emerging. I adjust my inner focus to another childhood re-imagining. This time I become conscious of fusing remembered events with imagination. Unlike my earliest childhood memory as described before, I am conscious of their happening in real-world time and then stored in the passage of time and memory, and now reconstituted in my own “tableaux” of images, senses and emotions arranged before me.

As a young girl, I loved to dance and became a dedicated classical ballet dancer from about the age of five years old. I practised this discipline for hours each week forming a strong part of my identity and my life only to stop abruptly at about thirteen. I gave up dancing because I was bullied and became isolated from the other dancers. Moving into the memory I flinch as my olfactory senses discover the faint fleeting scent of leather shoes. Remarkably the odour of leather is brought to me by memory. My memory also delivers me a vision and I sense an apparition of ephemeral blush pink dancing tights and worn satin pointe shoes. The sensorial moment is gone as fast as it arrives, leaving me with the static impression of the cold, icy dance hall. Here I see myself, both as observer and embodied, standing at the barre, prepared for warm up. In my present body, as interpreter I feel her tension and at once I am reunited, momentarily, with her as a young dancer. Now, my imagination steers me deeper into the narrative. Not only can I remember what happened but somehow, as I recall the memory, I am able to see her engaged in the activity. I am both

observer and participant. Merleau-Ponty validates my bodily perception with the *cogito* as type of truth.

At the root of all our experiences and all our reflections, we find, then, a being which immediately recognizes itself, because it is its knowledge both of itself and of all things, and which knows its own existence, not by observation and as a given fact, nor by inference from any idea of itself, but through direct contact with that existence. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 432)

The ambiguity between subject and object and the interchanging perspectives between the two allow the narrative to act as a crystal prism that Richardson suggests “reflects externalities and refract within themselves” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963). I enter into the narrative,

Standing at the ballet barre she feels acutely upset and only just managing to hold back her tears. She is a victim of typical teenage bullying. Through the slow, subversive bullying she is made deliberately aware that she is not welcome in the group of some of the dancers. The strongest most urgent recall of this memory is the feeling of hurt, abandonment and rejection. As she stands there, feeling pain, she has the urge to fight back and not crumble. She does not want others to see her tears and so she becomes angry and forcefully but unnecessarily pushes the girl in front of her and in doing so turns her position from being one of victim to perpetrator.

I see that it is wrong of her to behave this way and the memory holds an eternal guilt that swiftly courses through my veins to my present being, a reminder of my shame. Now, with the strength found in opening myself to vulnerability, my interpreter’s voice asks the soulful self to consider the young dancer and her actions. The soulful self tenderly accepts the young girl’s incident as she looks past the narrative, the scene played out before her, and into the body of the young dancer. Her insight reveals the girl’s harbouring pain that she is unable to release. She is tense and her pain is contained within her body like a toxin. As the memory fleshes itself out and I look for a beginning or an end, I am aware of a deeper, more sensory connection that occurs. Like a whisper it stirs within me in the present, and reminds me that within my being truth exists. I unfold myself to feel rejection, humiliation and shame brought forward by my soulful voice and I, as interpreter choose not to ignore these feelings any

longer. If I am to be truthful to my present and past self I must listen to the soulful self's narration so that the hidden stories that are suspended within my narrative might come forward in the safety of the writerly space.

If my memory, in its amoebic, unfocussed form can bring forth such imaginings that allow for the soulful self to be heard in her full voice, what might her journal unearth? What dialogue may unfold between myself as interpreter, the writerly self and soulful self as the pages of my journal are opened and my words are revitalised in the present? In *Celebration of Peace* the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin writes,

Much, from the morning onwards,
Since we have been a discourse and have heard from one another,
Has human kind learnt; but soon we shall be song.

(Hölderlin, 1990, p. 235)

The fragment of Hölderlin's poetics coerce my inner "discourse" to become increasingly audible and allow the exchanges between the selves to deepen and develop. I wish to hear their "song" and so let them linger without supressing them into a silence for I realise, without their voices I may become indistinct and without texture. Lawn "explores the centrality of language" (2006, p. 76) in the works of Gadamer where for Gadamer, "in relation to language, writing seems a secondary phenomenon" (1989, p. 392, in Lawn, 2006, p. 81). Lawn suggests, "The written word is somehow underscored by speech", and it is in "the constant play of dialogue" (p. 82) where we might find meaning. For Lawn,

...to understand a written text we need to treat it as a partner in dialogue and seek to revitalize the written word, bring it to life by engaging it in conversation, which is all understanding is anyway. (2006, p. 82)

As interpreter, the significance of maintaining an open dialogue between the selves becomes fully realised. It requires of me to remain open, with arms outstretched in the face of "temporal uncertainty" (Todres, 2007, p. 116). I cannot afford to deny my vulnerability for fear of losing my connection with the inner selves. It is only in remaining vulnerable and living with the "wound" where I may risk facing "an unfinished self that cannot be irrevocably grasped", or "falling from the oneness of belonging" (p. 116) I may continue to remain in conversation with the selves.

As I follow Lawn's subtle hermeneutic commentary of the ongoing dialogical partnership between text and interpreter, Todres delivers me further into the hermeneutic writerly space where he suggests, "each of us is formed as a passionate question, an incompleteness that lives with us and to which we respond" (2007, p. 116). With passionate questioning towards self and my ongoing restlessness in finding a truth about self in my journal writing, I let the words of Merleau-Ponty release me into another restful, hermeneutic pose. He says,

My hold on the past and my hold on the future are precarious and my possession of my own time is always deferred until the moment when I fully understand myself, but that moment can never arrive since it would again be a moment, bordered by the horizon of a future, and would in turn require further developments in order to be understood. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 362)

Ironically, no sooner do I hear my soulful voice than she retreats into darkness. Like Merleau-Ponty and his precarious hold on the past and the future, my soulful self is also fleetingly transitional in her movements between past, present and future. Just as her voice becomes audible and I begin to make sense of her words, she may disappear and leave me in my incomplete form of a "passionate question". I sense I am moving closer to understanding what is required of me to embrace my fragility but I am not yet practised enough to fully embody living openly exposed. I endeavour for my vulnerable self to be, as Julia Annas offers in her account of what it means to be virtuous, "a *deep* feature" of my being (2011, p. 9). Annas suggests,

Because a virtue is a disposition it requires time, experience and habituation to develop it, but the result is not routine but the kind of actively and intelligently engaged practical mastery that we find in practical experts. (p. 14)

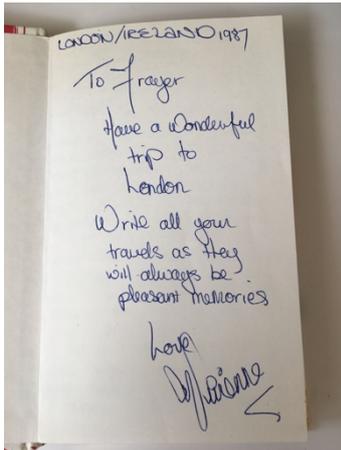
Todres says that "ongoing participation" in embracing openness "one is changed *in* the participation" and has the ability "of being moved and touched in many different ways at different times". He refers to this as "the gift of wound" and as associated with belonging to "freedom-wound" where we may be provided with the "possibility of an intersubjectivity that grants both freedom and empathy" (2007, p. 118-119). Annas also suggests that "virtue is a part of the agent's happiness or flourishing" and thus offers a freedom to its owner (2011, p. 1). Both Todres and Annas bring a profoundness previously misunderstood

towards living with “wound” and I now return to embrace openness and find voice the of the Goddess of Fragility once more.

To seek the Goddess out I retrieve the myth of Persephone, the Goddess of Spring. She is unaware of the deal struck between Zeus, her father and her uncle, Hades. As she picks flowers from a meadow Hades bursts forth from beneath the Earth on his chariot drawn by black horses. She is dragged, screaming into the underworld, into a place of darkness and unfamiliar terrain, unknowing of her future. I wonder what strength she finds to endure her time below the surface of Earth? I wonder if she becomes defiant and angry towards Hades? I wonder how long she continues to scream and I wonder if she remains vulnerable and frightened within the dark tombs of the underworld. Did she dream of daylight and sunshine? Or might she, as Jacqueline Rose suggests possible, have decided “rather the idea of light triumphing over darkness...dark with dark might be the more creative path” (Rose, 2015, p. xi). What creations might emerge from Persephone’s time in the underworld?

My journal writing in earnest begins in darkness. As though awakening from a dream I find myself alone and cold and unable to escape the torment of being a teenager. Feeling trapped I turn to writing as a way of seeking solitude. I had recently moved out of my mother’s house after a long and desperate battle of wanting to be heard and trusted as her daughter but continually failing to meet her strict expectations. From my mother’s suffocating hold I went to my father and step-mother’s hedonistic household, where I spent many hours alone and without the warm comfort of family interaction. To the world I loosely resembled a typical teenager but my world was deprived of the human connections needed for my soulful self to flourish.

Teenage torment and confusion show themselves in my first travel journal. In a small pocket book, given to me by Vivienne, a friend of my parents, I noted down awkward observations as we swiftly made our way around London and Ireland in 1987. Vivienne, wrote on the first page of the diary,



To Frayer

Have a wonderful trip to London. Write all of your travels as they will always be pleasant memories.

Love Vivienne

Up until receiving that travel journal I don't recall ever being asked to record my personal thoughts or opinions with such sincerity. Lessons at school had taught me to write in styles with intended audiences but Vivienne's words beckon me to write to an

audience of future self. At the time, I remember not being very sure what to write about or who I was supposed to be writing to. Somehow, this travel journal felt both partially public and private and I wondered, what would I say or do if someone asked me if they could have permission to read it? To stay safe, I refrained from writing anything damaging. I didn't vent any anger, I didn't complain and I didn't write about my feelings but I did keep writing and I haven't stopped.

31st June 1987. Melbourne, Australia

We got out to the airport okay although at check-in they didn't believe it was Janet's passport! We had a special room for conference people to stay in whilst waiting for the flight.

We got on the plane and we were in the bubble! I had to sit next to a funny old American guy but he was okay.

Downstairs was crowded but upstairs was really nice!

Her teenage self scans her surroundings for snippets of random observations to note down in her journal. She is quietly delighted that her step-mother's passport, which still bears her maiden name, is questioned and a source for awkwardness. She has no understanding that in many ways she is writing to stay in touch with her soulful self. Her writing stops her from diminishing and floating away from the cold world that she inhabits. Writing holds her together and grounds her to her surroundings. In journal writing she finds protection and comfort from a world that is often brutal, confusing and unforgiving. In her journal,

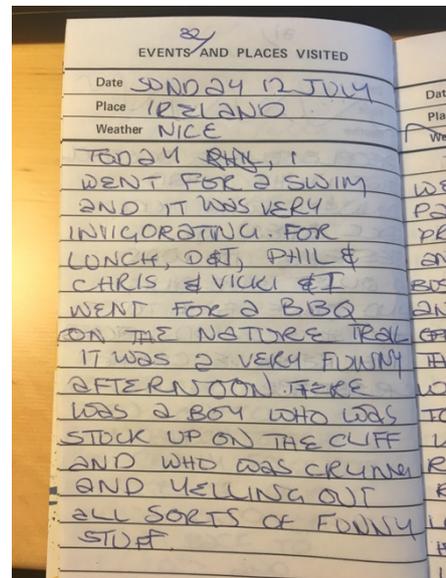
she finds a place to hide both literally and metaphorically. Gradually, without her becoming aware, writing becomes a habit that almost borders on an obsession. The addictive nature of her writing quietly surges and recedes with life's challenges and acts of injustice and continues to form a layer of protection that at times becomes frighteningly impenetrable.

The realisation of emergent selves of reader and writer make themselves known to me now. I question who owns the narrative. Perhaps I am imagining this was how I was feeling or, is this the power of remembering? Which of the two, memory or imagination, is taking hold of my past and creating a new narrative? Again, I return to my journal and attempt to reveal another delicate layer. I read an entry written twelve days into the trip.

Sunday, 12th July 1986. Ireland

Weather: Nice

Today, I went for a swim and it was very invigorating. For lunch, D[ad] & J[anet], Phil & Chris & Vicki and I went for a BBQ on the nature trail. It was a very funny afternoon. There was a boy who was stuck up on the cliff and who was crying and yelling out all sorts of funny stuff.



She avoids writing about herself. She thinks it is indulgent to write about her feelings and so she begins to seek out another voice within her. Her writerly voice starts to develop and with each new entry it becomes easier to find. Her writerly voice is strong and bold and refuses the fragile voice to be heard. She suppresses the fragile voice by choosing to mock others with her loud, harsh words. Like herself as the ballet dancer, she combats her feelings of hurt with actions and words that attempt to protect her and in doing so, she suppresses her vulnerable self.

My present visual connection with my journal and handwriting draws from deep within me an unexplainable sorrow. It wells up from a dark place and quickly rises and forces its way out in unwanted, messy tears. My unexpected outpouring confuses me and as I sit quietly, waiting for the wave of emotions to subside, I am summoned by Rilke to read his words to Mr Kappus,

You see – I have copied your sonnet...And now I give you this copy because I know that it is important and full of new experience to come upon a work of one's again written in a strange hand. Read the lines as though they were someone else's, and you will feel deep within you how much they are your own. (Rilke, 2004, p. 40)

The crying sound that emerges is from my soulful self and I wonder if these tears have been suppressed since that trip? Were these tearful sounds meant to be heard in 1986 but instead stored up and wrapped in darkness waiting for a time of safety? A heaviness takes hold of me and my breath is shallow and fast as though I am desperately running from a blackness looming up around me. I fight the urge to close my journal and shut down the internal dialogue but I am also alive with the energy of reigniting my voice of the past. Fleeting, I find the connection with my younger self and begin to know she is more than just a teenager that writes with an attitude befitting the smugness of adolescence. She is a girl that, for the majority of her life, has been steeped in an unjust world of divorce, remarriage and an ongoing bitterness between her parents that prevents necessary love, support and security. For much of her life she remains frightened at her precarious position of uncertainty.

I summon the past, and place myself in the scene and feel something that I cannot make meaning of. I want to embrace the girl in the journal. Like a ghost, I try and reach out to her but she cannot see me. I want to bring her back from the past and show her that everything turns out okay. But she is me and I find comfort in knowing that this young, frightened girl is still alive within me. She has travelled with me for many years but her story is temporarily forgotten and is now being lived once again.

With fresh openness towards my vulnerability I breathe slowly, and hover over the simple journal entry more carefully. I turn towards myself, in the present, as reader and wait. What does it feel like to sit with openness and greater compassion towards self? The writing, with its capitals and off-hand phrases brings back memories that I am not ready to face. As yet, I

don't feel I have the capacity to make of it a truthful intelligence but at the same time I also feel as though I don't need to have an answer. It is an ongoing incomplete truth.

I let time pass and return to my journal. I no longer am embarrassed or feel shameful about the girl that is presented to me with her flippant words but instead let the sensations of the past resurface so that a fusion of memories of the past come forward and blend with the present. My journal and its words have become part of me again—they have internalised themselves into my being where they move deeper, seeking out more connections. Over time, in reflectivity, I let the journal entry retell itself to me over and over as though watching a movie from different camera angles. I don't ignore the narrative and allow the unfinished, unresolved meaning to become of the self that is a passionate question.

UNFOLDING TIGHTLY PACKED PERSPECTIVES

Merleau-Ponty (2012) offers a beautiful presentation of memory and remembering and how it finds us and the kinds of connections that occur within us. He appeals to my internal universe and its vastness when he says,

To perceive is not to experience a multitude of impressions that bring along with them some memories capable of completing them, it is to see an immanent sense bursting forth from a constellation of givens without which no call to memory is possible. To remember is not to bring back before the gaze of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past, it is to plunge into the horizon of the past and gradually to unfold tightly packed perspectives until the experiences that it summarizes are as if lived anew in their own temporal place. To perceive is not to remember. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 23)

Merleau-Ponty and his galaxy of “tightly packed perspectives” returns me to my thoughts on temporality and how my memories could become possible forgotten fragments of my past that drift away like flotsam and jetsam on an ocean disappearing into the horizon. It only disappears, yet in its absence it seems present (Sokolowski, 2004). My tiny journal, written by my teenage self, all at once appears to me as if it is wrapped in something far more magical. My words and their powerful connection with memories, where snippets of colour and movement explode between emotions that surface and retract too fast to make

sense of, show me the wonder and potentiality of the new experiences that I created, unknowingly, as a 16-year-old. At this moment, I feel as though I am holding time in my hands, within the covers of my small journal filled only with scant, fleeting moments.

By relinquishing temporality as something that owns me, and instead owning it together with courage and compassion I “plunge into the horizon of the past” and discover those “tightly packed perspectives” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 23) and I embrace the new narrative that is unfolding with intrigue and wonder.

Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard’s union of memory and imagination as a vast internal universe brings me to a sense of wonderment about each of us and our ability to carry this extensive universe within us. Bachelard says, “A world takes form in our reverie, and this world is ours. This dreamed world teaches us the possibilities for expanding our being within our universe” (2010, p. 8). In my own reveries I am drawn to my internal universe of memory and imagination. What occurs in my journal writing is an untangling of memory and shaping of a kind of hypothetical existence. As I revisit my journal I am drawn to the vast lacuna that exists between what occurs within my internal universe and what is written in my journal. Within these depths there is much to unfold and understand.

The fragments of my memory are made into sense with the aid of my imagination. It is still a truth and the memory makes its intrusion known by a sharp incision into my present self. Its unexpected arrival could not be conjured into the present by imagination alone.

Sokolowski (2000) shows how memory creates a distinction between “the remembering self and the remembered self” (p. 70). He says,

...that my self is the identity constituted between myself now remembering and myself then remembered. My self, the self, is established precisely in the interplay that occurs between perception and memory. This displacement of myself into the past introduces a whole new dimension into my mental or inner life. I am not confined to the here and now: I can not only refer to the past... but I can also live in it through memory. (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 70)

The dialogue between the inter-subjective selves continues back and forth. In the seeking, there is an “advent of a certain playfulness, a spirit, a moment which comes after a period of disillusionment” (Kearney, 1998, p. 201). It is at this point that I discover a piece in Richard Kearney’s *Poetics of Imagining* that suggests to me an unexpected understanding of where my hermeneutic imagination is bringing me. Without following the intention in the direction of Kearney’s writing, it seems to me that if I explore the words he attributes to Julia Kristeva (1987, p. 51), I can explain a newer layer of evolving understanding.

The attitude here is that if one is...alone, like no other person, one is also inhabited by a perpetual sense of the other – as exemplified in the statement ‘I am someone else, I cannot say who. There are things that cannot be said, and I am entitled to play with them so that I can understand them better’.

(Kearney, 1998, p. 201)

I have an opening in which I might allow my voices to play which permits me to be free “to love others or delude myself at my own risk” (Kearney, 1998, p. 201), to continue a “search for truth in the joy of perpetually making a new beginning” (Kristeva, 1987, p. 52). Accepting the flow of memory and its associations is to accept the elasticity of time and see it as something that expands and contracts with a slipperiness that is not for us to control. The fluidity of time suggests an incompleteness and uncertainty that invites me into the subterranean darkness of my inner being where memories dance and distant voices can be heard revealing another layer of my narrative. I am no longer frightened of what may lay ahead and feel a freedom in the opportunity to “play” with “the perpetual sense of other”. Merleau-Ponty carries me forward with his description of night, a boundless space. He says,

The night is not an object in front of me; rather, it envelopes me, it penetrates me through all of my senses, it suffocates my memories, and it all but effaces my personal identity. I am no longer withdrawn into my observation post in order to see the profiles of objects flowing by in the distance. The night is without profiles, it itself touches me and its unity is the mystical unity of *mana*. Even cries, or a distant light, only populate it vaguely; it becomes entirely animated; it is a pure depth without planes, without surfaces, and without any distance from it to me. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 336)

Like Rilke, Merleau-Ponty lets the darkness of night wrap itself around him and within him, freeing him from any boundaries that might ground him to the temporal earth and “all but effaces [his] personal identity”. A suggestion of unbridled openness and infinite horizons within darkness draws me back to my inner world where, for so long, I have held back from entering memories where I might fall into the “pure depth without planes, without surfaces” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 336). I recall after the trip to London I wrote obsessively in a journal that was filled with a destructive energy that painted the confusion of my place in the world. For three or more years I coveted the journal that allowed me an escape into an existence where I explored an inner chaos. I wrote myself into a denial of self worth. Eventually, within the pages I began to create a new version of a self that I wanted the world to see as confident, strong and fiercely independent. My fragile self became lost, frozen and buried deep within me. I forced myself to try and forget about her because I did not want to need her. I pretended to myself that I had outgrown her. As a young adult, I became almost impenetrable to the emotional needs of others and prided myself on my unwavering independent, stoicism. I became shielded from the world and in doing so I lost an empathy and self-forgiveness towards self and others.

A SOFTENING OF EARTH

Viareggio, near Pisa (Italy),

April 23rd, 1903

Leave to your opinions their own quiet undisturbed development, which, like all progress, must come from deep within and cannot be pressed or hurried by anything. Everything is gestation and then bringing forth. To let each impression and each germ of a feeling come to completion wholly in itself, in the dark, in the inexpressible, the unconscious, beyond the reach of one's own intelligence, and await with deep humility and patience the birth-hour of new clarity: that alone is living the artist's life: in understanding as in creating.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 2004

In my early twenties, I was a woman who wore her independence like armour. I fought for my ability to survive on my own. My pride stopped me from asking for help but I also knew that help was not available to me in the desperately needed form of love or support from my family. I surmised that if I could not seek help from those closest to me it was easier to be distant and resilient. Surprisingly, something so profound happened that allowed a warmth to gently make its way towards the forgotten soulful self. Another human being

demonstrated such care and kindness towards me that, for the first time, I became aware of the deep reach of unconditional love from one human to another. Here I began a gradual transition. From childhood, the damage that had been done by me, towards me, was almost irreparable but I felt an internal shift, like a slow breaking of husk, a swelling of the seed and at the heart of the seed something was forming and moving towards fresh air and sunlight. For years I had endured a darkened drought. My being was inert but still alive. Finally, relief was being felt in the softening that comes with the joys associated with love. I had made a connection with another human that orientated my soulful self to dance closer between the boundaries of the interior and exterior worlds.

The journey towards self-forgiveness and seeking a vulnerability that had been so forcefully suppressed was and is a long and slowly progressive dance forward and backward. Finding love from another was a beginning that allowed a space for rest and comfort. The struggle was still internal and writing was my tool for creating the space for the wounded self to emerge. I wrestled my way into finding a place where I justified my writing to myself and others. In the creating of my first garden I quietly disclosed parts of my inner voices within the pages of garden journals. Like the teenage self and her travel journal, my purpose for writing about the garden seemed still to mask a deeper, more profound need for writing that was not yet fully understood.

My gardening journals are my personal narratives. They begin not long after I move to Tasmania in the mid-1990's. My partner and I purchased our first block of land and had taken on the mammoth effort of building a house and creating a garden with very little money in what was sometimes a very unforgiving environment. Working full-time as a teacher and building a house and garden on weekends was not the only challenge that I was facing. After finding love under a full moon at a bush dance on a remote island in the Bass Strait, I left my busy suburban life in Melbourne to begin anew on the island of Tasmania. Physical isolation from my friends and family left me feeling vulnerable and with a loss of inner resilience. To counteract this, I found a strength in creating something that I thought might represent me. I sought to find purpose in building and growing a garden. In my first interpretation of my journal I saw my garden narrative as my *Bildungsroman* — my coming of age story (Bruner, 2004, p. 703) but I now understand it not as a coming of age, rather an unearthing of my authentic self through the process of writing. Like Persephone, I was

returning from the subterranean world that I had dwelled in since adolescence to reunite with my other selves to make me fully whole again, as I had been as a small child. Over the years I had buried parts of myself and writing my gardening journal was a slow uncovering, a tilling of the soil around my soulful self and eventually coming to a revitalisation.

The physical departure from my family and friends moved me towards a new phase in my life but as I return to my journal I ask myself whether I was writing purely about the events that occurred around me or whether I was creating another version of myself, just as I had done so many years before as a teenager. It has been noted that, “Indeed, many scholars go so far as to assert that it is through narrative that people create themselves. The self and identity become that entity which is enacting the particular story under construction” (Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000; McAdams, 1999; MacIntyre, 1984, cited in Josselson, 2004, p. 2).

My journal allowed me to create a storied version of myself, I enacted this creation through my interaction and relationships with others in real-world experiences. It provided me with a validation of this version of self and it steered me in my decisions for many years. In my garden journal, through the writerly voice I drafted a new version of myself.

Still suppressing the soulful voice but through empathy towards the earth, my magnanimous friend, a dim light on the horizon can be seen. My journal demonstrates an attempt to harness time as a way of defining who I am shaping myself to be. There is a rigor in the marking of time. I enter dates and weather patterns and make notes as to what and where I might plant in the attempt to monitor some sort of progress. Josselson (2004, p. 2) says, “people order their lives through narrative”. My intention to order my life through narrative seems to be almost obsessive and each entry’s attention to achievement seems of great importance. A typical entry reads,

15th January 1997

Soil delivered – 8 tonnes - \$198. It doesn’t look much – and I can see myself ordering more – soon. But, it’s enough to keep me occupied for a while longer. The truck did not make it up the back, of course, so the back-hoe was in use again.

Her long hair is roughly pulled back and tied up so as not to let it fall in her face as she gardens with both hands and knees firmly in the cold, damp earth. Indifferent to her looks, she layers herself with old jumpers and scarfs to protect herself against the bitter winds. Intermittently, she stretches out from her crouched form in amongst the plants to go and write. This is her preferred pattern, gardening until her solitude summons her inner voices to become audible. The interior murmuring continues until she must write either to stop the voices or at least override them with her sensibly constructed self, the author of the gardening journal.

Her sentences are short and methodical. She is exhausted and wants to lie in bed for days and days and think about nothing and everything. She wishes to remain undisturbed but does not want to be alone. She is finding it hard to follow her heart because she struggles to find it and she is unable to unite with her soulful voice. She is fatigued. Her writerly voice shows that she is coping, making progress and creating something that people might agree is beautiful and then she may find validation for her created identity. This is what she hopes. Her focus on her garden stops her from listening to her inner self and hearing the faint whisper of her soulful voice.

Uniting my journal and the self within it, I wish to reach out and touch her gently so I might ease the tension that she carries with her. I look at her words and, as interpreter, find my own voice faltering. I am surrounded with uncertainty. van Manen says, “the act of phenomenological writing, if done with utmost seriousness, confronts the writer with the dark...but to write, one must already be possessed by the desire to descend into the darkness of the night” (2014, p. 371). My desire to write brings me to my internal night sky where I may “plunge into the horizon of the past” and “unfold tightly packed perspectives” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 23). I find myself at the journal entry that exposes my “freedom-wound” (Todres, 2007) to a pain that does not subside. It is my constant reminder of the injustice I delivered to myself in not allowing the internal dialogue needed to begin a grief that was necessary when facing the loss of something from my unreconciled past.

21st February 1997. Garden Journal

Today I sent off two orders:

Digger's Club - \$367.50

Bulb Express - \$16.50

I'm so excited about getting my perennials. I can't wait to plant my lavender and curry plant.

Bad news in the family:

Anthony – aeroplane crash

Petra – burgled

Dad – scans

I'm sure that it's an unfortunate but quickly passing stage.

Today I bought an Alpine Strawberry for the rockery.

She is deliberately distracted with her garden. She longs to stay surrounded by the smell of dampened earth and feel the clods of loamy soil in her hands. With each wheelbarrow load of soil and weeds, she moves and arranges and transforms her patch of the world. She does not wish to be drawn into her inner landscape where she knows she must acknowledge that her father is unwell and then begin to try and untangle the delicate fibres that bind her pain together in a tight knot.

For many years, in fact all her life, her father denies her affection or any demonstration of love. He wishes her well in life but he chooses not to be a part of it. The rejection of her father and the confusion it causes hurts her deeply. She wants to talk to him but she knows that he is unable to move into this kind of discussion. Instead she talks to trusted friends but it seems no one can understand her pain and eventually she stops talking. People urge her gently to get on with her own life, and so she does, but in doing so she forms a silent agreement with herself. She swears that she will not allow herself to be wounded so deeply by another person ever again. In forming this pact, she recognises that she must remain distant and suspicious of others. Her writerly voice strikes the paper like a sword. She writes with anger and refuses to let the soulful voice be heard. Her short sentences are written with such disturbing energy that no space is given for the soulful voice to enter into a conversation with the writerly self. The soulful voice is rejected.

Watching her father deteriorate slowly from Alzheimer's disease is painful but there is a deeper, slower throbbing pain that holds her soulful self in a vice like grip. She knows that her father's death is imminent and soon she will lose her opportunity to ask for his love or come to an understanding as to why he cannot give her this precious, most human offering. Her suffering is so unbearably private that she is powerless to unravel the constant twisting feelings of shame towards herself. She berates herself for her indulgent, selfish commiserations, and her lack of compassion towards her father. Like a voice recording she listens to herself ask never-ending questions about what made her father so utterly and determinedly distant and the constant, and confusing pain this has caused. Pain becomes anger towards herself once more, this time because she sees herself as weak and pathetic in her need for recognition from her father.

Her inner voices are in constant discord. The soulful voice asks for compassion but the writerly voice, the one that shows her hand to the real world will not allow it. Not finding comfort entirely with her inner world nor her outer world she lives in a state of constant restlessness.

Without allowing myself time to grieve, or to write my way in and out of it, I become stuck in a cycle of rejection of my fragile self and an inability to live with myself in the present. Increasingly I lose a hold of my temporal self. Pieces of my past and present are beginning to submerge. Like an iceberg, only a fragment of my being can be seen. I continue to write about the future and my expectations from the garden.

23rd February 1997. Garden Journal

Almost finished the rockery. It looks absolutely perfect. It really finished the border off beautifully. Planted Alpine Strawberry in crevice of stairs. Looks beautiful already. I really need to start focusing on making changes for the next season.

The journal entry, written only two days after she makes note of her family's predicaments, and in particular her father's imminent diagnosis, shows the writerly voice's attempts to tell us that the young gardener has swiftly moved on from her thoughts about her family and that she is far more interested in preparing for the next season. She is busy and only has time to reflect on her work in the garden. The soulful voice implores the writerly voice to let her show her compassion to the outside world, to share it with others but this conversation is terminated by the writerly voice. The soulful voice loses her battle against the writerly voice. She lays dormant and waits patiently until she might find her own strength to come forward and once again be heard.

OPENED GROUND

Seamus Heaney titles a collection of his poetry, *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*. His work perceives the political history and troubled union of the people of Britain and Ireland over forty years. I am drawn to his account not for their political rhetoric but for the way in which he invites nature to our senses with honest and raw imagery. He awakens my humble appreciation for the way in which connecting with earth brings us closer to an integrity without language. In the poem titled "Digging", Heaney brings the earth and his pen together as a metaphor,

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it. (1966-96, p. 3)

Heaney brings me to a vision of myself as I dig with my pen into paper, writing in my gardening journal. Hands covered in dirt, moving between garden and journal, it is as though I am digging to uncover something lost. Like Heaney's poetry, my journal is a dialogue to myself, a slow opening of the ground from which a freedom of imagination may begin to take root.

Annie Rogers says, “‘Finding a voice’ is not a metaphorical phrase, but a literal, psycho-physical finding of voice. The voice played on breath and linked with real feelings, reveals the self – and is therefore vital to authentic contact and to the recovery of courage” (1993, p. 281). My own courage “to speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart” (p. 265) has been lost together with my voice. My ongoing writing allows for a pathway to realising the benefits of being alone with oneself and to reclaim a part of myself through the solitude of writing. Solnit (2005) celebrates the notion of becoming lost and cites Walter Benjamin, “to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery” (p. 6). I become lost, but unlike Benjamin, I am not yet ready to be “fully present” and comfortable “with uncertainty and mystery”. I must stay in solitude and, as Rilke writes, “search for the reason that bids you to write; find out whether it is spreading its roots in the deepest places of your heart” (2004, p. 16). My long search continues to a place where my writing becomes a purge. My writing spreads its roots to other, darker places, still avoiding the tender place of the heart. Writing, once a protective mechanism for the soulful self, now becomes a turbulent, almost narcissistic relationship between the writerly self and her real-world experiences. The writerly self, and her insistence on finding certainty, clashes violently with the “true I” (Rogers, 1993, p. 273). Rogers expresses the “true I” as the self who “describes her experience courageously, rendering a story in detailed transparency, voicing a full range of feelings” (p. 273). I am far from revealing the “true I”. There is much practice required to find a harmony that brings to light the “full range of feelings” that dwell within.

18th January 1999. Garden Journal

It has been such a pleasure to have intensive time in the garden. It is a cure for any frustrations that I might be having. It is an immediate sense of achievement – an elixir to any thoughts of lack of self-worth...

She writes to remind herself of a happiness that she is desperate to own. For everything the writerly voice expresses and creates that might be destructive, she is also her saviour. The writerly voice whorls into her inner world where she can see into the darkness and grope towards bundles of intangibles. Here she may unwrap the bundles and unleash experiences that the soulful voice truly understands. It is here that they are in conversation and it is the writerly voice that chooses to take some of what she has come to understand

back to the outer world. Often, she writes nothing of her conversations with the soulful voice.

Just as the writerly voice is able to turn towards her inner world she is able to rotate to the outer world and witness another world where her eyes and ears and the flesh of her body are witness to other experiences. She has become the voice that represents flesh and blood and in doing so, has sacrificed the voice of the soulful self.

...Her father dies after a long and torturous struggle with the deterioration of his mind and body. No one deserves to let their soul unravel in such wild and uncontrolled indignity. She is pricked by the sharp point of irony at his fate and feels alone in her bleak observation. He dies without their voices ever intertwining or mingling in a heartfelt conversation where their souls are invited to speak. Their eyes never meet in a silent understanding. She folds into a melancholy of absolute abandonment. She becomes a fading photograph, stored away in the hope that one day she will look at the image and see a glimpse of who she once was and who she might be once again. In order to survive she knows she must step outside of herself completely and begin to restore the ruin that she has become.

First, alone she must take one more step further into the darkest corners of her humanity. A month or so after the funeral, not surprisingly, she receives a phone call from a family friend whose job it is to disseminate the contents of her father's will. She is not mentioned, nor her brother, nor her sister. Like a wave rushing forth her realisation that her wish is not for money or possessions but a sign that her father acknowledged her brings her to uncontrollable tears. His silence in the unwritten words that might have saved her from further self ruin reverberate within her like a cacophony of voices. She cannot stop the rambling and the prattling of voices telling her to be angry, to be sorrowful, to be wounded, to be humble. All minor and sharp notes of the voices belong to one, her soulful voice. Slowly, a fortitude begins to rumble within her. She arrives at a certainty, a sense of completion that she has been searching for. For many, many nights she lies awake and internally plays out her final conversations with her father. Each time the script is slightly altered but it concludes in the same way. He tells her that he just doesn't want her. With her ongoing rehearsal of the internal play, she finds a strength that will serve to either resurrect her or bury her.

In Ancient Greek theatres, actors wore masks to transform themselves into different characters. After my father's death, it becomes time to reveal my face from behind the mask I choose to wear and attempt to convince others of who I wish to be. After many months in solitude, dwelling within the depths of grief and melancholy, I find myself in reverie where a crumpled palimpsest appears before me. I am curious. I open it and smooth out its edges and find what I believe to be the faintest of words scratched over its surface. I draw the palimpsest closer to my face so as to make out the writing, but there is not enough light for me to read. I turn towards the steps of my internal staircase, away from darkness, that bring me closer to an incandescent glow where I can see that parts of the parchment are grey with the smudges and rubbings of lost words. At the top, I am able to make out a single question. It asks of me, "Are you courageous?"

ANZAC DAY Tuesday 25th April 2006

I have just read my last journal entry...who would have thought I'd be where I am today? Life has taken so many unexpected pleasurable turns...I now have my beautiful boy, Ethan to keep me more than occupied and unfortunately away from the garden, BUT my enthusiasm is renewed with my new garden at Ridgeway. Finally, I am back at my old writing desk...

Seven years later it is with joy and relief that the soulful voice is released and comes forward to announce that she lives with the outside world once more. She turns her face to the sun and feels the cool breeze of fresh air. The writerly voice, through her journal, in its very simple manner, introduces, for the first time, another human into its pages. In doing so she allows for an open passage in which the soulful self may travel. The writerly voice softens and gradually brings the soulful voice out of the exile of darkness. The writerly voice brings the soulful voice with her as she pivots from the inner world back to the outer world. Now, there can be heard a melody. The two voices write in harmony and belong to the worlds of inner and outer. They begin to see through the same eyes and the soulful self teaches the writerly self to embrace her own humanity and the pain that comes with it into her writing.

Is my voice, with its sleepy breath-filled words of love and adoration towards my tiny baby boy bringing with it the soulful voice? Do the sounds that come from deep within me carry a song that allows the path to my soulful self to remain open? Gadamer's claim, "being that can be understood is language" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 474) asks me to reflect on my inner voices and realise the long absence of my own audible voice. For many years I use the writerly voice to transcribe me into a version of self with which to live by. The writerly voice dictates my behaviours and interactions with others. Rogers suggests, "the unconscious covering of voice" potentially "diminishes a girl's courage and knowledge of herself" (1993, p. 281). Finally, with the presence of my son, who is part of my flesh, who, when carried within me, is as close as one can physically be to another human, I find another audible voice. The voice that is revealed is closer to the "true I" that transforms me into yet another self, a mother. This voice is not only audible but becomes embodied in such a way that it makes itself heard also through my journal.

My audible voice brings the writerly, the soulful and the interpreter's often inaudible voices into another dimension where they are heard as one. Kirstin Linklater in *Freeing the Natural Voice*, describes the "natural voice", as "transparent – revealing, not describing, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously" (2006. p. 2). My son allows me to find a "natural voice" that I soon became familiar with. I am immersed in his dependence on me and in awe at the bond that is being created with each new day. I quietly hear the murmurings of my soulful voice as she reaches out to remind me that I must remain vulnerable if I am to give of my authentic self and the love that will follow to my son. I respond to the soulful self with words of love and tenderness to my own son, nourishing both his heart and mine. Is this the voice of love that is needed to begin to understand more deeply the inner voices and knowledge of self?

Traditional Byzantine chants comprise of the *ison* and melody. Tore Tvarnø Lind (2012) says the practice of *ison*, the "sustained bass note... with no, or only a few tone shifts" (p. 106), does more than enrich the overlaying melody. He points to the findings of Constantine Cavarnos who says that the *ison* "adds solemnity and power to psalmody" (Lind, 2012, p. 110). He says, "Byzantine sacred music employs, instead of polyphony and the accompaniment of the organ or some other instrument, a finer, more spiritual means: the *isocratema* or *holding-note*" (p. 110). Cavarnos says Byzantine chants hold sacred the ideal that

with practice, “music is able to express the inner life of the soul” and that it “can represent man’s entire emotional universe” (p. 110). If I were to turn to my inner selves I might ask, who sustains the *ison*, the choral note that holds me firmly to my authentic self? Who holds the drone note, which other voices may use to enrich the sound of their own melody? Who might reply? Might other voices reply in melodic harmony and point to my own audible voice as the sustaining note? Or might they hear the sound of my melodious voice to which they anchor their unified spiritual *isocratema*? Is the *ison* the sound of my embodied vulnerability and the melody my courage?

Stephanie Dowrick, *In the Company Rilke*, says, “When we abandon inwardness and a search for meaning, we lose a depth of perception that makes the world more real to us. Going inward, the ‘outer’ more easily reveals its dimensionality and tenderness and our fragility” (2009, p. xv). Rilke writes, “We empty ourselves, we surrender, we unfold” (Rilke, 2001, p. xi). Writing drags me, like Persephone, into celestial darkness. Here it unfolds in ways that sound pain. To live with this pain and to hear its beauty, I surrender to its highest difficulty. Rilke writes, “perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us” (2004, p. 52).

Clarissa Pinkola Estés in her book *Women Who Run with the Wolves* heralds the intuitive wisdom of women and brings into new light the value system that strangles the female psyche. Estés embraces traditional tales and “far older stories from the matria-centred religions” that “point towards a definite ‘yearning to love’ bond between the maiden and the king in the underworld” (1992, p. 412-413). Estés goes on,

In these old religious versions, the maiden need not be seized and dragged into the underworld by some dark God. The maiden knows she must go, knows it is part of divine rite. Although she may be fearful, she *wants* to go meet her king, her bridegroom in the underworld, from the beginning. Making her descent in her own way, she is transformed there, learns deep knowing there, and ascends again to the outer world. (p. 413)

My realisation that I wish to be independent but not alone, to embrace the comfort of receiving and giving unconditional love asks me to continually return, openly to my

underworld where I must sit with the vast darkness all around me. When I return, new voices come with me, waiting for me to invite them to the surface, where they might appear in my writing. Eva Hoffman brings an intelligibility to her shifting position of finding a voice in her diary writing. For Hoffman, the dialectical challenge of seeing oneself in language as a way of seeing oneself as person emerges. Her writing unfolds gently and from the abstract that I feel compelled to feature in length, we witness Hoffman's difficulty in writing herself into an "immediate" existence. She is challenged into finding a voice with which to justify how she comes out on paper, a comfortable voice to represent who she now might be as she emerges from an "untranslatable past".

For my birthday, Penny gives me a diary, complete with a little lock and key to keep what I write from the eyes of all intruders. It is that little lock—the visible symbol of the privacy in which the diary is meant to exist—that creates my dilemma. If I am indeed to write something entirely for myself, in what language do I write? Several times, I open the diary and close it again. I can't decide. Writing in Polish at this point would be a little like resorting to Latin or ancient Greek—an eccentric thing to do in a diary, in which you're supposed to set down your most immediate experiences and unpremeditated thoughts in the most unmediated language. Polish is becoming a dead language, the language of the untranslatable past. But writing for nobody's eyes in English? That's like doing a school exercise, or performing in front of yourself, a slightly perverse act of self-voyeurism. Because I have to choose something, I finally choose English. If I'm to write about the present, I have to write in the language of the present, even if it's not the language of the self. As a result, the diary becomes surely one of the more impersonal exercises of that sort produced by an adolescent girl. These are no sentimental effusions of rejected love, eruptions of familial anger, or consoling broodings about death. English is not the language of such emotions. Instead, I set down my reflections on the ugliness of wrestling, on the elegance of Mozart, and on how Dostoyevsky puts me in mind of El Greco. I write down Thoughts. I Write. There is a certain pathos to this naïve snobbery, for the diary is an earnest attempt to create a part of my persona that I imagine I would have grown into in Polish. In the solitude of this most private act, I write, in my public language, in order to update what might

have been my other self. The diary is about me and not about me at all. But on one level, it allows me to make the first jump. I learn English through writing, and, in turn, writing gives me a written self. Refracted through the double distance of English and writing, this self—my English self—becomes oddly objective—more than anything, it perceives. It exists more easily in the abstract sphere of thoughts and observations than in the world. For a while, this impersonal self, this cultural negative capability, becomes the truest thing about me. When I write, I have a real existence that is proper to the activity of writing—an existence that takes place midway between me and the sphere of artifice, art, pure language. This language is beginning to invent another me. However, I discover something odd. It seems that when I write (or, for that matter, think) in English, I am unable to use the word “I.” I do not go as far as the schizophrenic “she”—but I am driven, as by a compulsion, to the double, the Siamese-twin “you”. (Hoffman, 1998, p. 121)

Coming into motherhood means to embody another way of being and with it a new language, another voice with which to draw myself. I feel a shift in voice and, like Hoffman, I wonder if “language is beginning to invent another me” or if I am evolving into another version of self, somewhere “midway between me and the sphere of artifice, art, pure language” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 121). I write,

Monday 12th February 2007. Regatta Day

...we welcomed the arrival of beautiful Claudia on Jan 17th in thunder and lightning. Maybe she will bring us good gardening weather as this was the night that brought rain, rain and more rain after some very hot and humid weather.

My relationship with my daughter further softens the ground around me. Beyond the internal darkness I begin to stretch towards a wide horizon of which the dawn of new

experiences exists. Somehow my temporal existence does not require of me to carry a burden of a past that is awkward and difficult to manage. Instead, with understanding, I am able to shift the weight and repackage things in such a way that they become manageable.

IV

MAJESTIC SILENCE

Silent friend of the many distances,
feel how your every breath enlarges space.
Amid the rafters of dark belfries
let yourself peal. Whatever feeds on you

is taking strength from such fare.
Know every path through transformation.
What one memory holds your deepest grief?
If you find drinking bitter, become wine.

Now in this night of fire and excess
be magic power at your senses' crossroads,
the meaning of their strange encounter.

And if the earthly should forget you,
say to the silent loam: I flow.
To the rushing water speak: I am.

Rainer Maria Rilke, 2009

SILENCE BENEATH WORDS, BELOW WORDS, BEHIND THEM

The presence of a beautiful, distilled, quiet, that I call silence, pervades the writerly space. It is a tranquil hush in a place of solitude where sound is present but unheard, equivocally comforting. My fingers tap against the keyboard with an unobtrusive clacking suggesting the progress of something written. The faint trickle of hot water reticulating through the heating system offers the room and its occupier ambient warmth. The cackling chatter of black cockatoos descending from the mountain heralds the arrival of winter. The hum of traffic is far enough removed that I am appreciative of my separateness from the rest of the world.

Closer to me I hear the sound of my breath rhythmically moving in and out of my body, the delicate rush of air tunnelling through my nose and into my lungs, the silent chambers of life. The shell of my ear, shaped like an amphitheatre catches the surging sounds made by the close proximity of my fingers to my eardrum as I soothingly rub the fleshly lobe. At once, I am moved out of dreaming reverie and become aware of myself and my surroundings again.

Gazing out of the window, I set my eyes on the green hedge in my front yard with intent. I ask myself how will I deal with its messy limbs that so often annoy me. It is not long before I slip back into what Bachelard refers to as the “constituted state” of “daydreaming” (2014, p. 201) or van Manen terms the “transcendental attitude” (2014). Solnit delightfully says that in this state of “voluptuous surrender, lost in your arms, lost to the world, utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away” we are capable of being in “uncertainty and mystery” (2005, p. 6). In my writerly space, a transformation occurs where I see past the hedge and its problems and become only vaguely aware of its greenness. Instead I become engaged directly with an internal dialogue that rises from inside of me. The dialogue is full of wonderment and the hedge and its problematic limbs become distant. The momentum of memory and imagination and the chaos of conversation that emerges from within is fast and so I move deeper into this space of a different silence so as to untangle the possible meanings that appear in my half-made constructions.

From a place of silence in my writerly space I listen to the internal voices that emerge from the self as writer of the past, and self as interpreter of the present. I hear the voice that is cloaked in the carefully chosen words of the writer and I hear the hushed tones of the soulful self that sit delicately behind the writer. The self as writer is disguising the fragile soulful self but the soulful self, it seems, is determined to be heard, even if only through the faintest of pen strokes, or occasional phrases that serve as reminders of the fragility of my younger self. As I listen, Bachelard seduces me into believing my phenomenological ear is attuned when he says, “And for ears that dream, what a noise of syllables there is in its name! Words are clamor-filled shells. There’s many a story in the miniature of a single word!” (2014, p. 196). For me, my ears must dream within poetic silence.

In an interview recorded in the magazine, *fourbythree* Jean-Luc Nancy says, “Silence is itself a noise; a rustle, a crumpling, a squeaking, a rumbling, an uproar or a breath, a racket or a

panting. All this occurs beneath words, below words, behind them” (2016, par 8). Throughout my journal exists a silence that “is itself a noise”. There is the ever-present silent roar of unwritten words. This silence has an ache attached to its unprinted existence that finds its way into my soul, as the interpreter. Parallel, there exists, like Rilke, a “silent friend” whose “breath enlarges space” providing the narrative and its reader a place of restful calm in which listening may begin to occur in earnest. In silence, there is much to be discovered as Susan Sontag contemplates,

A genuine emptiness, a pure silence is not feasible—either conceptually or in fact. If only because the artwork exists in a world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence. Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue. (Sontag, 1969, p. 9)

My reflective journey continues with returning re-readings of my journal. I begin to look at phrases that were not meant for any audience but myself and listen to a timbre of voice, that is mine, that becomes audible through the writing. There is no rush in my journey and a slow comfort wraps itself around me, forcing me to revoke time’s urgency and instead deepen my thoughts and listen to the nuances of my response to the reading of my journal. I make my way through countless pages of stories and memories surge forth, catapulting into my present being, disturbing my body and its emotional reaction. Images, smells and other intangibles swiftly appear and disappear before I have time to grasp them and understand them more fully. In immersing myself in my journal and allowing the narrative to speak to me it is not long before I begin to discover the silence within my writing. I embark on this thesis with the stack of journals on one side of me and a new journal where I write my ongoing observations and understandings. I write,

13th March 2014. Koh Samui, Thailand

I am overcome by the realisation that my journal and the diaries seem to contain nothing other than surface stories and annotations. I was in fear that when I was to go back and read my journal that I would discover something that I wasn't yet ready to confront. What I have discovered is a frightening void—a chasm of unspoken, unwritten words. Who is this

person that was so afraid to write about her true self? What is she so ashamed of that she cannot disclose who she really is to her only audience—herself? I feel a great sadness at her infidelity towards herself.

There is no surprise revelation to the lacuna of silence that divides my journal between what was written and what was not. As I penned my travel journal to London and Ireland in 1986 I was aware of the unmentionables that I carried within me. The sadness that this brings to me now is a kind suffering of not being able to use my voice or find solace in the written word. Henry Hart's poem, "The Oracle of Bees" (1998, p. 69) quotes Bachelard,

What is the source of our first suffering?
It lies in the fact that we hesitate to speak.
It was born in the moments when we accumulated
silent things within us.

Now, the interpretation is not only about uncovering the stories that lie beyond my words or the gaps between the sentences, and the entries, it is about bringing the stories into my present so that I can breathe them again and rediscover who I have become. In doing so, I must prepare for a renewed "suffering" if I am to reveal my own "moments" of "accumulated silent things".

27th June 2014. My study, my writerly space

As I continue to explore my understanding of self through writing I have returned to examine with greater objectivity the sense of shame and shock at confronting my journal. Part of my shame comes from the notion that I thought I should write with greater intention and skill. But there is also a sense of disappointment, the lack of soul, and character—and then suspended, hovering annoyingly near is the silence. The silence is no longer silent. Like white noise it has become a loud deafening roar that erupts in the cusp between night and morning—my purgatory. This demanding silence stares at me and asks me not to look at my writing for answers but to look back at myself, to look within, to see myself in different ways and to write myself in different ways.

Interpreting my journal, my story, comes with apprehension. As interpreter, I now enter the arena of the hermeneutic circle, and again into my own intersubjective space of writing.

Within this space my journal's early narratives lie before me. The entries are written by the self from the past, the writer. The disclosure of the narratives become a collaboration between myself as writer, the past, the soulful self, the unifying voice of past, present and future and the present, the self as interpreter. A sensitive balance between all collaborators must be arrived at to allow the interpreting to be faithful, authentic and disclose revelations. The hermeneutic (Rilke, 2011) relationship between collaborators is complex but my attempt to effectively bracket or at least notice it, might promise "a purer distillation of meanings" (Josselson, 2004, p. 7).

Josselson points to Ricoeur and the two forms of hermeneutics to guide me in my re-imagining and interpretation of the newly discovered silences within and around the narratives. I choose to acknowledge both "a hermeneutics of faith which aims to restore meaning to a text" and "a hermeneutics of suspicion which attempts to decode meanings which are disguised" (Josselson, 2004, p. 1), as ways of entering the hermeneutic circle.

My early narratives are my stories and I bring them to their fullness by listening to the voices of my past from where the story originates. I hear the voice of my younger self, its brashness, its dismissiveness, its anger, its sadness. Here I am "restoring" the meaning of the narrative through "its given form" hermeneutically "animated by faith" (Josselson, 2004, p. 3). I let the words speak to me. In contrast, the silence in the narrative is revealed through "suspicion". The narrative itself is a disguise and the words are "distorted pointers to other layers of meaning" (p. 4). Josselson goes on to point out,

The contrast between the hermeneutics of restoration and the hermeneutics of demystification, however, refers not to the property of texts but to the stance of the interpreter: whether he or she conceives of the interpretive process as being one of distilling, elucidating, and illuminating the intended meanings of the informant or of discovering meanings that lie hidden within a false consciousness. (Josselson, 2004, p. 5)

My close proximity to the narrative as its original owner dismisses the idea that meaning lies "hidden within a false consciousness" (p. 5). Acknowledging the deliberate disguise created within the narrative by the writer, I ask her the purpose of the disguise. It is here, at this point that I wish to offer my own hermeneutics of vulnerability to the hermeneutic circle. Hermeneutics of vulnerability is where the stance of the interpreter seeks to listen to the

voices within the layers of the narrative with openness whilst being attentive towards self as interpreter. How does the narrative affect myself? What moves me? What silences me? What makes me laugh or cry? As the interpreter, I move into the narrative and become a journeywoman. She does not own the narrative as Barthes may suggest, but instead walks alongside the narrative, still aware of herself as interpreter. My slow release of compassion towards self allows the silences to reveal something rich and here I may find my soulful self waiting to be heard again, in the present and reuniting with the soulful self of my past. This transformation of such subtlety reminds me of Rilke who describes the “moments when something new has entered us” as “a house changes into which a guest has entered” (Rilke, 2004, p. 49). Within me an adjustment is felt like an opening of a door followed by its gentle wake of air.

The silences I discover sit in between short words,

16th July 1987. Singapore Airport

Night time/Hot. 31 degrees

Average airport/average people

Sharp angles strike the page like the incessant downpour of rain on the slick black runway. The airport interior is bathed in artificial fluorescent light and disguises day from night and night from day. Foreign people with foreign smells invade her space. She has no patience to try and understand them. She is tired and yearning for familiarity and home. She is lonely and is accepting of its ongoing presence within her.

Rilke writes,

Loneliness is like the rain.
It rises from the sea toward evening
and from distant plains moves into sky
where it ever belongs.
And from the sky it falls upon us in the city.

It rains here below in the twilight hours

when alleyways wind toward morning
and when lovers, finding nothing
leave the failure of each other's arms,
and when two who loathe each other
must share the same bed:

The loneliness flows with the rivers...

Rainer Maria Rilke, 2011

I write my own lines of verse to accompany Rilke's words. It serves to both separate me from my family and allows me to see our awkward grouping among others at the airport. Simultaneously it brings me back into myself where I am reminded of the solace found in being alone.

It rains here below in the twilight hours
Where bodies move in family units
only to be dissolved when words are spoken.
In silence, they find the comfort of loneliness.

Ten years later the writerly voice pours her words into every crevice of her journal. There is an urgency in her effusive language that suffocates the silence needed for reflection.

18th January 1997

Soon I shall begin to lay out the herb garden and hopefully there will be enough soil to fill it. I'm slightly dubious about the curry plant because I don't think it will reach the right height, however, I'll still order it as there are a million other spots I could use a small hedge.

Only in solitude and silence might I find the way past a loneliness that accompanies sadness to lead me further to a place where my soul might be nourished rather than ashamed by my words of the past. Bachelard says, "A lost symbolism begins to collect dreams again" (2014, p. xv). This becomes evident as I linger over entries and let my memory release itself. The silences, like "lost symbolism" now act as small offerings to my present self. Like seeds, they are nurtured with patience whilst I allow my imagination to "begin to collect dreams again".

Reflecting on the emotions that confront me upon the continuing reading of my journal, I startle at my reaction. I know the words are mine but they reach out from their inky sheets and touch a deeper part of me. Unleashing a wave of unexpected tangled feelings that are difficult to explore and not yet ready to be made sense of, I consciously ask myself to suspend these reactions rather than repress them. In silence, as Rilke suggests, I let “each impression and each germ of a feeling come to completion wholly in itself, in the dark” (2004, p. 23). Here, in the dark I find new ways of unravelling the feelings. A gentle unwinding of the bundle of words and its associations asks me to listen not only to a worldly conscience of logic but also to my soulful self and the intuition that she delivers to me and asks me to acknowledge.

Paulo Coelho’s beautiful tale, *The Alchemist*, tells of the young shepherd, Santiago, who bravely follows his dreams and travels from Spain to the Pyramids of Egypt in search of treasure. Along the way he meets an alchemist who helps him listen to his heart and realise the real treasure lies within him. The alchemist says, “what alchemy does is to bring spiritual perfection into contact with the material plane” (Coelho, 2014, p. 147). The majestic silence of solitude is perhaps my alchemy between reaching into the depths of my heart and bringing its revelations to the words of my journal. Quietly I sip my alchemic elixir of spiritual and material, and wait.

Emboldened by the developing trust in soulful self and guided by intuition I am drawn over and again to the place of my journal where alpine strawberries feature. I find my journal bracketed by entries about the garden. Here, haunting silence effects me as interpreter, and I gain insight into the necessary deliberate disguising of the narrative by its writer.

21st February 1997. Garden Journal

Today I sent off two orders:

Digger’s Club - \$367.50

Bulb Express - \$16.50

I'm so excited about getting my perennials. I can't wait to plant my lavender and curry plant.

Bad news in the family:

Anthony – aeroplane crash

Petra – burgled

Dad – scans

I'm sure that it's an unfortunate but quickly passing stage. Today I bought an Alpine Strawberry for the rockery.

I attempt to suspend my reaction to the silence. The hasty listing of serious family incidents and the lack of personal emotion strikes a blow within me and it takes me months to return to this entry and learn to listen and breathe the words again. I compose myself and wait for feelings to germinate and become whole. In silence, I hear the voice in the narrative imploring the future self not to forget this moment in time. This juncture in the narrative is clear and without emotion. It is written with deliberation and serves as a sign for me to return, when ready, to re-imagine my story. My interpreting discloses a silence in the narrative that manifests through lack of any detail to subjects that are sensitive and relational and, at that time, I am unable to communicate the effect they are having on me. Through her quiet bravery, the author finds the strength to leave this piece marked, though hidden amongst her garden writing. It is enough to summon memory many years later. My writerly self is not willing to let myself forget who I was at that point in time. No matter the casual, brusque manner of the narrative, nor the distilled silence, Pandora's jar was locked, waiting to be opened.

OPENING PANDORA'S JAR

Formed out of clay by the Ancient Greek Gods, the mortal Pandora is delivered to Epimetheus with a jar holding all the evils of the world. In relating the story of Pandora's curious opening of the jar to my own daughter, together we discovered a poem that brought to attention Pandora's plight and her faith in hope as a way of restoring the damage that might be done to the world.

Pandora's Box

She unlocked and opened the box
And the first to escape was rage,
Followed by pain, then jealousy,
Disappointment, greed and old age.

Out flew measles, mumps, rubella,
Bubonic plague, chicken pox,
Leprosy, hepatitis B,
All escaped from Pandora's box.
Pandora was shocked and appalled,
What on earth had she done?
Soon all of the things had escaped,
...all, that is, except one.

As she peered into the box,
She slowly became aware,
A little thing called "hope"
Was still trapped in there.
Pandora sighed and let it go.
She knew, if there was hope,
Then no matter what else happened,
The human race could cope.

Paul Perro, 2014

My history with my journal, as its writer, privies me to knowledge of what else lies beyond the words and how the words once provided shelter for my soulful self. The startling effect that I experience has moved from the shame of seeing myself as cold and impersonal and instead into a wash of emotion that returns when I read my journal in the harsh glare of the full present-ness of my vulnerable being. The reading of the words unlocks a part of me beyond what is written and it is now that I feel I have re-entered the narrative and move alongside the writer and her soulful self. Suspending my initial reaction of feelings of partly shame and humiliation at the silences I attend to the secrets of that shame and humiliation and become curious about whether I can transform them into self-forgiveness (Estés, 1992).

My garden journal has an almost brutal commitment to material projects and appears to openly reject any reaching towards a spiritual self-reflection. The juxtaposition between

writing about the garden in such detail against the bluntness of other far more important and personal episodes further increases the silences. The voice of the writer seems to somehow simultaneously deny the soulful self from having a voice but attempts to provide silent but “distorted pointers” at other possible truths that lie very close to the surface of the text. I return to Bachelard who refers to “cosmic reverie” as “a phenomenon of solitude which has its roots in the soul of the dreamer” (2010, p. 14). My desperate longing to be in solitude and to meditate is disguised through the shallow ramble of words about a garden. The intentional concealment of seclusion into a space of solitude and reflection without a material prop intrigues me. My body, my mind and soul ask me to immerse myself in cosmic reverie where I may be situated in “a world and not in a society” and possess “a sort of stability or tranquillity” where I might “escape time” (2010, p. 14). I am still not able to openly declare this and find myself seeking other ways to disguise my need for solitude and cosmic reverie. I am reminded again of the difficulty of embodying vulnerability fully and return once more to my journal with open-wound (Todres, 2007), and to the entry of alpine strawberries.

Like Pandora’s opening of the jar and her inability to stop the illnesses from escaping, my own openness towards the feelings that are released from my journal seem unstoppable. The memory opens its doors to the surrounding stories around my journal and the devastation begins. Like Pandora’s jar, rage and anger, followed by pain and suffering spew forth and they are uncontrollable. I feel walls crumble around me and I am not able, nor am I inclined to hold them up. I cannot find grief for my father’s illness, I cannot engage compassion towards my sister or brother and I hold resentment towards my mother. I begin to drown in a self-imposed anaesthetic and I am incapable of communicating my own feelings of loss and bereavement. Until at the very bottom of the jar, I find hope. I cannot feel love and compassion towards others if I am not able to begin to do so for myself. Hope is something I have denied myself. How am I now to restore myself?

PERFORATION OF SOUND

When did my compassion for self become lost? I hear it slipping from the girl’s voice in her very first travel journal of London, 1987. She follows the suggested rules of a travel journal

by commenting on places and weather but she makes little or no reference to herself or her inner thoughts. I smirk at some of her sarcastic adolescent phrases as I re-read her journal but the smirks quickly fade as I begin to listen earnestly and awaken the silences that surround the narrative of what appears to be a petulant teenager.

5th July 1987 London

Weather – excellent.

I had a day all to myself. It was absolutely brilliant! I walked along Oxford and Regent Streets and then went to Carnaby Street and bought some postcards. Then I went and sat at Piccadilly Circus and ate some fruit and watched all the people. Later I sat in Hyde Park and there were people everywhere. It didn't get dark until 10:30pm!

I return to van Manen's words once more, "It is not what is written but it is what is not written" (1990, p. 112) that draws me back into my self of the past.

I watch her sixteen-year-old self at her hotel writing desk in London penning words into her journal. She has short, short hair. This is her defiant gesture towards those who want her to behave like a lady. Her cigarettes are close by and as she reaches to light yet another she takes silent delight in treating her hotel room as though it were her own tiny home. She opens the window wide into the barely dark summer evening. There is an urgency about everything she does. Nothing about her is relaxed as though she is waiting for something dangerous to happen. Rather than retreat from danger she runs at it full pelt. Like a warrior with sword and shield she prepares herself for battle in which she knows she must become fiercely independent if she wishes to survive. She attempts to write herself away from her past where she is sensitive and towards a future where her skin is thickened against the touch of others.

Kearney realises the importance of hermeneutics and embracing language as understanding through the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur but goes on to suggest that, "The journey from flesh to text all too often lacked a return ticket" (Kearney, 2015, p. 100). He

asks us to veer back to the body, the “carnal as a site of meaning”, to make of our return journey a recovering of “the deep and inextricable relationship between *sensation* and *interpretation*” (p. 101).

I feel the sense of who I was then. This journal entry, with its youthful simplicity, is now rediscovered many years later by my older self. I am the same being as I was thirty years ago but now I exist in an altered form shaped by new events but still held together by a history that is both my past and my present. I have not, as some would like to suggest of their own past experiences, moved on, rather I seek to fold myself into my past through the reading of my journal, thus allowing me to reclaim a part of my historical self as I was then. To sense who I once was and to be open to the “sensations” that come with this opening allow a new interpretation where I embody the compassion and vulnerability that I had once sacrificed in the belief that without “sensations” I would protect myself.

In the hastily written travel journal entries of my youth I hear a sharp, dismissive tone. The pages reek with the taint of cigarette smoke and a selfish attitude. At once I am reminded of my later garden journal and its strong writerly voice disguising the soulful voice and I soften to search for the inner voice of the young teenager. I am reminded that independently I chose to write about my journey, prompted only by the gift of the small journal itself. As I stir the senses of the teenage self I ask, perhaps the voice of the girl in my journal, my voice, is the only voice she has? The words, as I read them now, are finite and selective, devoid of description or detail of experiences. The act of writing appears to have another purpose and I am left wondering why the writer selects those words and that particular narrative.

As authors, we decide what to write and what not to write. As interpreters, we decide whether to acknowledge the possible silences between the words and how we might begin to address them. Are the silences empty vessels or, if I angle my ear and listen with a Buberian openness and carnal awareness might I read my journal with hermeneutical compassion so that new sensations may be felt? Silence beckons me in the form of punctuation. The full stops and dashes ask me to pause and listen to the hidden narrative. The punctuation is blunt and acts as a stopper for any further disclosure. This is a forced silence.

10th July 1987. Dublin, Ireland

Today we set off for Heathrow to go to Dublin. I was frisked and had my bags checked. Dad and Janet were angry. Janet said, "That's what you get for the way you dress". When we arrived in Ireland I decided that I hated it.

As I consider the impact of the full stop between each sentence I immediately feel both betrayed by my own words and saddened at my fear of not being able to write with the courage to disclose my emotional turmoil. As I lean into the silences formed by my sentences I allow the full weight of the experience to resurface in the present. van Manen says, "We may have knowledge on one level and yet this knowledge is not available to our linguistic competency" (1990, p. 113) and Kearney reminds me, "Before words, we are flesh, flesh becoming words for the rest of our lives" (2015, p. 99). Was the rejection of my own feelings an act of self-preservation or was it because it was also not possible to describe what is yet to be understood? It is only through time and lived experience that I am now able to honour the rejection of my own feelings, my own self through crafting of new words.

The silences that are presented to me through the full stop, and the lack of detail stare back at me. Silence is fixed and unwavering and challenges me to somehow fill the gaps with my present self. The cold stare of silence invites me to participate and become active in the narrative. Silence is waiting for me and I am drawn in as who I am now and not just who I was then. I revisit my teenage self in this place and time, and observing her, with my hand firmly on her heart, I write,

Halfway through the trip things have become increasingly tense between her father and step-mother. Often drunk and undignified her father weaves his way through restaurants, bars and social occasions with a carelessness that she realises is not always appropriate. She begins to feel the beginnings of a growing frustration and embarrassment towards him. Her step-mother, away from the stability and controlled environment of the home, is struggling with his helpless and childish behaviour.

She watches from the side, keeping very quiet and small so as not to draw attention to herself for she knows any small move from her might unleash the torment bottled up by her step-mother. Her position within the ranks of the family has diminished since the arrival of her step-mother. Coupled with poor performance at school and the constant fear of being sent back to live with her mother, she is wary.

She had been so careful to keep the peace and avoid confrontation and this results in emotional exhaustion. She stands there, arms outstretched at the airport terminal. She is wearing her new black leather jacket and a t-shirt with a picture of James Dean on it that she bought from Carnaby Street in London. Here, at the airport, she stands with arms apart as airport security pathetically run their hands up and down her arms, almost in justification of their position rather than in effort to find incriminating objects. She can feel her father and step-mother looking at her in disgust at holding them up. She feels their embarrassment at the way she is dressed and it is her helplessness that brings her to tears. Her eyes fill and she turns her head upwards so as not to let these quivering dams burst but it is almost impossible and she is shamed. She needs her father or step-mother to show her kindness, but this is not forthcoming so instead she wants to explain, this is not my fault, and have them understand, but this is also not an option. Instead her body betrays her by pushing out tears that she desperately wants to hold back.

Silence arrests me, as interpreter at the unfinished story. Her writing holds fear, and I sense her treading closer to dangerous territory where she might begin to write of her recognition of the acts of injustice that occur around her. I take my eyes away from my journal and now silence beholds me in its restful embrace where, in contemplation greater things glide in where silence once stood. I encompass cosmic reverie and its welcoming silence and begin to wonder where my own narrative begins and ends. With each renewed construction of my narrative an alteration occurs where new silences become apparent. Silences become openings into potential enlightenment.

As an experiment, I begin to rewrite another journal attempting to use the voice of my sixteen-year-old self once more. This time I appropriate the voice with the self-forgiveness and compassion that I had previously denied myself of. In writing this way I might coax the

soulful voice of my past to come forward and reconnect with her in the present. I evoke other submerged memories.

Today we set off for Heathrow Airport to go to Dublin. I'm not sure what to expect when we get there as nothing is ever really explained to me. I know Janet is nervous. We are away from the other members of the conference and she is unsure of her constantly changing environments. She is anxious about Dad although does not realise it herself. This is because Dad is so dependent in more ways than anyone will ever admit to. I feel strangled and exhausted by this relationship between us that is complete pretence. I am not the happy, independent daughter, Janet is not the devoted step-mother, Dad is not strong and capable. It's not fair to be used as a victim to vent anger upon. I am angry that I cannot fight back and that I must stay quiet. I must stay quiet because I will not be able to contain the tears and I cannot show tears because they will only be met with mockery or avoidance. I don't want my face to betray me with messy, uncontrolled contortions of sadness.

As I finish the last sentence of my re-interpretation I am already dissatisfied with my attempt. There are too many words and they do not convey the depth of emotion felt by my younger self. I cannot mimic her voice and I realise, once again, that I am the same person but not the same person. Here, silence is more provocative in bringing meaning to the words of my journal. My interpreting, my filling of the silences does not allow me to be fully immersed in the silence where I might hear the slight tremor in the voice of the young girl and come closer to feeling her confused pain. In this silence, where the shaky breath of my teenage self is audible, I find the path in which a stronger reconnection with the past is found. Following this path, I respond by listening and remaining in silence where my body and mind are able to give in to emotions as they begin to surface. In this silence, time is rendered irrelevant and I am drawn into my own intersubjective space, my own consciousness where from silence, questions and wonder arise. Sontag says, "Silence keeps things 'open'" (2009, p. 17). With silent openness comes an incompleteness that keeps my narrative alive and rich with potential new meaning, meaning that is built upon and grows as my own lived experiences continue to unfold.

Audre Lorde says, “the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger” (1984 p. 42). In my own transformation of revealing the silent narrative through words and language, what dangers might I face in this act of self-revelation? Might I cause harm to myself or others? Am I putting myself or others at risk? How might others judge me and why do I fear this? My journal reminds me that aspects of my life in connection with others could lead myself or others to pain or harm if my interpretation is not respectfully written. My wish to invite others to live with the “wound’ of human openness” (Todres, 2007, p. 116) so that a “freedom” might be discovered can only be realised if I turn towards myself as the source from where a dialogue may begin to develop that fosters self-forgiveness and empathy. Whilst self-revelation may still occur within silence, our overwhelming desire to matter, our desire to connect with others, our desire to make meaning and our desire to construct purpose and meaning for our lives is also realised through writing. Lorde goes on to say, “Only when we can learn to put fear into perspective and embrace our vulnerability can we find a new kind of strength” (p. 42).

In Sontag’s beautiful portrayal of silence, she says,

Silence never ceases to imply its opposite and to demand its presence. Just as there can’t be ‘up’ without ‘down’ or ‘left’ without ‘right’, so one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence. Not only does silence exist in a world full of speech and other sounds, but any given silence takes its identity as a stretch of time being perforated by sound. (Sontag, 2009, p. 8)

Sontag’s translucence aligns with van Manen’s, “It is not what is written but it is what is not written” (1990, p.112). I return again to my journal and observe more closely an entry that I have passed over many times. Sontag’s words and my inherent belief in wanting to connect with others, ask me to return to this entry and realise the silence delivers me to a truth and honesty within my journal words.

16th July 1987. Singapore Airport

Night time/Hot 31 degrees

Average airport/average people.

A connection forms between writer and interpreter as the self as interpreter acknowledges the silence that “takes its identity as a stretch of time being perforated by sound” (Sontag, 2009, p. 8). As interpreter, I am grateful for the words that perforate the silence in and around my journal. I am grateful for the writer’s strength and commitment to the act of writing and realise that without these words I am left with nothing with which to find the narrative within the silence.

She writes to keep herself distracted from the outside world. She writes because she thinks that to the outside world she appears engaged in something productive and meaningful. She becomes satisfied with her disguise and soon continually falls into the secure womb of her writerly world. What she doesn't see is that she has developed a default of escape and that through her writing she is both searching and escaping. Reaching out for the future and running from her past she is perpetually trapped in temporal flight. She is a fledgling yet she is brave.

Simultaneously, another path between interpreter and writer is created by my journal’s use and limitations of language. The blank words do not invite the interpreter to participate in the travel journey but instead they ask the interpreter to listen to something the words alone cannot offer. As I read I feel a distance grow between writer and interpreter and it is filled with a silence that beckons the reader to be inquisitive and ask questions about the narrative. The writer reveals her existence through the small offering of her presence but the words connect and allow a passage into another dimension of the narrative where, by listening, I reunite with the self of my past.

Professor Otto Bollnow (1981) suggests there is a silence of survival. He says that “Silence has the purpose of self-protection” and that the “person is using his silence to shut himself off from the outside world. He loses his living relationship with the outside world” (p. 2). The silence that I hear in my journal is one of exhaustion. I hear the denial of the writerly self to give the soulful self a voice. I feel the oppression, suppression and dominance of silence as the authoritative gesture summoned by the writerly voice. The existence of my

journal reminds me that the soulful self continually asks to be heard. Her attempts to keep communication open with the outside world is made clear by virtue of the written word. Indeed, her voice is muffled and smothered but she asks me to listen to her.

Once more, in solitude and reverie I contemplate the journal entry,

16th July 1987. Singapore Airport

Night time/Hot 31 degrees

Average airport/average people.

I listen to the silence and gently transform it to a new life. The transcendental awareness of silence arrests time and from this I feel a physical slowing sensation that leans into the words of my journal. Gentle reverie allows me to see beyond the meaning of the words and instead find inky shapes where new meaning is discovered. The formation of letters and dashes show my simple words as a poem. The forward slashes either side of each word or phrase act like cages and emphasise the need for pause and silence. The slanting straight dashes remind me of the torrential downpour of tropical rain against the large windowpanes at the airport gate lounge. I feel the heat and the exhaustion of the poet as she listlessly wanders through the airport at the timeless hour between night and morning. Foreigners with foreign customs and foreign voices jar against her need for sleep. I begin to appreciate the words and the silence they offer to me now. In a beautiful way, the narrative has offered me a silence to allow for a clarity and giving of life to my senses in the present. I am no longer looking at the narrative of a girl of the past, as the silence draws the past into my present and the two are unified. My words are no longer the object of my past but have become my present.

BOUND UP IN ANGER AND PAIN

I was walking into the forest with my grandmother one morning. It was so beautiful and peaceful. I was only four years old, a tiny little one. And I

saw something very strange – a straight line across the road. I was so curious that I went over to it; I just wanted to touch it. Then my grandmother screamed, so loud. I remember it so strongly. It was a huge snake.

That was the first moment in my life that I really felt fear – but I had no idea what I should be afraid of. Actually, it was my grandmother’s voice that frightened me. And then the snake slithered away, fast.

It is incredible how fear is built into you, by your parents and others surrounding you. You’re so innocent in the beginning; you don’t know.

Abramovi, 2016, p. 1

Eventually from deep silence, my audible voice surfaces. With a bravery and courage found amongst the words of my journal and in the solitude of my writerly world I experiment with my new voice. First, I begin to write referring to myself as ‘I’. Never before have I been so bold as to use ‘I’. The word and its towering column of narcissistic singularity is something that I shy away from. Gradually, with gentle orientation, I explore the effect of ‘I’ and the subtlety of meaning that begin to emerge in the creations of my deep thoughts. Surprisingly, it does not sound authoritative or demanding but rather, considered and attentive.

Next, in my writerly space, I begin to speak aloud and hear the sounds of my voice bounce off the walls of my tiny room. Out in the world, occasionally I test out my voice and hear it weave itself into conversations with trusted loved ones. I meet new acquaintances who know nothing of me and use my voice to establish a foundation from which they will build their understanding of me. I find this evolving act exciting and I am both delighted and proud of my secret. My voice is gentle and considered but she still becomes rattled by the strength of others and retreats quickly into her silent darkness. I am not yet fully embodied with the strength of vulnerability and, at times, I weaken to let the voice of my protective self take over. The armour that is her cold and accusing voice of protection no longer feels comfortable and I struggle to decide how I wish to be. Todres might describe my circumstance as “one in which I am both observer and participant, commentator and actor” (2007, p. 52), and this way of being is “conducive to to learning about myself and how my inner and outer worlds connect” (p. 53). I embrace the growing pains that come from my struggle and the resistance felt with my new voice. Todres suggests that the “growing permission to be both observer and participant...constitutes a kind of self-forgiveness” (p.

52) and “such truth-telling seems to require this kind of emotional freedom for it to be authentic and productive” (p. 53). Cautiously, but courageously I take my vulnerable, soulful self and bring her into conversation with the person whose flesh I am created from, the person whose own narrative is interwoven with mine from beginning until present, the person that I wish to love more deeply than another but feel so divided from. This person is my mother.

I ring my mother every Sunday. Together, we share a unique intimacy that stems from my home in her womb and then into the hours when she brings me into this world in a pain and joy that is beautifully primordial. In our parallel beginning, our interwoven narrative, she is my protector, my source of nourishment and life. I am inextricably bound to her in a fusion of protective comfort and survival.

...Rilke asks of silence, “What one memory holds your deepest grief?”

(in Snow, 2009, p. 461)

Over the years, my relationship with my mother becomes like a small boat in a vast ocean. Often the boat is at risk from the storms that hurl the ocean into giant waves and threaten to capsize the boat and drown its occupants. When days of calm seas and sunshine surround the wooden vessel, it rocks in appreciation knowing that many thousands of gallons of salty water, schools of fish and sea creatures swim beneath its tiny hull. It is always in a precarious situation and knows that on the horizon, somewhere, another storm brews. The position of my mother as the ocean and myself as the tiny boat is interchangeable. I am drawn back to Bachelard’s words and reminded of the fragile relationship that exists between my mother and me. Bachelard asks,

What is the source of our first suffering?
It lies in the fact that we hesitate to speak.
It was born in the moments when we accumulated
silent things within us.

(Hart, 1998, p. 69)

Might she be the source of my own first suffering when I become too frightened to speak? In my acknowledgment of suffering as a form of compassion I bring myself closer to our

union and its complex and delicate structure. For my mother, I am her dark and brooding ocean and she is the boat that bobs and floats in her own silence of suffering. For me, she is my tumultuous and fierce ocean and I am the vessel in which memories, like unwanted cargo weigh me down but also steady me in the rough seas. My own silence, I now understand, comes from my deepest grief and this grief lies in my childhood with my mother.

Our beginning together is fraught with pain. I, the third child in a loveless marriage anchor her to a foreign part of the planet, far from her home and her people. Perhaps a gradual and quiet resentment towards each other grows out of the predicament we have both found ourselves thrown into. Or perhaps, we feel responsible for each other and finding ourselves surrounded in futility, we lose hope and compassion for each other and ourselves.

Punctuated throughout our shared history my mother and I have found ourselves in such desperate places of anger and hurt towards each other that we have rendered each other silent for long periods of time. My mother is verbally volatile, and her angry words often frighten me into silence. In my silence, my mother waits, hoping that the disagreement will pass and not be spoken of again. This gesture of transferable silence between the two of us has become part of our relationship. Now, with age and the disappointment of our recurring battles, silences stretch out past days and into months and then seasons. It seems as if neither of us is able to reconcile our differences with respect or understanding.

I notice my mother is getting older. I could say she is an old woman except that her energy and her spirit keep her from crossing into the threshold of old and rather I place her appropriately at elderly, still with her wit and intelligence. Ironically it is her spirit and energy that strikes with such force and results in another argument about my failure as a daughter and the expected duties that I neglect to fulfil. Our silence, sustained by my refusal to make contact with her, or allow her contact with me, lasts nearly a year.

In writing this thesis as a way of exploring other perspectives of self and discovering the spiritual process of seeking and nurturing the soul, I am now ready to turn towards my mother in an attempt to reunite through honesty and love, virtues I have not been free to

share before. With my voice that embodies vulnerability I seek to find a compassion towards self to release the soulful voice and the grief that has anchored her to the deepest ocean floors of my body. I attempt to write a letter to my mother and let the soulful voice find her place in the present, first within my writing, and then perhaps in my voice. I draw from a deep well of grief the delicate words of the soulful self to the surface. The process of writing is difficult and I struggle to find a way of entering into a space where my voices might sing a chorus of compassion. Finally, the soulful voice beckons me to write a reflective journal that continues my own intersubjective internal dialogue. My journal invites both the writerly voice and the soulful voice to come forward and write in unison. What follows is a to-ing and fro-ing of voices and drafting ways of writing during which I prepare myself for the letter that I finally write. I write in my journal,

10th October 2016

I lie awake for many nights and enter an internal writerly space where I write and edit the letter to my mother. I have not yet committed words to paper but instead listen to my inner voices as they clamour about opening the drawers of my past to reveal some of the ugly stains of my childhood. I struggle to find how I might begin the letter. In our relationship, we do not discuss our delicate emotions. We move around each other in an odd tango of blame and distrust. How strange it now seems to start a conversation, a type of dialogue in a letter and not be interrupted by her declarations of outrage and disgust at my suggestions that we might both be at fault for the strain that we bear in our relationship. In striving to bring words together in the safe space of my inner world, I become conscious of her many possible responses. As though lost in a maze, I struggle to write my way out. Ironically as the writing flows it begins to form an impenetrable hedge that I am compelled to follow until I come to yet another dead end that is the voice of my mother and her damning retorts. I quickly retreat and with my words, I slowly rehearse another route forward.

Emotionally fatigued I decide that if I were to write a letter to my mother that could somehow begin to examine our relationship and its failures I would do so only if I present myself to her as a failure. I will admit my imperfections so that she might find safety in her position of control and authority. It is from this stance that I attempt to unfold some of my own feelings and include them in the letter. It feels strange to write in this way.

Looking at the typed words in their neatly boxed shapes I decide that I must write the letter in my own scrawling handwriting. The crafting of the words not only in thought but in

their physical creation seems another way for me to show my vulnerability and my openness. My ill-formed letters and ever-changing angle of script signifies a part of myself, my uniqueness, and my imperfections. Maybe this gesture will go unnoticed but, for me, it is a significant part of the writing process. The selection of lined paper is a deliberate choice. I use the straight lines like a crutch, propping my words up and keeping them steady and stopping them from sloping towards the dead-end of the page.

16th October 2016

As I begin to write the letter the complexities of our mother-daughter relationship emerge quickly and I become consumed by so many emotions. I think of the pain that I will cause if I write with my heart, with vulnerability and courage. I begin to distrust my own feelings and question whether I am, as my mother says, overly sensitive or telling lies about events in our lives.

As I begin the process I realise that there is much that I want to say but I succumb to silence. I know her well enough to know that she will not understand. Some of my words are bitter and she will be offended and enraged.

Quickly I begin to weaken and my letter writing seems futile. I cannot see what purpose the letter serves except to create more anger and resentment. I become humiliated by my attempts and I feel a sense of diminishment and withdrawal.

Writing my reflective journal brings the writerly self and the soulful self together in harmony. Bachelard writes,

...reverie gives us the world of the soul, and that a poetic image bears witness to a soul which is discovering its world, the world where it would like to live and where it deserves to live. (2010, p. 15)

From my writing emerges a narrative of unified voices where the unearthing of events of the past lets the voices, heralded by melody of the soulful voice and sustained by the *ison* of the writerly and interpreter's voice, to come forward.

Through the narrative the voices twist and turn and my memoir begins to unfold. As I write I slip between feelings of compassion towards my mother as I recall her struggle as a single mother, then anger at her inability to actively listen to me and accept her role as a nurturer. I admire her strength but am frustrated at her refusal to acknowledge the pain she

has caused me. The words, “the pain she has caused me” instantly burden me with a great weight of damnation that my mother has, in my words, caused me pain. As I consider this now, I realise the immense depth of our relationship and the rigid roles that have never developed beyond that of a small child and mother as caretaker. We have not grown and flourished together.

I wonder what fears hold my mother from letting me go and watching me thrive on my own. I cannot help but think she is tied and bound up in her own pain from the past, unable to release herself and her loved ones into uncertainty. With this I am calmed and become free to accept my worth as someone who acts with integrity and good faith. I understand that we have each grown into traditions, inherited values, language and beliefs that have formed the self that is in one of us in quite different ways.

The letter that is finally written results in a distilled version of the chaos of emotion and storytelling that I first begin to draft in my head as I lie in bed surrounded by the silence of dead night. I leave no room for error. I do not draw on memories or incidents but rather I make metaphorical observations that involve the balance between two people in a relationship. I believe that I write with honesty and courage using a voice that I know my mother has not heard me use before. I end the letter with a tone of resignation and uncertainty, inviting her to respond.

21st October 2016

Dear Mum,

...I write this letter with great difficulty as I know many things I will write will make you upset, angry and confused. I wish very much that I could avoid any of the pain that this may cause you but I also feel that it is important that you perhaps begin to understand a little of how I feel and how it has become so difficult to try and uphold a genuinely loving and caring relationship with you...I will always remain open to finding ways of a having a better relationship and understand that time is needed to find the trust in each other to begin to move forward...

When I re-read the final draft of the letter I am satisfied with its tone. It is only later that I realise that the distillation of the letter, the removal of memories, the quietness of my emotion and the positioning of myself into one of submission is a return to my old voice and a retreat to a position of self-protection. I have returned to the old armour that I believe will save me from damage. Re-reading the harsh, filtrated draft, I see the familiar years of journal writing come forward. The absence of emotion, the refusal to make a connection with others, and the stark, clinical sentences have disguised my soulful voice once again. I still decide to send the letter and wait for her response. In this time I retreat to my writerly space for comfort and continue to write myself into different ways of understanding. My journal writing is emotional and full of tenderness towards the self. I make the connection with my soulful self and bring us together through language.

4 days later...25th October 2016

Facing my hesitation at sending my letter I realise the gravity in the commitment to the task. The risks of betrayal, humiliation, the cause of pain, are large and looming. I am swamped by my own increasing self-doubt and my thoughts about myself and who I have become. Do I believe and trust myself enough to know that this is the right course of action? What are the consequences of remaining silent and compliant? It becomes increasingly complex as I consider it further. I hear her taunts of my being 'selfish' and not thinking of others and once again I weaken.

I think of my mother's reaction at receiving the letter. She will be on her own and initially shocked and saddened by my words and later, she will become angry. I carefully pay attention to my thoughts as I wait for her response. Part of me does not want her to respond and wishes not to hear from her ever again and another part of me desperately hopes that she will choose to begin to understand and accept responsibility for her role in our relationship.

I feel guilt from writing my thoughts in the journal. It feels like an indulgence, a selfish indulgence.

5 days later ...30th October 2016

Increasingly I turn inwards to explore my feelings of guilt and how they oppress, shroud and keep me silent and in fear of myself. Where does this guilt come from and does it represent some kind of truth or has it manifested from somewhere else that I cannot yet name?

I sit in a self-imposed purgatory waiting for a response from my mother. In this place of unrest, I consider how precariously I am balanced and feel as though I may topple into some kind of chaos. What might happen if I let myself fall? What am I frightened of? Is it because I fear I might not ever be able to return to my safe sanctuary of silence once my mother tells everyone about my lack of respect for her? Or is it because I am frightened of the uncertainty of what lies ahead?

As I turn outwards, away from my soulful self and place myself in the company of others, I begin to feel the increasing sense of guilt encroach. I become diminished as I am no longer a single individual in dialogue with myself but now within a context of a history that concerns others. Gadamer says, “we ourselves stand within a tradition” (1998, p. 24). I cannot help but wonder if it is tradition that wraps myself and my mother together and is the cause of such friction.

For Gadamer, tradition is a vital force within culture: it can never be effaced and reduced to a ragbag of non-rational or irrational beliefs since beliefs and rationality themselves are part of wider contexts called traditions. (Lawn, 2006, p. 36)

Within the notion of tradition guilt may be found, for instance, amidst the traditions and expectations that form a mother-daughter relationship, this tradition where a mother expects to care for her daughter and in return, a daughter supports and cares for her mother as she matures. Does my guilt come from my challenging a tradition that is so engrained in our society? Does my guilt come from my relations with my mother or does it come from conflict between myself and the traditions that I have inherited? Reflecting on my thesis journey I see my silences, in both my language and my writing as an affirmation of my own suspicion of the traditions that have surrounded me. Annas writes, “Your actions fit into structured patterns in your life: a snapshot of what you are doing at one time turns out to reveal, when we think about these structures, what your broader aims and goals in life are” (2011, p. 122).

My writing reveals patterns of my own quest for understanding of self but within the context of traditions that have imposed ways of being that are so culturally imbedded that it has been wrong to outwardly question them. The silences indicate the knowing and the

questioning of unjust actions but without the belief in myself to perforate the silence with my voice. Only through the acceptance of my past, that which the writing brings to the present, have I allowed myself to be heard.

Solitude, away from the noise of tradition and the voices of others, gives time for another silence to come forward and for a different understanding to be formed. I return to my journal where I wait to hear from my mother.

5 days later...4th November 2016

The letter has prompted me to think about the choices we make and about submission and resistance. When do we choose to submit and when do we choose to resist? To resist seems to suggest that we are asking for change. In resisting we are challenging what might likely be a predictable outcome if instead, we choose to submit.

My risk was to write a letter that served as my resistance against a submission into a familiar outcome, one where I return to carry a burden of confused unhappiness. I chose to alter this. Arriving at this point I now accept myself from the past and the present. I am no longer ashamed of my writing of the past with its odd references and omissions and I am proud of the author. I have come to understand how she writes in a code that even she does not quite understand. This coming together of past and present presented itself in a quiet unfolding of realisation and transformation.

The artist, Anne Truitt writes, “Perhaps the human lesson is always submission. We have a choice: to rebel or to recognize our powerlessness while maintaining our faith” (1982, p. 19). Writing to my mother with an acceptance of self has released new emotions and feelings that enter into my being and shape my thoughts. Despair, frustration, anxiety, grief and the way they enter me, as one, form a new experience. This broadens my understanding of what it is to be human. This new way of being occurs not only from within but also has a bearing on our relationships with others. For my mother and I and a letter full of words that gets passed between the two of us, I, in silence, deliver and she, in silence, receives. Together, our relationship begins to alter from the predictable to the uncertain. The cycle, the pattern is broken. Release might have damaged or set free a relationship between my mother and I. Whatever eventuates, all might not be lost for we can reward gifts of voice to the soulful self.

The next day...5th November 2016

For reasons, not apparent to me now, I chose to write a journal with pencil and paper in the sunny warmth of my lounge room, away from the study, my usual writerly space. I have taken myself away from the square frame of a computer screen and its noisy electronic connections with cyber-space and its pressure for me to produce something. The keyboard does not wish to let me rest or contemplate. The pencil is different. It hovers above the paper whilst I sit in unhurried regard. It seems happy to let me wander, be distracted by something whilst it waits patiently for me to begin writing again.

During this time of reflection, a disclosure evolves slowly from within. The following days after the letter to my mother is sent I become increasingly anxious. I think of the turmoil I have created and what I have set loose and the damage I might cause. Soon these feelings begin to abate. With the overwhelming uncertainty of how I might make others feel I turn towards myself and examine how the process of writing and sending the letter has affected me. What is transforming within me?

To others, in the outside world, I continue to drink from the same cup, I eat the same foods and generally behave in the same manner as I have always done. To the outside world there is no physical transformation. Deeper conversations with trusted friends, the kinds of conversations that seem to happen so rarely these days, reveal hints of a different me. I acknowledge that I listen differently. I take more care with other people's words. These small changes, obvious to only a few in the lived world highlight the enormity of the anagogic experience continually unfolding within me.

On the 12th August, 1904, Rilke writes to his friend, Franz Kappus,

You have had many and great sadnesses, which passed. And you say that even this passing was hard for you and put you out of sorts. But, please, consider whether these great sadnesses have not rather gone right through the center of yourself? Whether much in you has not altered, whether you have not somewhere, at some point of your being, undergone a change while you were sad?...Were it possible for us to see further than our knowledge reaches, and yet a little way beyond the outworks of our divining, perhaps we

would endure our sadness with greater confidence than our joys. For they are the moments when something new has entered into us, something unknown; our feelings grow mute in shy perplexity, everything in us withdraws, a stillness comes, and the new, which no one knows, stands in the midst of it and is silent. (p. 49)

In my transforming I am aware of “something new” within me and I ask, what is the new thing that is nameless that has become part of me? It is majestic and serene and delivered in silence. It does not herald its arrival but instead waits to be discovered. I am respectful of this new feeling and let it become part of me. I do not wish to unpack it in order to understand it rather I let it find its way around my inner world. Free to explore my darkest corners I am in “shy perplexity “at this gift “which no one knows”.

Ruminating deeper into the corners of my soulful self, I no longer see dark corners of hidden secrets. Instead I see my inner world as a vast solar system of complexities, beautiful, unique and colourful in the Elysian, dark, endless, infinite, boundless potentiality of my inner self. My corporeal body with its frame, its skin, its words, its actions houses such magnificence and I am in awe.

This new thing that has entered me, that now resides within, cannot be described as a feeling or an emotion rather it is an eternal state of becoming, a constellation of uncertainty and hope, fragility, openness and vulnerability. But as the moons of my interior wax and wane so does the sense of these entitlements. If I lose sight of them, their majesty drifts in the expanse.

On the 16th November, 2016 I receive a letter from my mother. At once I notice her handwriting with its German dialect infused into the letters. The number 7 of my street address has a strike through the middle, not something taught in Australian schools. An emphasis on full stops and commas denote the careful and deliberate measures taken to ensure this letter is delivered to the correct address. She writes,

Liebe Freya,

Thank you for your letter which did confuse me quite a bit...maybe if I were a wealthy important person, our relationship might have been different...When I asked you to put our grievances aside and make peace after all these months of silence, I thought you could find it in your heart to resume a friendly relationship with me again, considering that my life is coming to an end...

Her letter is gentle and accepting of my words yet I wonder if the divide in our relationship, which has existed for many years, has made it difficult for her to recognise who I have become. Her own attempts at placing herself in a position of humility frustrate me and I wonder if she writes with truth, cowardice or ignorance. I let these thoughts ruminate within me and gradually, with my own self-belief becoming stronger, I wonder more about my mother's narrative and whether she too has buried her soulful self.

For months, I let my phone ring unanswered, knowing that my mother wishes to contact me. I am frightened of being diminished into my childhood state of grief by her vitriolic words but I am more frightened that we might shroud the grief with yet another heavy layer of feigned ignorance. Another year passes before I am ready to communicate with my mother in a way that stretches towards an uncertainty where we move together rather than retreat into the habits of our past. Slowly, we move forward with gently swaying motions, like waves on calmer seas. We care for each other and begin to talk in ways that are more self-forgiving and that in turn, become forgiveness for each other. It is delicate but comforting. Again, we share an intimacy that only a mother and daughter can experience.

I am excited by the discovery of my inner self visualised in this celestial way. Like any explorer I am keen to push myself further into the shimmering blackness, not with fear but with bravery and courage. After all, how could I be fearful of a discovery that will only lead to a greater understanding of self, the self that does not move or act differently and is discernibly the same to others but instead, the greater self, the unexplored self. In my quiet jubilation, I wonder how it is that I have not honoured the inner self with more reverence, that I have not treated it with greater respect. How is it possible that for so long how others were seeing me was more important than how I was seeing myself? How is it that when I was looking at myself, I was judging myself on my actions performed in the real world. From

new awareness of my vast inner universe the real world outside looks small and filled with less difficulty.

Heraclitus writes, “Soul has its own inner law of growth” (45). From this internal perspective my soul, my internal universe is without limits and offers the promise of infinite expansion. Developing and deepening my understanding silence brings me closer towards embodying vulnerability. Silence asks to be heard and I have come to understand that yawning gaps of seeming nothingness in my writing contain rich meaning. Initially, my reaction to confronting my journal and discovering her silence was to immediately fill the empty space with words or sound, anything to plug the void rather than explore the silence. Might I have been afraid that silence holds greater truth than words? And if this is so, what was there to be afraid of in truth? By embracing silence and its potential for finding hidden truth, along with patience, the friend of silence, I have begun to find delicate joy and subtle beauty that once may have been lost amongst the noise of too many words.

V

POETIC SYMPHONIES

Just imagine, it was precisely those bruises on my soul that at the next moment gave me the courage for a new life.

Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, 1989

LANDSCAPE OF THE NIGHT

I take my chapter title from Rose's *Women in Dark Times*, a volume heralding female survivors who are prepared to risk trekking down the difficult road to reach their destiny, even if it is a fateful one. Rose takes us into a world where poetry, art, cinema and speech are mediums in which heroines tell the story of their "struggle to be fully human" (2015, p. x). Through the unfolding narratives, Rose asks all women to bravely "tell the world what it has to learn from the moment when we enter the landscape of the night" (p. x). Buried within my journal entries my darkened landscape can be found and so I resonate with Rose's women in their urgency to speak, write or paint their own suffering. In doing so we might bring to the surface our stories from which we might re-interpret our suffering with new insight. Rose introduces the women in her book by writing,

Each of them trawls the darkness of their inner life, where their own most anguished voices reside, in order to understand what impedes them but also in search of the resources to defy their own predicaments. (2015, p. 2)

Writing my life story in bits and pieces, here and there has become a habit I have kept for more than thirty years. Over this time my writing journals take on various guises and now form a patchwork of written personas. Slowly I have come to appreciate them as fragments of honest expression but there are still periods of writing that I have forcefully buried because of the catastrophic confusion and pain they harbor. In my tumultuous teens I wrote a series of shared diaries between myself and a girlfriend, where we moaned and

wailed dramatically over the burdens of teenage life. I got rid of these as this was a chapter of utter chaos and frenetic struggle that I needed to at least physically remove from my life in the hope it might be rid entirely from my memory. Later I religiously keep notes and musings on my successes and disappointments in the gardens that I create to indelibly leave my mark on the world as proof that I was here. In between I meticulously write travel journals that vaguely attempt to capture vignettes of my intrusion on to foreign soils. Over the course of this time my journal grasps my identity as it slips and slides into various moulds. Within each journal entry, whether it be banal, vacuous, entertaining or reflective, I find myself in both writing the entry, and now reading the entry, traversing the deeper pockets of my being. My journal moves beyond language and into realms of symbolic meaning.

Truitt says, “Artists have no choice but to express their lives” (1982, p. 38). I now wonder if my journal constitutes artistic expression, one in which I habituate a struggle between wanting my thoughts to remain private and needing to actualise them through words. Is this suffering, to remain private and at the same time to be vulnerable to public view, my art? And, is there something to appreciate about our humanity that seeks affirmation through making connections with others, confiding and revealing what is inner to the outer in creative acts such as writing?

With each ongoing transformation of self I continue to document aspects of my life through my journal. Unwittingly perhaps, I capture an essence of my being that permanently stains the pages of my journal, but not always in ink. My being might be found tightly compressed between stories, trampled flat by tedious details of dull events, or it might even be temporarily lost amongst the frenetic words of daily life. Even where I have deliberately tried not to disclose anything of my self, like an apparition, my being still occupies a space within my journal. It as though something deeper within, my internal celestial Goddesses are willing me to leave a mark of my presence in this world through narrative.

Over time I have come to accept my ongoing writing, the presence of my journal, and its permanent residence in my life as part of my necessary accessories. Normally, I have an aversion to clutter and am known to clean out cupboards with regularity and great gusto. I believe my obsession for simplicity comes from leading a nomadic life from an early age as the result of the divorce between my parents. Shared custody meant the constant to-ing and

fro-ing of my siblings and me between houses and I became used to packing a bag with only bare essentials. Later in life, I find a calming comfort in being surrounded by space and order. I enjoy the restful sensation of knowing that my objects have a place of belonging and I become annoyingly agitated if something sits homeless on an otherwise clean surface for too long. For me, my objects have a purpose. Whilst I don't like clutter I do value what each of the objects I choose to keep represents to me. For many years my journals were homeless and it bothered me because I didn't know what to do with them or where to put them because they didn't seem to have a purpose and should have been thrown out years ago. Instead, I dragged them along with me like excess baggage, a necessary nuisance, like Coleridge's Albatross around my neck. I wanted to know they existed but I wanted them to remain hidden. For years my journal books were dispersed between boxes of photos, a cluttered drawer in the garden house and old storage boxes that contained a few mementos from my childhood. Unlike many of my other books they were never housed together on a shelf in neat chronology to represent my timeline on this earth. Instead they lay dormant, in darkness and unopened. Even now I have them stored in a box in a cupboard, away from fresh, curious eyes and whilst I have acquired a quiet reverence for their contents, they are utterly private.

Recently I have come to see my journal as something richer, more cathartic and, most importantly, a "resource to defy [my] own predicament[s]" (Rose, 2015, p. 2). Kearney points to "the earliest of literatures", where "we find tales of primal trauma which testify to a certain catharsis through storytelling". I have always felt that writing, my writerly space, and the solitude and reflection that form part of this world release me from an emotional pressure that holds me in an anxious grip whilst I am in the ongoing complex noise of the world. I cannot say from where this pressure arises except that Kearney's notion of primal trauma might be a description that opens up to me another perspective of how I reside within my writerly space. Might I now see my own narrative as one of such quiet trauma, where pain is so bound up in words it is rendered silent and hidden? Might my journal be symbolic of a festering wound too tightly bound and without air. Revisiting my journal through the writing of this thesis opens the wounds of my journal and allows fresh air and new perspective to begin a healing process. Kearney says,

while traumatic wounds cannot be cured, they may at times be healed –
and such healing may take place through a therapy of narrative catharsis. In

short, healing by word. A transformation of incurable wounds into healable scars. (Kearney, 2017, p. 1)

Even now, after embracing the contents of my journal, many of the stories told still hold pain but suspended within is an alchemic elixir of potential healing. Perhaps because they are always under construction and continually coming into something new they are perpetually uncertain and it is within uncertainty that restorative healing resides. Merleau-Ponty says, “beneath the conceptual significations of words, an existential signification...inhabits them [words] and is inseparable from them” (2012, p. 188). With each re-reading of my journal I am surprised at the rejuvenated, fluid and elastic meaning that comes forward and once again I draw on Merleau-Ponty as a way of seeing myself and my writing as an ongoing creative dialogical movement. Merleau-Ponty says,

The operation of expression, when successful, does not simply leave to the reader or the writer himself a reminder; it makes the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, it installs this signification in the writer or the reader like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience. (2012, p. 188)

Remaining open to the “operation of expression” and looking again to vulnerability and its alchemic properties of bringing us closer to ourselves, Rilke, once more, shows me a sensitive but unwavering strength in his embodied vulnerability towards sadness,

The more still, more patient and more open we are when we are sad, so much the deeper and so much the more unswervingly does the new go into us, so much the better do we make it ours... (Rilke, 2004, p. 49)

My journal is a creative, metaphorical text that invites ongoing dialogue between myself as reader and interpreter. My diaphanous being is held in the words and pages of my journal and I acknowledge the soulful self as it moves in and around the words and back into my bodily, present self. Emotions, which come forward from unfolding layers of new meaning, delve into parts of me where a “new sense organ” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 188) might be touched. My writerly space provides me with the stillness and patience that Rilke suggests is needed for the “new to go into us”.

My relationship with my writing transforms just as my relationship with myself undergoes transformation. The two intertwine and I now see more closely their inextricable ties. The creation of words and the physical act of writing bring me to a place of transcendence but also of great vulnerability. I gradually soften and in doing so my inner world becomes available to me. I draw my inner world out like a spider spinning a silken web, carefully weaving her thread here and there. My web, my words are both delicate and strong. Linking the creation of art and authoring one's inner thoughts shares the notion of exposing one's own vulnerabilities. The interpersonal intimacy between writing and personal transformation is a way of further understanding ourselves in this world. Kym McLaren suggests, "the intimate ways in which human artistic creations can both give expression to, and deepen, our relations to reality" (2014, p. 55). In Truitt's own account of her life as an artist, she describes her experience when she attends her own showing at the Baltimore Museum of Art and stands before her sculptures,

Tears rose to my eyes and from that freshest of feelings the unchangeable and unchanging truth: I am always, and always will be vulnerable to my own work, because by making visible what is most intimate to me I endow it with the objectivity that forces me to see it with utter, distinct clarity. A strange fate. I make a home for myself in my work, yet when I enter that home I know how flimsy a shelter I have wrought for my spirit. My vulnerability to my own life is irrefutable. Nor do I wish it to be otherwise, as vulnerability is a guardian of integrity. (Truitt, 1987, p. 19)

Recounting the experience of facing my own narrative I share with Truitt a similar emotional upheaval. My reaction to my narrative starts to manifest at the apprehension of seeing my words. A slight internal tremor holds me when I approach my journal to begin to scan my past history. The tremor I experience I now recognise as a fear at seeing an objectified version of myself in the form of language. I fear that the written narrative exposes a truth that is open to an interpretation that might stretch the intention of the narrative into directions that I am unable to control. I fear that my words are cast and cannot be erased. I fear that I must acknowledge my written narrative and expose a truth of the self, and in this raw exposure I feel vulnerable and unprotected. What I uncover in my writing is a truth drawn from the soulful self, a place where my integrity is composed. Interwoven in the narrative is the alchemic elixir of integrity and vulnerability and as long as the narrative exists, even if only in dormancy, I remain unprotected.

ALCHEMY



Painting by Brett Whiteley, *Alchemy* Art Gallery, NSW

The Australian artist, Brett Whiteley writes of his eighteen-panelled painting titled *Alchemy*, “*Alchemy* is the business of seeing what doesn’t exist...The quest is the transmutation of Self”(Pearce, 1995, p. 34). He tells us of his work, “Most of this painting was first seen with the eyes closed in the pitch of night, awake”. Curator Barry Pearce quotes him as often saying, “Art should astonish, transmute, transfix. Work at the tissue between truth and paranoia” (Pearce, 1995, p. 34). Whiteley brings his other world, where he sees “what doesn’t exist” into his extensive creation where he continues on his quest of the “transmutation of Self”. My own alchemic transforming happens when I enter the writerly space and make a connection with my journal. In this space, I hover somewhere near the “tissue between truth and paranoia” and a version of my own edited reality. I see before me the inky script of a version of self. I immediately connect to the author by her handwriting but also feel a disconnection because her authoring is overly careful. She is not brave enough to create something so intimate into something so objectively visible. She hides behind her narrative. I see her attempts at writing in neat lines on a blank page. I watch as her script flows between upright and inclined lines of words, like a small breeze pushing through her sentences creating patterns like tall, parched grass on a dry summer hill. Her vague ramblings serve to massage her mind into a restful state.

28th January '97, ~~2~~

Today it has remained misty and slightly damp and humid. Great weather to work in - the sun gets too intense. I finished the Herb Garden and have begun to fill it with Tip Shop Mulch and soil. It was such an enjoyable little project I hope that it will succeed completely. I can't wait for my plants to arrive - I can see that I'm going to need all the help I can get that weekend. I can't remember exactly, but I've ordered something like 192 plants and about 3- or 400 bulbs. What fun.

Have not decided what to do with the garden ^{or the} steps. Maybe I'll plant annual delphiniums to follow the bulbs; grape hyacinth, crocus - left over. It would deserve to have a mass planting of something. I may just leave it as the annual bed and this year will be ladybird Poppies. They will look fantastic - I must remember to plant iris bulbs in a corner - a large dump

She writes to find a mindless rhythm where easy words fall from her and land onto the page without effort other than to record something of her existence in that space in time, as though to merely exist is not enough.

In the gradual opening of dialogue between my journal and myself as reader and interpreter, the collision of past and present versions of self create new, ongoing understandings of who I might have been, who I am and who I am...not yet (Pinar, 1998). As I continue to write I begin to reveal what is hidden beneath the superficial and visual layer of my everyday thoughts and understand my relationship between self, my journal and with ongoing restless confusion, my place within the world. As I evolve I begin to see and feel myself not merely as a dense construct of human flesh that looks primarily to the outside world but increasingly as a transparent fluid shape that turns inwards and outwards with ease. As I gently waltz between the porous boundaries of my inner and outer worlds I bring with me newly discovered perspectives so that I might gaze upon the inner and outer spaces that I now freely habituate. My writing, once a way of protecting what my inner being held sacred, is now a way of sharing the virtues of fragility, ethos and truth.

Whiteley's life is embedded in his art and his work allows him to convey his continual "transmutation of Self". Other artists also show a compelling need to represent themselves

through their art and I am drawn to understand what it is I share with artists in our quest to reform parts of our otherwise unseen selves to the public. Are we showing ourselves or others different ways in which they might come to understand us better? Or perhaps we are trying to purge ourselves of a turmoil of hidden trauma that boils away within us, unseen by others but immense within our being. The paintings from artist Charlotte Salomon, whose tragic life ended in Auschwitz, show a frenetic energy in which she attempts to revive all the women in her life through her painterly voice. Rose declares, “Charlotte Salomon’s work is her hymn to freedom”(2015, p. 76). Primarily a painter, Salomon’s Jewish heritage in Nazi Germany resulted in her producing one outstanding artistic work titled *Life? Or Theatre?* of over “700 colour gouaches...with musical and verbal accompaniment mostly inscribed on transparent overlays on top of the painted page” (Rose, 2015, p. 68). Her layered autobiographical story is represented through “fragments of a life that cannot be cohered into a single shape” (p. 74). Salomon’s approach to her art appeals to my temporal upheaval in choosing to see my own life not as a lineal construct of beginning, middle and end but rather, delicate layers of a past as present and a future as both impossibly imminent but also eternally stretched into a horizon so distant that it might fall into a past that I have yet to remember. My journal in its true reconstituted form is not an autobiographical chronicle of events, but rather “fragments” of narrative that are held in shape only by the readers interpretation. The interpretative shape might dissolve once the reader’s attention is turned elsewhere or perhaps transform into another formation with altered meaning. Either way, my journal is under eternal transformation.

Alchemy may also be viewed as Whiteley’s autobiographical journey from right to left as birth to death with a toxic abundance of personal anecdotal references along the way. As the viewer becomes more closely involved with the art we gradually become drawn into seeing other entries into the work. The central panel “IT” dominates the painterly landscape and invites me to ponder on our never-ending present-ness. The “IT” suggest a possible question, “Is this IT? Is my life IT?” I am summoned by the bold, black letters that engulf the panel and am frustrated by its call to demand of me my own accountability to my ongoing present-ness in the real world. The painting asks of me, am I giving of my true self to self and others? Am I loving authentically and with honesty and not hiding from the pain that is necessary to live fully?



Painting by Charlotte Salomon, *Life? or Theatre?*, The Jewish Historical Museum

Salomon completed her work between 1941 and 1943 after being told her family's history, which includes extreme violent acts of suicide and incest. She writes in a letter that the alternative to painting is "to lose her mind" (Rose, 2012, p. 69). Although my life experiences cannot compare with the devastation that Salomon was subjected to, I feel that I am able to relate to something of her insistence in turning to painting as a way of addressing the substantial silences and unjust acts in her life. In Salomon's work, we find her "struggling for an artistic form which will allow the different voices of the world, however dissonant, to subsist in the same space" (p. 75). For my own writerly space, I too look for ways of bringing together my inner world voices in a shared space and constantly feel my way through words towards a harmonious equilibrium. My earliest journal reveals the difficulty in finding the balance of voices when the "I" is absent. For Salomon, so traumatised, "she forgoes the use of 'I' and at one point she assigns the tale to 'another viewpoint'" (p. 69). As I reflect on my own dismissal of "I" in my journal, I recall that I do not wish to be the owner of the narrative and bear the responsibility of its permanent reminder. Rather, to take away the 'I' from the narrative allows me to become something other and in doing so makes the writing act tolerable. Now, my writing draws on the energy of "I" and I am in awe of its strength to draw me into places where, ironically, I am able to lose the rigid identity that holds me in the outer world. I am no longer held in the grip of 'I' but can also be 'other'. Rose says Salomon is an example of "another woman whose unyielding sense of who she is relies on

an ability to disperse, or even lose herself” (2015, p. 69). Like Salomon, my increasing sense of who I am and who I am becoming allows me to write my own “hymn to freedom” through losing myself within the writerly space. Woolf in *A Writer’s Diary*, similarly tackles her writing with the same “ability to disperse” when she notes, “when I write I’m merely a sensibility” (1954/1981/2003, p. 47). Here, Woolf revokes her conscious for the unconscious where her sensibilities reign and I am reminded of the subtle alchemy between the artist and her need to be closely connected to her bodily intuition so that she might create works with authenticity.

Rose says of people’s histories, “you gather up, paint, draw, narrate, and sing others who people your past” (2015, p. 70). Indeed, Salomon says of her own work “‘I became my mother, my grandmother...in fact I was all the characters who take part in my play. I learned to travel all their paths and became all of them’” (p. 69). In my journal, I ask where are my other people? Have I buried them deep in my garden where their voices are muffled by the earth? Or perhaps they are drowned by the shrill of my own writerly voice in my desperate attempt to create a new version of self. I seek out the reasons why I have attempted to carve out new versions of myself at various stages of my life through my journal. Are the words my attempt at affirming my newly creating self? As the writerly voice drowns the soulful voice I wonder if the writerly voice is more than protecting the soulful voice and instead is shamed by the vulnerability that the soulful voice embodies. In his article, “The Wound that Connects: A Consideration of ‘Narcissism’ and the Creation of Soulful Space”, Todres finds in Phil Mollon a poignant depiction of shame,

in shame the pain concerns the image of the self...the self as weak, defective, pathetic, exposed and violated. (Mollon, 1993, p. 74 in Todres, 2004, p. 5)

In following Todres I see that I might have subdued my early images of self by forgoing ‘I’. And so, I deliberately repress, even lose, the voices of others in my attempt to “pretend that one does not need others or otherness” (Todres, 2004, p. 5) to affirm or shame me. Perhaps I too create a “construction of a more perfect ideal self is attempted; one that is in control of, and that can armour oneself against, personal vulnerability” (p. 5). Todres leads me on and says,

In such forms of interpersonal sensitivity and extremity, a lot of energy is expended on finding a mirror that admires the hoped-for ideal self-image. The need to see oneself in such a mirror can carry the level of panic and desperation associated with life or death issue. (p. 6)

I am in awe of how hard I once worked in writing to purge the vulnerable and sensitive self and now, years later, ironically, to recover my vulnerability I write again. The invitation of my journal continues to bring me to darkened corners of my past and I now am drawn to wonder when vulnerability becomes shame. Todres says,

there is simply a vulnerability given with the human condition...a sense of disconnection from a source of nourishment and discontinuity: a tear in the sense of simple going-on-being...a felt vulnerability of need and incompleteness, of wanting; a sense of something missing, and a stretching toward what may come. (2004, p. 4)

CHRYSALIS

In acts of writing I feel my way towards early memories of rejection and it is here that I find the “tear in the sense of simple going-on-being” (Todres, 2004, p. 4). In these memories treacherous storms of rejection, vulnerability, pain and shame brew. I find a memory that brings me back to my youngest days when the sanctity of family was my comfortable world. Learning the shocking reality of the broken relationship between my mother and father was the first “tear” of an unspoken and confusing disturbance that has not left me. When writing to my mother in an attempt to repair our relationship I find myself writing another letter, this is a letter to self. Unable to use the significant “I”, I come closer to the awful tear by developing an intimate relationship between the voices of the soulful self and the writer. Here, in unison they write in conversation, often overlapping and intertwining each other, about their shared past. The voices adjust and “I” is bravely brought forward as the narrative unfolds as though the story offers a place of safety from which to reveal the significance of the memory.

September 2016

Do you think that the world began to shift into a different focus when developing your speech and finding your earthly, external voice? With the sound of your voice comes new words and new understandings begin to form. Is this when you unwittingly embody an unwelcome coldness into your existence? An awareness of being begins to slowly unfurl and nest itself within you. You sense you are part of a flow of day and night and move forward with a rhythm that is called life. Occasionally you break the rhythm to stop, listen and pay closer attention to the details and complexities of your existence. You know you belong to a group of people, a family, but now you become attentive to your being as a solitary figure who functions independently of others. The warm security of acceptance and unconditional love from family and to family begins to tarnish. A confusion arises from understanding your place within the family and its position of both strength and fragility. Family and the linking of each member to another form something solid, protective and strangely united. You belong together but once a link is broken, you become lost and don't know where or how to belong. For a time, efforts to remain linked are made but the strain is great. You begin to exist independently, you think independently. You both belong and at the same time do not belong. This is where I am here to comfort you and you begin to retreat increasingly to your inner world with greater conscious awareness. Another type of nurturing begins to unfurl inside of you. Your awareness of the self inside of you begins to become known. This is my voice. This is where we meet and I become your friend, meek and quiet. You shield me from the outside world as though I am a secret not to be shared with others.

Remember the early evening in the kitchen of your childhood home when your mother throws a plate at your father? It misses and strikes the doorframe instead, shattering into large ceramic shards. It is in the same kitchen that you often innocently dance in the morning sunrays whilst your mother tidies around you. Unbeknownst to you, your mother is steeped in constant sadness and frustration at her predicament of being locked in a loveless marriage and far away from her homeland, Germany. The shock of being on the sideline of something so violent and wrong, and being frightened into a frozen silence marks the intrusion of fear and uncertainty into your life. Somehow, without any explanation you swallow this memory like an uncomfortably large pill, struggling to force it down with embarrassment and a shame that is not yours to own. You desperately want someone to say something to try and soothe you but there is no one there to help you

understand. The incident of the broken plate is never spoken of. Perhaps they thought that you would forget. Perhaps they were unable to explain themselves.

What you do remember is that your mother feels justified in what she does. Her deliberate action suggests she is not sorry. At the time, your father is mute and possibly drunk, the reason for your mother's outrage. The power and tension of that moment as you stare at both of them in silence and disbelief reverberates in you still. Your mother is strong and in rage and your father is like paper against a wall, thin, flattened and silent. What does a five-year-old do with an experience like that? You turn it into a memory and secret it away deep inside of yourself. You feel as though you are carrying contraband and its constant presence makes you feel uneasy. I help you by smuggling this memory even deeper inside of you away from the harsh bright light of the real world. I pack the secret into a corner and cover it with darkness in the hope that it might disappear forever. But the inner world, where I reside, is eternal. Here nothing is ever forgotten but only hidden.

After the imminent divorce, there is a silent and swift departure from your childhood home in South Yarra, your place of belonging. Moving to the new house in Malvern with your mother and sister, and not your brother marks disengagement and the permanent ugliness of divorce stains your world. Your new home marks not a new beginning but an end to the innocence of childhood, something that was taken from you too soon. A strange mixture of wariness and comfortable joy fills you every second weekend when you return to your childhood home to visit your father and brother. Your first childhood home, solid, grandiose and big enough to be the entire world of your existence represents the comfort of belonging somewhere and to someone. Its thick brick walls fill with cool air in the scorching summer months. We smile at the sound of pigeons gently cooing in the cool dawn. Their presence is marked by their velvety calls and they remain hidden amongst the deep, verdant leaves of the ancient oak tree in the backyard. Later, as the day heats up, the air cracks with the deafening pulse of bright green cicadas. We collect the discarded brown, paper-like shells of the cicada that cling like sticky aliens on the willow tree. Up-close we admire their perfect features. The shell is complete with legs intact, only a small tear can be seen where the living iridescent creature crawls out. This is your comfortable world where you belong and feel entitled to call your home. You share an intimacy with the house and garden that somehow invites you to own its spaces. You know every creak in the floorboards, the smell of its rooms, the taste of the water as you drink straight from the backyard faucet. Later, with the family links broken, piece by piece you lose a definition

of yourself. The objects that ground you, like your childhood home, that give you a sense of place, also begin to move and shake so that you become increasingly unstable.

van Manen says, “To write is to measure our thoughtfulness” (1990, p. 127). As I return to my journal and wonder about the young girl and later the woman that wrote her thoughts, I listen carefully and hear a voice that unites the past and present. The voice is gentle and liberates the pressure of trying to understand who I was then and who I am becoming. Gently guiding me, the voice invites me to listen and allows me to open my present self to something new. Ushering me towards relinquishing my position of possible judgements and biases, the voice encourages me to find a deeper sensitivity towards myself, my connection with my journal and my place in this world. As I write, the voice urges me further into myself and it is in this transformative place of time, space and memory that I find strength and have a sense of clarity. Like Persephone, I am being pulled into the darkness of my own underworld where from this place, fresh words emerge and I write with “thoughtfulness” and confidence. I reunite words from the past into newly crafted phrases with alternative meanings that give a fullness to who I am becoming in the present. I wonder how often and for how long I will find myself returning to my inner place where a slow incubation, like that of the developing chrysalis takes place.

As we write to measure our thoughtfulness van Manen suggests we find that our writing “separates us from what we know”. Yet, he says, writing “unites us more closely with what we know” (1990, p. 127). Though we might become separated from what we know we can “reclaim this knowledge and make it our own in a new and more intimate manner” (p. 127). For van Manen, as we seek to bring what is internal to external expression we enter a dialogical to-ing and fro-ing from inside to outside in a kind of “embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation” (p. 127). I follow van Manen in transforming my journal into new meaning, with fresh words. Like the palimpsest, I write over the original layers of words with new emerging meaning, and yet again, I write another layer. Salomon’s obsessive return to the theme of her family reminds of my own, as yet unhealed scars of my past and the wound caused by the tearing of my family from its foundation of a truth of belonging. Might the re-writing and the layering of new meaning allow the air and light needed for healing to happen? Might I be left with only a scar as my reminder of the wound that struck so deep?

Childhood hours in our vast backyard listening to the choral drone of the cicadas brings me, once again, to revisit the memory in search of what I now come to know as the comfortable state of belonging. I wish to hold myself in the gossamer cocoon of my summer childhood and, if only for a moment or two, feel the same sensation I once had as a child so as I might explore it more fully and come to understand its potent elixir of a contentment that arises from fragile vulnerability and an openness to uninhibited self-immersion. I remember, not only the glee in discovering the cicada's empty, brittle outer cases but also of the continual wonder and mystery as to how the cicadas had arrived. Only now, I discover they lie beneath the earth as a nymph, slowly, slowly developing for up to seven years (Britton, 2015). Waiting for the right conditions, they then emerge to crawl up a tree, resplendent in vivid green. The long maturation and transformation of the cicada reminds me of my journal and its emergence from dormancy. It now seems appropriate that my journal lies quiescent for so long. In its underground place of inactivity, my journal is quietly gestating, meanwhile, I, its owner, also undergo life change that slowly prepares me for the reunion of the stories in my journal. I wonder if my writing and the regeneration of my journal is a cyclic rebirth? A cycle that comprises of one in which I write to discover the conditions in which I might emerge, like a nymph cicada maturing into an adult and pulling myself through the tear in the shell, gracefully unfolding my brightly coloured wings, gilded with golden chrysalis. What I leave behind is the empty shell which are the words left in my journal. The words only represent a layer of me, now discarded as I move into yet another transformation, eventually to return underground once more and wait before I write again.

Ursula K. Le Guin writes about her thirty-year relationship reading the author, Leo Tolstoy, in her book of essays and talks titled *The Wave in the Mind* (2004). She is refreshingly frank in her description at arriving at a point in which she says, "I used to be too respectful to disagree with Tolstoy, but after I got into my sixties my faculty of respect atrophied" (p. 33). Here, she forms "unspoken questions" of "silent disagreement" towards Tolstoy and his ability as a "genius" writer (p. 34). My relationship with my journal, in its inactive state, is a reminder of my shame. Gradually, with time, my shame shifts into an awareness of the need for vulnerability. The questions that arise are able to transform, in my case, from unwritten to written, hidden to exposed, through a hibernation where incubation of feeling deep inside of me is necessary. Le Guin goes on to say,

The unspoken, as we know, tends to strengthen, to mature and grow richer over the years, like an undrunk wine. Of course it may just go to Freudian vinegar. Some thoughts and feelings go to vinegar very quickly, and must be poured out at once. Some go on fermenting in the bottle, and burst out in an explosion of murderous glass shards. But a good, robust, well-corked feeling only gets deeper and more complicated, down in the cellar. The thing is knowing when to uncork it. (2004, p. 34)

Deep in my journal I begin to find attempts of a kind of self-healing and repair. Words emerge that act as a gift of kindness towards my vulnerable self. I am emotionally startled at my reaction as I gradually discover the moments of warmth and life slipping into the later journal entries and realise that a fermentation of my own feelings is maturing and developing,

Tuesday, 25th April 2006

ANZAC DAY

Life has taken so many unexpected pleasurable turns...I now have my beautiful boy, Ethan to keep me more than occupied...

A slow opening of the doors I have closed on the world begins to let light and others in. I let people amaze me, distract me, fall in love with me and potentially hurt me but I have become strong enough to risk the pain. The word “we” enters the language of my journal as though I am no longer truly alone but now part of something inseparable, my own family. The “thoughtfulness” towards my stories fills me with sadness at the silent, painful journey that still lays unearthed at the heart of my journal. I cannot quite reach into it but know that the words that lie on top are like Pandora’s lid that sits over a deep pot of something that simmers.

Warnke says of hermeneutics and understanding, “From the beginning..., we are involved in the practical task of deciphering the story or stories of which we are a part so that we know how to go on” (2002, p. 79). As interpreter of my journal I continuously question who I am and who I am becoming. For me this question is always alive and constantly changing its dimension in each new moment of contemplation. Warnke says,

We have to reflect on and understand ourselves in the middle of continuing to live and act as we have already understood ourselves. Put otherwise, we live or write our lives according to the meanings we think they have possessed and understand those meanings according to the way we continue to live and write our lives. (in Dostal, 2002, p. 80)

Warnke places us in the middle of our ongoing incompleteness in the hermeneutic circle, where even further enrichment for myself as interpreter is waiting. Following Gadamer, Warnke says, “When we try to understand ourselves, our past and our future, we do so from a constantly changing temporal position” (p. 81). The reading of my journal is hermeneutic. With each new reading, I am present at a new point in time. My past spreads out in vast horizons before me, not linear, but across great expanses of years, days, weeks and moment upon moment all leading me to the ever-new present. It is the past that is before me that leads me to where I am now, it is both in front and behind (Lederach, 2005). It sits with me and guides me to who I am at this very present moment. And with each moment folding into the next, my realisation of myself changes and continues to change.

It is in this hermeneutic circle that past, present and future interweave to temper the relationship that forms between me and my journal. At the heart of the relationship breathes an ongoing dialogue that yearns for understanding. Jean Grondin says of Gadamer’s notion of understanding,

To understand, in Gadamer’s sense, is to articulate (a meaning, a thing, an event) into words, words that are always mine, but at the same time those of what I strive to understand. (in Dostal, 2002, p. 41)

Thinly veiled thoughts that I yearn to grasp briefly suspend understandings and imaginings that seep through my words. I wish to anchor them but I wrestle them until I might begin to claim lucidity towards my own understanding of my ongoing narrative. Grondin concludes with, “the application that is at the core of every understanding process thus grounds in language” (p. 41). Through art-making with language my understanding is able to shift transcendently and aesthetically as I summon my past self and transform her into my present. In Turitt’s diaries I find miracles of words, as she writes of her work with the curator, Walter Hopps in preparing for her retrospective exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1974. Truitt struggles with the painful process of revisiting “every extant piece of work I ever put my hand on” (1982, p. 21). I bring together Le Guin’s metaphor of timely

uncorking of fermented feelings and my own hermeneutic rediscovery of my journal and its initial disturbance on my private inner world with the words of Truitt. In her diary she writes,

8th July 1974

The core of my reluctance was, of course, cowardice. I had recorded in order to forget. I had hustled my pain, my despair, my delight, my bafflement onto paper and into clay and wood and stone, and fixed them there as if in magic enchantment. I had thought to hold them, beyond re-examination, re-experience. Sprung from my deliberately wrought tombs, my most secret feelings arose alive, bleeding and dazzling, to overwhelm me once more.

Paradoxically, it was this very pressure that saved me. My past meshed into my present. It had to be taken in, considered, woven. I found, to my surprise, that the experience of my twenties, thirties, and forties had room in my fifties. The warp and woof of my self was looser and stronger than I had known. Thinking I would not survive, I found myself enriched by myself. (Truitt, 1982, p. 22)

Like Le Guin, the fermentation and the pressure felt from this process brings me to uncorking my feelings. Like Truitt, “it was this very pressure that saved me”. The pain of opening the “tombs” of my written past and the catharsis of writing in the present is what saves me by reuniting my past and present, repairing the cracks between the fractured gaps of the journal entries as a way of healing.

GOLDEN CRACKS

Physically handling my journal with confidence I order the notebooks into ascending years and notice that garden notebooks and travel notebooks have quite a different appearance from each other. The garden notebooks are always written in A4 unlined books and the travel notebooks are odd sizes, always smaller for travelling convenience but with different textures of paper and random, coloured covers. Curiously, I begin to write down a timeline of my journal. I include the number of entries made and am struck by the high frequency of writing at certain times. I quickly acknowledge that the energy put into my

writing shows how consistently I place myself in solitude. My journal and the entries appear now to me as fragments of a broken vessel. I place the sections here and there and in doing so the travel notebooks reveal further times of solitude. I write,

Wednesday, 2nd June 2004. Yasawa Islands, Fiji

The climb was steep but well worth it. The views spectacular. There was a goat trail to guide us to the top and we watched as swallows hovered above our heads and beside us as we walked. At first, I thought we were invading their territory—too close to their nests perhaps. Eventually we worked out that they were waiting for us to disturb the grasshoppers and other insects. As we walked the insects would fly up and the swallows would swoop in to catch them. They were amazing to watch so close to our legs—and the way they rode the wind currents with such precision was magical. I really liked being up so high in the breeze—quite isolated. Isolation, for some reason I can't seem to get enough of it. At last I really do feel the pressures of that other life disappearing...I'm still questioning what life is all about and how to find the right balance.

Saturday, 10th September 2010. Bo Phut, Koh Samui, Thailand

Last night we had a lovely meal at The Elephant Bar in the Fisherman's Village in Bo Phut. Again, perched high on the beach we watched fireworks (which seem to occur nightly—how wonderful!) and ate fried noodles, tom yum and chips (!). I drank wine and just basked in the warm smugness of someone whose life, at that particular moment, was perfect. These trips away are essential for restoring the Ph balance in my life. No stress felt, just a smooth, wide calmness surrounds my thoughts...

Almost one year later, a subtle shift in the writing occurs...

Wednesday, 20th September 2011. Koh Samui, Thailand

After our nap in the afternoon Ethan was really hungry and we decided to have lunch. Ethan ordered ham and cheese sandwiches with fries, which, by the way, he made into a

cheese and chip sandwich! When he finished his sandwich, he decided to have a race on the beach with Claudia. All of a sudden, he came back crying because his tooth had fallen out! We all helped look for Ethan's tooth and it was very difficult because it was in the sand and all the shells looked like teeth! Eventually Daddy found it! And tonight, the tooth fairy will come to our villa and take the tooth to build a tooth fairy castle and leave some money for Ethan.

In the voice of this travel notebook a warmth is felt. The ongoing addition of “we” suggests I am finally accepting the presence and inclusion of others. There is a sense of joy and the writing shows an observation of the fragility and wonder of humanity rather than only the details of the occasion. Solitude is almost forgotten in the delight of being a family and I am no longer alone. There is a whimsical carelessness in my writing and I am openly unguarded. A naïve vulnerability exists in my journal's simple tale. As with all my narratives their simplicity still holds a complexity that continues to mature. Now my journal pieces show the separate parts of me coming together. Woolf wonders in her essay, “Street Haunting”,

Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? (1882-1941, p. 4)

Unimpeded, I remain open and move through time unfixed. Only through the medium of writing do I find the fluidity with which I can place myself here or there in the hope that I may reach closer to a version of my “true self”.

I create an alchemic mixture with which I might begin the process of *kintsukuroi*, golden repair, to restore the broken vessel that is my fractured tale. The ancient Japanese art of *kintsukuroi*, is the fixing of broken pottery with a lacquer infused with gold dust (My Modern Met Team, 2017). If I am to repair the fragments of my journal, to join the pieces together so that the seams are gilt gold and shining, may something new be revealed? And what is the recipe for this magical elixir I might apply to the cracks? *The Alchemist*^[s] protagonist, Santiago, travels to the Ancient Pyramids of Egypt in search of treasure and in doing so searches his soul to discover something greater than treasure. I also must search within to

find my ingredients and grasp towards my own vulnerability that serves as the binding lacquer to strengthen my broken vessel.

The lacquer, strong in vulnerability and shimmering with alchemic vitality, is applied carefully with a brush. Each stroke leaves behind a string of glistening words, filling the gaps between the fragments of narrative, creating golden rivers and tributaries traversing and meandering across the vessel, binding the pieces with the strength of vulnerability. The soulful voice speaks once more and recalls the years after divorce when the foundations of existing as a family undergo more changes that bring a new kind of fear. It is the alchemic mixture that helps bring my journal into new voice.

September 2016. YOU!

It seems right that your Dad should have a girlfriend and there are a few. Nothing serious but they are a welcome distraction. The tiny French lady, "Chantel", who performs handstands with you against the brick wall in the backyard in her bikini is fun to be with. Soon the fun turns to something slightly shocking with the arrival of a more permanent girlfriend. The new girlfriend is blue-eyed and sparkly. She wears bright pink lipstick and is short. A cigarette is never far from her lips and, just like Dad, she loves a beer. Dad is happy and this, as directed to us by those around him, is the most important thing. What we feel is irrelevant, and for that matter, nobody ever asks. She cooks wonderfully and for the tiniest bit of time, this woman is welcome into what is left of our shattered family. She applies a thin, glossy veneer over the disturbing portrait that is our family and gives people the illusion that we are a happy, functioning unit.

My sister and I get new clothes, in fact, an entire outfit each, all purchased from one shop and in one go without any fuss about the cost or the need. We are both at once thrilled and surprised but quickly told that these clothes are to be worn when visiting her family. She wants us to make a good impression. I know you try, somehow you know it means for an easier path for you to travel down if you submit. But it is the avocados that change everything forever and plunge you further into a void that eternally displaces you from your family.

It is the early 80s and avocados are a new and expensive exotic delicacy to the palates of Melbourne's upper-class diners. During this time, your mother would never dream of

buying an avocado for herself and we know that if we are ever to divulge to her that Dad's new girlfriend bought avocados there will be an irate outpouring of fury towards Dad, the avocados, how she could never afford one and then general disgust at the new girlfriend. It is always better just to remain silent and carry these episodes like secrets.

I am as keen as the new girlfriend to try this new nut, or vegetable, we can't decide which it might be. She takes great delight in showing me the avocados she has bought at the market and tells me that she is going to create a prawn and avocado salad (prawns being another delicacy never seen at my mother's house). I enjoy watching her cook and she enjoys my company in the kitchen. We clean the prawns and make the dressing and then open the perfectly creamy, ripe avocados, marvelling at the large pip in the centre. Wondering how to cut the pulp out to best effect, she carefully scoops out the contents and arranges it carefully on the salad. Sunday evening approaches and together you carry the platter of salad out into the living room where Dad and our brother and sister sit and watch the television.

You are excited at the thought of dining on this sophisticated meal. As you lean in to put a small offering of the avocado salad on a plate, the new girlfriend let's out a questioning laugh and tells you the dish is only for herself and your father. A wrenching humiliation overcomes you as you realise that, from the outset, you were never invited to share in this meal. The eyes of your brother and sister furtively look elsewhere, suggesting that your enthusiasm for the partaking of such a meal is an unfortunate but they are powerless to say or do anything. How ignorantly blind can you be? This is the way it is now always going to be. Your ranking and position as daughter topples to somewhere far below.

Eventually, not surprisingly given her culinary skills and expertise in entertainment, new girlfriend informs you and your sister that, "your father and I are getting married". You are shocked, as it seems only a few months ago that she moved in and began to rearrange the bedrooms. Sitting next to your sister you summon up the courage to ask, "Was anyone going to ask us what we think?" The thought that she might wonder whether you are happy about this decision never occurs to her. In fact, she laughs at the suggestion of it and spits out the words, "Do you think I need your permission?"

This is the last time for a very long time you find the courage to speak so openly. For now, you are cut loose and left swimming in cold dark murky ocean of homelessness, loneliness and you are mute.

The elixir I create with its swirls of golden words is more than a narrative. It brings me to a place where I am full of uncertainty of self and I realise my disconnection with family is pivotal in my writing. What I feel is what I now know as abandonment and when it happened it was something new and ineffable. Rilke writes,

I believe that almost all our sadnesses are moments of tensions that we find paralyzing because we no longer hear our surprised feelings living. Because we are alone with the alien thing that has entered into our self; because everything intimate and accustomed is for an instant taken away; because we stand in the middle of a transition where we cannot remain standing. (Rilke, 2004, p. 49)

My narrative is about the entering of the place where I am alone with “the alien thing” and the rewriting brings me to another place of transition. The suffering that comes with abandonment no longer diminishes me but instead I open my heart to it and invite it to deliver me towards greater compassion towards self and others. The fragments of journal, held together through the art of *kintsukuroi*, now glint with a greater beauty than before. Like my journal I am also a vessel fractured and broken. Might I wash my own open-wound with a laquer of golden dust and paint my wounds with chrysalis gold and return to the self as a source from which understanding emanates. Might my vessel be one of suffering, but like Pandora’s jar be filled with hope?

In this my new form I go back to my childhood once more and begin to repair the wounds through the catharsis of words. In doing so I begin a restoration of the self, one in which gold, supple and pure, is my mortar.

VI

THE INTIMACY OF HOME

A RETURN TO THE BODY

There are those who receive as birthright an adequate or at least unquestioned sense of self and those who set out to reinvent themselves, for survival or for satisfaction, and travel far. Some people inherit values and practices as a house they inhabit; some of us have to burn down that house, find our own ground, build from scratch, even as a psychological metamorphosis. (Solnit, 2005, p. 80)

Solnit's words steer me to my ongoing yearning towards a search for an authenticity about myself, either inner or outer, that I am not yet able to grasp. In situations of travel I find the space in which to indulge in thoughts of self-awareness that might lead me close to my authentic self. All my life I have sought comfort in the momentum of movement such as walking, driving, or other forms of transport. If I am feeling stressed, or contemplative, I go for a walk or a drive in the hope that going forward and travelling to a destination I might find an answer that brings me to a closer sense of completion. Often, I find that I am reluctant to reach the destination but rather stay in momentum so that I might reside in reflective solitude. In Lederach I find a connection with Solnit's search for "sense of self" and my search for an authenticity through my ongoing physical displacement and replacement until I am satisfied. Lederach (2005, p. 120) suggests that we find the "soul of place" through penetration into our deep "moral imagination". It is in the soul of place where we might engage genuine dialogue that assists in bringing "authentic social change" (p. 120). Finding the soul of place involves a journey where "we go to the core, that we make our way to the voices behind the noise" (p. 120). Throughout our journey Lederach invites us to ask two questions, "Who am I?" and "Where am I?" He says,

Those who invite and keep these questions throughout their journey in any geography will envision the soul disciplines as the spiritual underpinning of their work. They will struggle with the disciplines, and at times rare and fleeting as they may be, they will feel the soul of change. They will walk a pathway that invites the moral imagination. (2005, p. 120)

Lederach might be implying a metaphorical journey to the “soul of place” but mine is both metaphorical and physical. I am one who has journeyed far, from island to island in the search for my “own ground” and my soul place. The “soul disciplines” that Lederach refers to are “stillness, humility and sensuous perception” (p. 120). My travelling, whilst full of movement, allows me inner stillness where I am suspended, or find the “ability to disperse, or even lose myself” (Rose, 2015, p. 69) so I might hear the “voices behind the noise” (Lederach, 2005, p. 120) with attentive sensuous perception. Finding my soul place is ongoing and often I have come near enough to think that to physically build something permanent that I might call home will allow me to fully embrace my “soul of place”. When I think I have found the space I literally “build from scratch” a new dwelling and in doing so, undergo a transcendental metamorphosis. I have built houses and gardens high up in mountains where only a few would visit, or be invited. I have hammered nails into wooden beams to hold up walls so that I might box myself in. I have built stairs so that I might climb high and far out of reach. I framed enormous windows with glass so as to scrutinise the world from a safe distance, and turn away from life if I choose. I have created corners where I seek solitude and dream to “reinvent” myself. With each path travelled, and each destination arrived at, I still have yet to find satisfaction. Slowly, I have come to realise the metamorphosis happens in momentum and the “soul of place” is not something we find upon reaching our destination but in the journey. If we do reach a satiated sense of self, it may only be for a short while before we begin our journey again.

My travels and desperate attempts to find satisfaction in a physical home have not ceased rather they have waned. Now, my efforts have turned inwards where no greater distance is travelled than the one in which I continually orbit my internal universe. The further my universe opens up to me the more frequently it returns me freshly to the world with new perception and awareness. My humility is recognised in the acceptance of my being as incomplete, hence my travels and search for home might not be satisfied as long as I ask myself, “Who am I?” and “Where am I?” Knowing this I find myself searching for physical

spaces where I am free to navigate my internal universe. Here, I reside in a poetic balance between the inner and outer, the unconscious and the conscious worlds.

Bachelard's dedication to the intimacy of space and the potential nourishment that its owner may find within it not only remind me of my own ongoing nesting and yearning for a place of solitude and reflection where I seek clarity, but also of its ongoing importance. As long as we continue to undergo transformation, we continue to reach towards our newly forming "soul of place". My spaces of intimacy have developed over the years from childhood playrooms in the backyard to dedicated gardening houses and now my own writerly space, a room I refer to as my study. For me this chamber has only a vague attachment to its official title, a title that some may suspect goes with the ordering and tidying up of one's affairs into something extraneous such as documents that represent the sum worth of one's life, or perhaps the place where academic pursuits are undertaken. Rather, my space allows for an internal study where I allow myself release from the noise and clamour of daily life so as I might devote time to subjective intimacy. Ironically, I surround myself in my study with sentimentally precious contents such as books and cherished objects. Each book, trinket or scrap of paper has a reason for its placement and even I am silenced into fully understanding the meanings of my objects except to know that somehow, they represent an opening into the intimate world of inner and outer that I inhabit.

My objects, the value of my outer world, somehow help me find the direction to seek out my inner world. My relationship with things and their symbolic meaning in my life has often caused me pain and sadness as I am unable to relinquish, as much as I might try, the connections they hold with my past. Don't be mistaken into thinking that I am a collector or a hoarder. In fact, I am quite the opposite and take pleasure in my minimalistic approach to holding onto things. My precious objects find me and claim me forever. Like my journal, I wish I could throw them away but something, perhaps my soul, asks me to keep them and hold them close to my heart. I have a policeman's button, found in the streets of Fiji, that has lived in my pencil case for twelve years. Occasionally, when my fingers find the button, I let myself be lost in the moment of combined fear, elation and the morning sickness I endured when I unexpectedly found out I was pregnant with my first child during that trip. Why, I wonder, would I be so devastated to lose the button when I can look at my son, talk with him and feel an even deeper love that transcends the feelings given from the button?

Similarly, I have a small piece of chalky driftwood kept in my handbag, a gift from my partner who likes to collect small tokens of natural beauty as reminders of special moments. The driftwood, bone dry and silky grey, represents his honest and pure, unconditional love for me. In a little jar on a shelf in my study I have managed to collect almost every tooth fallen from the mouths of my children. What strange, macabre sentimentality I seem to have, and presumably what an odd relationship I somehow have created with these objects. Am I frightened of forgetting these moments of intimacy? Are these objects the things that keep me close to the feelings of a pure shared intimacy with loved ones?

Bachelard suggests the “house” or in my case, the writerly space and its objects may be the resting place where I find my own “images of protected intimacy” (2014, p. 26). He says we look to dwellings where “we must go beyond the problems of description...in order to attain to the primary virtues, those that reveal an attachment that is native in some way to the primary function of inhabiting” (p. 26). He says, “In every dwelling, even the richest, the first task of the phenomenologist is to find the original shell” (p. 26). In searching for my original shell, I find images of intimacy have an almost ineffable bitter sweetness that can make bringing them to light through words problematic. Sometimes in memory, I return to a place so deep and forgotten that I call on my imagination to assist in its rediscovery. I return once more to an early childhood memory that is nameless, unspoken and wordless because of its amoebic and sensory values. This makes the memory utterly private and pure in its untainted, un-constituted form. The memory is both unsettling and comforting as it connects me to a place of naivety and a purity of unencumbered awareness. Through this thesis I have chosen to reconstitute the memory as a way of needling closer to the essence, the “original shell” of intimacy. My writing efforts serve as a catalyst to draw me closer to the vapours that surround the memory. Here I follow a transcendental path that leads me closer and only momentarily I find myself immersed once again in a womb-like condition.

5th June 2014

I have extracted something from my memory from somewhere so deep that it has no name. It is bottomless, it is a deep, deep repressed breath slowly being exhaled onto paper. It is sound and texture and it weeps...

...At night, I would close my eyes and wait for sleep, and gradually sleep would slowly drag me towards another world where nothing was stable and time was liquid. In my dream-like state I would be aware of this new world and alert to its surroundings.

My childhood memory in its soft, formless ambiguity brings me to a place of awareness without understanding. I am aware of my sense of self but I have no past, no history with which to recognise myself. I feel as though this is a type of enlightenment, an entry into something new. I continue with the memory...

...At the onset of the dream I would find myself in a cube, not a room, but a suspended cube.

Reading this extract, I feel a sense of frustration of not fully knowing and an embarrassment at thinking that I might begin to understand something of myself through this distant haze of pure sensory value without any connection to real-world value. But the task of the phenomenologist is to reveal what is hidden and so I continue to embrace memory as a way of adjusting my perception to reveal ways of seeing into my past. Bachelard writes, "All the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the places in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so" (2014, p. 32). Like my own memory and its origins in the onset of sleep, Bachelard says, "when we reach the very end of the labyrinths of sleep, when we attain to the regions of deep slumber, we may perhaps experience a type of repose that is pre-human; pre-human, in this case approaching the immemorial" (p. 32). In my daydreams passing into the "labyrinths of sleep" I find a thin aperture into my past and summon it into daylight and wish to give it meaning, but words fail me and I am left with something unfinished, like a poorly appropriated sketch. If I give myself over to ponder on the sensory nature of my own "immemorial" experience I find a

comfort and an ease of tension as I let the experience float within me, at the surface of my being where I am closer to it and allow it to remain nameless but powerful in its ineffability.

Suspended in calm reverie I return to the extract again and move beyond my present self to a place where a turning in my perception occurs and I find a quiet joy at still having the deeply repressed memory as part of my present being and am honoured of its rediscovery. Perhaps I am closer to what Lederach describes as feeling the “soul of change” (2005, p. 120). Like a small child discovering a forgotten favourite toy I feel both elation at encountering something familiar and cherished, and a shame of allowing it to become lost. Words alone cannot take me to this place “of naivety and purity” but the act of writing and reflecting draws me closer to the memory so that I may reclaim more fully moments of my past. To be brought back to my own “place”, I now receive with gratitude. I feel a small triumph in my return to a memory and a realisation, through the vision of Bachelard that I am holding onto an essence of my being. I find comfort and sensitivity in Bachelard as he elaborates on a memory of intimacy and its connection with “confined, simple, shut-in space” (2014, p. 32) and I wonder whether this is something that we are all able to find within ourselves with dedication and whether I am closer to penetrating the core of my moral imagination. For Bachelard, images of intimacy and the eternal comfort they give to its owner may be found in daydreams where,

the recollections of moments of confined, simple, shut-in space are experiences of heartwarming space, of a space that does not seek to become extended, but would like above all still to be possessed. In the past, the attic may have seemed too small, it may have seemed cold in winter and hot in summer. Now, however, in memory recaptured through daydreams, it is hard to say through what syncretism the attic is at once small and large, warm and cool, always comforting. (2014, p. 32)

Urged on by Bachelard’s remembered places of intimacy, Lederach’s journey towards moral imagination and Solnit’s understanding for the need to find physical places of home, I entwine the three and turn to writing as a way of searching for other “heartwarming space[s]”. A piece of writing that begins as a gentle reflection, or a dialogue with self draws me into a phenomenological space where I slowly unravel something of significance. In the past, I might have left my imaginings untapped inside of me, lying contorted and distant.

Now, through writing, I create them into something. Like Le Guin's wine, deep in the cellar waiting to be uncorked, I let my fermented words carefully pour from me. I recall my early childhood on our farm on Flinders Island where my father would take us for the summer holidays. It is a quiet period in the lives of my sister, brother and I between my parents' divorce and my father's second marriage. During this time, my father seems to tolerate us. We are undemanding children and respectful to the delicate nature of shifting family roles. My father attempts to look after us between drinks in small and rather odd but welcome doses and in return we take care of each other as best as we can. We are not a model family and nor do we care to be one but we are linked closely enough to feel a bond between each other and this gives us a vague sense of security. I write, recalling summers in the early 1980s,

I love our old farmhouse and the sounds that surround it. Alone, sonorous memory offers me a yearning, a sadness, and peacefulness, all brought together in sorrowful song. Our farmhouse house is old and contains furniture brought out by the first settlers on the island. A sideboard of dark wood and small hand carvings, shipped out in the groaning, turbulent seas of the Bass Strait now rests, relieved on solid foundations in a quiet corner of the living room. The tiny room is dominated by a fireplace that my father had rebuilt on a grand scale after the original one fell after years of use and strong winds. This is the heart of the house where we gather at night to watch the fire as it flickers with bright flames offering warmth, light and comfort.

My sister and I sleep on fold-out beds and drape ourselves with brown woollen blankets that scratch fiercely against our sunburn and mosquito bites. We wake at early hours to catch the low tides and check the fishing nets for flathead fish. Our skin is tight from salt water and, not willing to waste fresh water on a shower, we rely on the ocean as a way of cleaning ourselves. Breakfast is flathead, bread and a fresh pail of milk from the dairy. Our life during the summer is simple and basic with a sunrise beginning and a sunset end to each day.

Summer nights descend into darkness quietly. With no electricity, my father and brother eventually march off with a fading torch to the generator shed leaving behind my sister and I in isolated darkness. For miles around there are no other houses and it seems as though we are the only people on earth. Sometimes I let myself think this and I am strangely both comforted and disturbed at this prospect. The generator shed is beyond the machinery shed, far from the house, and houses the ancient diesel fuelled, cog and

conveyer belt contraption which chugs and splutters into life after much handle turning and swearing. Once going, black smoke puffs furiously and conveyer belts turn dangerously close to hands and stray bits of clothing and the entire iron monster rattles and shakes itself from its weak mooring. I am frightened by its noise and dark, slick layers of grease and oil but this machine is the life blood of the house and it feeds us precious light and electricity, if only for a few hours each night. I fear the nights when, in the distance, I hear the pulse of the generator begin to slow and the lights begin to dim and flicker as the old machine either runs out of diesel or something worse. This means silence, absolute quiet and pitch-black darkness. Slowly, from the silence comes the soft hoot of the owls that wait in the deep green cypress trees at the front of the house. The trees act as a windbreak and on stormy nights their limbs catch the wind and hurl it around their branches so that sound is magnified to hurricane proportions. In the distance, a windmill can be heard. It has long ago fallen into disrepair but its useless vanes still turn and call out in a rusty voice the speed of the wind. These sounds, frightening, familiar and comforting all at once.

In the still, early summer evenings dad gets a beer and we make our way to the cattle yards and watch the sun go down. Swarms of grasshoppers flick hard against our bare legs as we walk through the dry summer grass. There is always the threat of bushfire and only a whiff of smoke makes my heart quicken. It is in this spot that I first begin to understand the vastness of our universe and witness the precision of the stars, cast like diamonds throughout the Milky Way. With no electric light to dull the magnificence of the night sky, its intensity is spectacular. With eyes cast upwards for what seems like hours, I become delightfully disorientated and feel as though I might fall into the heavens and land in its black velvet softness. Here, I feel the comfort of belonging and a connection with my world.

A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing a veritable psychology of the house. (Bachelard, 2014, p. 38-39)

Bachelard's merging image of the attic and its comforts and my childhood summer vacation bring my writing to a place where accuracy of description is not sought but rather evoking the human condition that is suspended within the memory. Merleau-Ponty joins me

when he revisits his past with beautiful respect to the mystery of a clarity of understanding that is felt only in the moment that it is being lived in.

I currently understand my first twenty-five years as a prolonged childhood that had to be followed by a difficult weaning process in order to arrive finally at autonomy. If I think back to those years as I lived them and such as I now carry them with me, their happiness refuses to be explained by the protective atmosphere of the parental milieu – the world itself was more beautiful, things were more fascinating – and I can never be certain of understanding my past better than it understood itself while I lived it, nor can I ever silence its protests. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 361)

Looking for my place of belonging in the hope that I can return, even if only momentarily, to a place of naïve security, I wonder how far I must search and whether I have, over the years attempted to reconstruct, for myself, a place of belonging, to replace the home that is taken from me when I am only a small child, too young to lose the security of family and home. Like Merleau-Ponty, I experience the difficulty of being separated from family but for me it comes too early and I am not afforded the time for maturity and rationality to deliver me to a necessary autonomy. Rather, I am abruptly disconnected, as though the power is turned off and I am steeped in confused darkness and left to carry the uncomfortable burden of “silent wound” (Kearney, 2017, p. 7). I question my connection with the world and its objects and what these objects might represent and wonder whether in the creating of a home for myself, am I searching for ways of restoring myself to a former condition of intimate connections? Will my search lead me to objects that deliver me to a past where I might find solace and clarity or will “I never be certain of understanding my past better than it understood itself while I lived it”? If so, might I shift my focus to write of the past so that I might better understand my present self?

OIKOS AND ECOLOGY

The Ancient Greek word for “house” is *oikos*. It refers to the distinct concepts of family, family property and house (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). These interrelated concepts

make perfect sense as they overlap each other and create the notion of a group of people moving in and around a shared, intimate space. Over time the English language has transformed *oikos* to the prefix “eco” creating “ecology”, “the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and their physical surroundings” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Moving further into my inquiry a deepening understanding of the inseparable connections with those that surround my journal appears and unfolds. I am no longer the solitary character that sustains the life of my journal, as once I thought I might have been. Just like the Ancient Greek *oikos*, it is not possible to separate the concept of house from family and the connections made between them. My inquiry may attempt to feature my soul, my strength and courage at its centre, but I am, and always will be surrounded by the people that form my family and with whom I shared my childhood home. My hermeneutics of vulnerability becomes like a whirlpool in which the fragments of the diachronic tales of others get caught up in a swiftly moving rift. I am not able to fully separate my being from them and nor do I wish to.

The following excerpts from my 1997 gardening journal show an intensity of physical activity in both the ritual of writing and the creating of a home. As I note down the details of the entries I sense the purpose of my journal is a crutch offering necessary support for another fractured time in my life. There are only a few days between each entry and each one is long and detailed. During these times of writing I would retreat to a very isolated place in my garden, away from people. The writing begins in earnest during the construction of a little garden house built on a very hard to access part of the property. This is built as a retreat and a place to house my garden equipment but also deliberately well resourced with wood heater, comfortable chairs and desk so that I can stay for hours at a time. The garden house is constructed a year or two before we build our actual residence, which proves to be another overwhelmingly monumental task.

18th January 1997. Fern Tree

Today we laid the concrete slab for the Garden House and have filled the garden borders with soil...the Garden House will take up a fair bit of time but if it is finished by Easter, and

we decide to spend weekends up there, the garden walls will be started and finished quickly...

24th January 1997. Fern Tree

Started placing cornerstones in the herb garden. Looks great, such pleasant satisfying work...

29th January 1997. Fern Tree

...found a lovely old desk for the Garden House at auction...

8th February 1997. Fern Tree

The Garden House is going to be a large focus for this year. My list of projects so far; Garden House, veranda on Garden House, steps into herb garden, back border walls, hot house, second retaining wall.

This will make the back section complete before we start building our main house. Then we have the driveway, front garden and courtyard to do...I think the backyard should be called the summer garden as this is where we will spend our summers.

I am planning, visualising and building something into which I might deposit myself in permanent isolation. Rather than letting life unfold and others become part of the ongoing fabric of my life, I establish a fortress, allowing access to only a few. I wonder at my purpose for this isolating retreat and consider Solnit's words, to "find our own ground, build from scratch" and to find my "sense of self" (2005, p. 80). I recall the craving of the longing to feel as though I belonged somewhere. I yearned for a sense of security and welcoming and an inner warmth of satisfaction. This was not to happen despite my efforts to erase my past and begin anew. Erasing my past is not possible, only in reconciling with it might I begin to feel the inner warmth I so desperately sought.

Sunday, 2nd March 1997. Fern Tree

...Yesterday we finished the rockery. It looks magnificent. The stairs are exceptionally solid and look very established...

23rd March 1997. Fern Tree

...It's quite a corner to work in – very difficult as it is at the top most point and on a steep incline. But it needs to be set and established and this is the year to do it.

Reading the extract again, with greater understanding of how close the inner selves are poised against the words of self-affirmations of the writerly voice, I hear a soft solicitation emanate from the writing. She writes because she needs comfort and her writerly voice, strong in its timbre, nudges the inner selves to rouse a gentle chorus of validation.

Thursday, 4th April 1997. Fern Tree

Scott is preparing the roof beams for the Garden House. The wall frames are up and still standing after the very strong winds.

Sunday, 6th July 1997. Fern Tree

Another beautiful day! I'm sitting at my garden writing desk and feeling the warmth of the wood heater on my back...

Saturday, 12th July 1997. Fern Tree

Well, everything not quite ok. The doors blew off the Garden House but should not be too much of a problem to fix. The wood heater is keeping me warm and it is snowing outside.

My continued optimism in the face of trying conditions is filled with tension. The creation of a building and fortress that might potentially offer me the comfort and security that I seek eludes me. Through nature's musings, I never seem to fully reach my desired post. The winds and cold air hint to me that my stoic chosen path to rebuild my life from scratch might be misleading.

23rd October 1997. Fern Tree

Did a bit of rearranging - moved the blue aquilegia and the hellebores and put a penstemon in their place - moved the hostas and the lambs' ears...

2nd November 1997. Fern Tree

...I'm constantly rearranging! I'm planting things knowing that at the end of the season I won't be satisfied and want to move them. What am I doing?

My glorious garden whispers to me that my foundations are compromised and I cannot find comfort in the placing of my plants. Perhaps their delicate roots are asking me to not let them be set into unconditioned soils but instead, take them to another home?

22nd November 1997. Fern Tree

Building the main house is underway. The footing and boxing is prepared for the concrete pour on Monday.

19th January 1998. Fern Tree

Hard to believe that this time last year we were pouring concrete for the Garden House and now we are pouring concrete for the kitchen slab in the main house.

14th February 1998. Fern Tree

We moved into the main house and I'm now feeling a lot more settled and happy...but I can't stand the chaos, there is stuff everywhere.

I remember this day as a staccato of image and emotion. It is Valentine's Day and the school year has commenced. I cry when we finally move the last of our belongings into our new home. Only one room is finished enough to keep us dry and out of nature's elements. The glass for our windows has not been installed and so wind, birds, bats and insects curiously explore the bare rooms reminding us of whose territory we have encroached upon. We have no kitchen and our water pressure is so weak that I hastily wash with a precious bucket of tepid rainwater. For so long I hold myself steady, waiting for the day when I might release myself into the comfort of belonging but at its supposed arrival I feel as though I have failed.

I cannot admit my sense of failure to my inner selves as though in doing so, I am failing them also. Somehow, the person I have attempted to create for the outer world to see and to recognise as me, has an overwhelming sense of responsibility for the welfare of the soulful self. Over the following weeks, I retreat into my Garden House, for solitude. I complete one last journal entry before an abrupt stop in writing occurs. The journal entry follows,

30th March 1998. Fern Tree

Garden House has been used extensively over the last week or two. It has an extremely restful quality about it. The sun is streaming in and the fire is keeping me toasty warm.

Bachelard pulls me back into the space of reverie and daydream where the concreteness of objects is not the focus and instead I let memory unfold in timeless waves around me. His emphasis on "localization in the spaces of intimacy [a]s more urgent than the determination of dates" (2014, p. 31) intrigues me as my own journal's tenacity towards date keeping and the naming and placing of objects seems to be its defining quality. Although I agree with Bachelard that spaces of intimacy reach further into our temporal being than a chronology can capture, ironically it is through the dates and within the objects that I find ways of reaching a hermeneutical stance. Bachelard says,

To localise memory in time is merely a matter for the biographer and only corresponds to a sort of external history, for external use, to be communicated to others. But hermeneutics, which is more profound than biography, must determine the centers of fate by ridding history of its conjunctive temporal tissue, which has no action on our fates. For a knowledge of intimacy, localization in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than the determination of dates. (Bachelard, 2014, p. 31)

I exist in a two-fold world, one world draws me towards the unconventional hermeneutics in which I search for my own “knowledge of intimacy” and in doing so, I carry out a conventional biography in the form of my journal. My journal rests on the traditions of a culture that places emphases on an “external history” as a way of measuring success and satisfaction rather than the more soulful approach of hermeneutics as a way of not only seeking a knowledge of intimacy but also of finding it. Now I see the correlation of my journal and its objective focus is in stark immediate contrast to the subjective trauma I was facing in my life. As I was deconstructing my internal self, struggling to understand my own ruinous body and mind, I was desperately constructing something out of the objects around me. Solnit says, “What is a ruin, after all? It is a human construction abandoned to nature” (2005, p. 88). Did I abandon myself to nature, to the confines of the garden, where eventually “the return of plants and animals mak[e] their own complex order that further dismantles the simple order of men” (p. 89). Perhaps my abandonment to nature was a quest to dismantle my own sense of order and begin again anew. Years later I acknowledge my struggle with order and control in a journal entry that suggests I am willing to allow myself to be released.

Sunday, 12th August 2001. Fern Tree

It has taken me a long time to come to grips with how the garden has changed and I am not in control. The native animals eat away at the new and old plants and this is always difficult to deal with. I need to start working with nature rather than try and create something that only I want.

Bachelard notes Jean-Paul Sartre's comments on a passage from Richard Hughes' *A High Wind in Jamaica*.

“Emily has been playing houses in a nook right in the bows...” It is not this line, however, that Sartre discusses, but the following: “...and tiring of it (she) was walking rather aimlessly aft...when it is suddenly flashed into her mind that she was *she*...”. The text quoted by Sartre is a valuable one, because it designates topoanalytically, that it, in terms of space and experience of outside and inside...the lightening like thought that the little girl in the story has found in herself comes to her as she leaves her ‘house’. (Bachelard, 2014, p. 158)

There have been occasions during my childhood and my emergence into adulthood when I am brought into lightening moments of understanding me as me. In these moments, I feel simultaneously immensely powerful in my unique existence as a human and fragile in being within the collective mass of humanity. This uneasy duality manifests periodically when I seek to create my new home. I imagine that by creating and building something together with someone I love, the home will offer me sacred intimacy and protection. Not finding what I think I need I am challenged to look to myself and ask questions about who I am as a way of discovering what is necessary in order to feel fulfilled. In doing this, I realise that I am not the person that I think I am. Like the girl in Hughes' story, I come closer to finding myself only after leaving my family home and then attempting to rebuild it thinking that I can replace those earliest feelings of intimacy and security. And yet I was continuing to veer away from my soulful self further and further.

EMBEDDED SPLINTERS

I return to Bachelard and find myself in a space of gestalt, all my writing voices appear with their own time, tonality and manner, their own character rising and falling one into the other. “For a knowledge of intimacy”, as Bachelard says, “localization in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than the determination of dates” (2014, p. 31). With his words I become increasingly curious about the insistence of the dated entries in my own journal. As interpreter the dates provide a gateway for me to enter into deeper places. They act as a code

and as I rearrange them they unlock different paths into which I might venture. Initially I use the dates to begin to piece a timeline together that triggers me into finding a series of events that I have buried. Through vulnerability and openness, I use my sensory awareness to take me further into uncovering the events that bring me closer to experiencing the “knowledge of intimacy”. Once discovered, I have no use for the dates, as I am no longer fixed in the real world. Amongst my suspended states I come across places of intimacy and see there as well, with sensory perception, places of trauma. Being vulnerable takes strength to move into spaces where trauma’s acrid potency still lingers and my traumas are felt like deeply embedded splinters. Sharp and painful, over time I have left them to become inflamed and infected but have been prepared to live with the discomfort of suffering rather than deal with the difficult extraction and unknown injury that might follow.

I am ready now to attend to the splinters that barb my soul. I use the act of writing to take me to a precipice where I might fall into the darkness where, in “the space of the text”, says van Manen, I might see “what cannot really be seen, hear[ing] what cannot really be heard, touch[ing] what cannot really be touched” (2014, p. 371). Through writing I begin to explore in, around and under the relationships that for so long I have been frightened of tampering with for fear that I might imprison myself in self-inflicted betrayal. The risk of self-harm looms but the greater risk is not to write and so I begin. My father dies after a long, difficult battle with Alzheimer’s disease on the 15th April, 2003. Five days after his death I write a journal entry dated, Sunday, 20th April, 2003. It is long and includes many reflections on the progress of the garden but not a single mention of my father’s death. The extract reads,

I have just taken time out to read back over some journals...The thyme hedges are absolutely gorgeous. I love trimming them and shaping them...Still so much to do but reading back lets me know how much progress has been made.

Reflecting on this entry now, I see myself arriving at a metaphorical equinoctial point in my life in which day and night, darkness and light seem equal in length. I am at a tipping point, a fulcrum in which I might pivot into a darkness of such great depth that I may not return unscathed, or into a lightness where I might find something to hold onto and keep

me buoyant and alive. I am not sure whether I am running away from or chasing something from my past. My journal entry belies the calm before the hurricane that hits and strips away the emotional fortress I have built around me. With my father's death each garden step, every plant, every door and shutter and window frame and the foundations from which I desperately set down in an attempt to reinvent myself are pulled up and destroyed. I am, once again, without voice.

I do not write another garden journal for three years. During this lacuna, I write two short travel journals, one in Samoa in 2003 and another Fiji in 2004. My journals contain detailed observations but they are primarily about running away and escaping from a past that is too painful to voice. Rather I write to suppress the pain and in doing so embed the splinters of my past further into my soul. Finally, an entry is made on ANZAC DAY Tuesday, 25th April, 2006...

Life has taken so many unexpected pleasurable turns...I now have my beautiful boy Ethan to keep me more than occupied.

My small handwriting offers the introduction of another human being into my writerly world. My precious son and his inclusion into my writing world is significant and still incredibly humbling to read. I forgo the fierce and determined writerly voice in my garden journal one, who berates the self for not working hard enough or fast enough, and hear a new voice emerge whose tone suggests one of care and pride. I now realise the birth of my son, soon followed by my daughter, forms the foundation of my self-restoration from which I slowly begin to build upwards, out from the dark and reach towards the light. The transformative experience of pregnancy and birth has a profound effect on me. As my body muscles ease to allow for the growth of my baby, I experience another release where I soften into a forgiveness of my body, marvelling at its strength and ability to mould and shape itself into something extraordinarily beautiful. Perhaps this newly found gift of forgiving my physical self allows the beginnings of my forgiving my soulful self.

Shared spaces of intimacy and home are not to be found in the buildings but rather the *oikos*, the overlapping of family and home. To understand this, I now return to an *anagnorisis*, a recognition of climactic proportions. I wish to explore deeply the ravine that exists between my journal entries before my father's death and the birth of my son because it is here that potential for catharsis lies in wait. A deep wound begins to throb again. Something painful is being felt and it is through writing that I am able to submerge into spaces of private pain. Kearney says,

Working-through of trauma calls for a delicate equipoise between silence and speaking, invisibility and visibility, if the wound is to grow into a scar. If one covers the pain too soon, it festers and needs to be reopened at a later time for new scar-tissue to form; if one covers it too late, infection can set in and the pain becomes intolerable. (Kearney, 2017, p. 7)

To return to the lacuna of silence, where an opening awaits, I consciously adjust my perception and arrange myself with “delicate equipoise” so that I do not wince and recoil at the pain that I am yet to endure, yet rather live into it. Dowrick reminds me of Rilke's call to “live into the answers’, rather than grabbing onto them or creating them (out of ‘thin air’)” (Dowrick, 2009, p. 265). For me, living the answers is to turn to writing and now, with continued transformation, I choose to continue my narrative in the first person. Here, I acknowledge that I am the author, I own the words and they come from within me. No longer, for this narrative do I wish to use the second or third person as a way of distancing myself. I am brave enough to come closer so that I may become more intimate with my past. Kearney continues,

Wounded healers know, from their own experience of woundedness, two basic things: 1) the right timing between too early and too late, and 2) the right spacing between too near and too far. As important as sensitivity to timing is being careful neither to over-identify with suffering (too close) nor to remain an indifferent observer (too removed). It is a matter of *tact*, in the sense of both tactility and know-how. An art of ‘exquisite empathy.’ (2017, p. 7)

The voices I have used throughout this thesis provide the “right spacing between too near and too far” but I now am ready to employ an “exquisite empathy” towards myself, the ultimate in self- forgiveness by embodying the use of “I”.

My father dies on the 15th April, 2003 and the funeral is held a long seven days later on the 22nd April. My partner, Scott and I travel the short distance to Melbourne to attend the funeral. I know it is going to be a fairly large affair as my step-mother is highly social and will use this occasion to celebrate his life in full party-style. We decline my mother's request to stay at her place and whilst I know this deeply offends her I desperately need space to compose myself and think about the ways in which I am to reconcile with the finality of my father's death and its significance to me and how I might respond to others who will offer their condolences. I write,

The Day Before the Funeral

It is a mid- Autumn day that feels more like the end of summer. The early morning brings a cool comfortable temperature that suggests the ease into the mellow warmth of midday. But the sun is relentless and the heat continues to climb. I look to the yellowing leaves on the deciduous trees and am not surprised to see them freely giving up their tenuous stake on life as they wither and fall in the hot afternoon sun.

Scott and I make our way to my mother's house. We are to pick her up and take her to my step-mother's house where we meet with the priest and my brother and sister to discuss the funeral arrangements. After my parent's divorce my mother never remarries and lives alone. As a single parent my mother always struggles financially. Her stoic German roots allow her to make the most of her living conditions and she is proud of her simple independent existence. My step-mother has enjoyed a far easier life and the marked difference between their lives with my father is something we are all quietly, but violently aware of. It is an act of unfair injustice that my father causes pain and frustration to one female, my mother, and gives another female, my step-mother a bountiful life, free from any responsibilities. As children, we are interwoven into this bizarre family unit and I struggle to find allegiance or solidarity with either parent or step-mother. I listen to their stories and wonder where the intersection of truth lies as their words cross the threshold of their own tale and into the path of another. I feel partly responsible for my mother's pain and her timely reminders to me that had she not had children, her life would have been far easier, only reinforce her own torment and mine. Hurtful but perhaps truthful, my birth unwittingly turns events for my mother and father in new directions. Some births herald celebration—mine was a herald for disaster. In my absolute innocence, I become the final catalyst for divorce.

I greet my mother with a restrained embrace and I feel the tension surface between us immediately. I succumb to the tension by falling into reserved silence. After some awkward small talk, and with the grateful addition of Scott's beguiling charm to soften the journey, we get into my mother's car to travel the one hour distance to my step-mother's house where we discuss the funeral arrangements. It is the day before the funeral and for the first time since my father's death my sister, brother, step-mother and mother will be together representing our family. We are all resigned to knowing there will be no gentle and caring discussion about my father's final wishes, rather my step-mother will run the daylong event with military precision and we will simply act out our roles as instructed.

The car ride is difficult. I feel claustrophobic and I am rigid as I watch her unsteady hands manoeuvre the steering wheel from my back seat. My silence makes her angry. As a way of seeking her compassion I manage to tell her that Scott and I had arranged to be married in the next two days. It was to be a very simple ceremony at home with only a handful of friends. We were to surprise her by flying her to be with us for the weekend celebration. Of course, we cancelled the ceremony because of the funeral. Expecting her to find sympathy and perhaps a small joy in my conversation I am overwhelmed at her caustic response. She begins to boil and I thank God that Scott is in the car with me, because I know she will rein in her anger in the company of others. But she doesn't, like a volcano brewing before eruption she begins with a low tremor,

"What do you mean you are getting married? Why haven't you talked about this before?" she says, quietly incredulous at the thought another of her children will not have a proper wedding. With each breath she begins to mount another attack.

I say, "I didn't think I needed to. It's no big deal". I regret my words immediately knowing she won't understand that I don't want to make a fuss. For my mother, this is her chance to take on a traditional role as mother of the bride. By my humble wedding I am taking this away from her. How can she be proud of someone who won't follow the traditions that are set out before them? She won't let the wedding issue go until it is exhausted and turns to Scott for support, her driving becoming increasingly erratic. "What do you think of this Scott? Don't you think Freya is being disrespectful by not telling anyone about getting married, not even her mother!" Scott looks at her and tries to explain that we both want things to be simple and with no fuss but that we had bought her a plane ticket for her to come and celebrate for the weekend as a surprise.

“A surprise! What do you mean, a surprise? You think I would travel all that way only for the weekend. You must be joking.” And then silence, but only for a short moment, short enough for her to move into another phase, where, like a machine-gun, bullets are rapidly fired in full assault. No part of me is left untouched. I am ravaged by her anger and her words.

Estés (1992) tells the magically beautiful story “Losing One’s Pelt”, in which the seal maiden represents the female “psyche”. The pelt of the sealskin is a metaphor of a “feeling state and a state of being – one that is cohesive, soulful, and of the wildish female nature”. (p. 264). Estés asks of me when I might have felt cocooned in my own sealskin and I search my memory only to find fleeting moments where I embrace my “state of being” where, not surprisingly, I am either in solitude surrounded by the tones and hues of nature or finding myself in a childhood memory where I am in a state of exquisite concentration, oblivious to any surrounding distractions. Estés goes on, “When a woman is in this state, she feels entirely in and of herself instead of out of herself and wondering if she is doing right, acting right, thinking well” (1992, p. 264). She says that when a woman stays away from her “soul-home” for too long, she may lose her skin and only in returning might she find it once again and become replenished. But what if there is no “soul-home” to return to? Sitting in the car with my mother, feeling trapped and submerging in her words of anger, I am completely out of myself. My seal pelt is lost and I am without home or mother and father and I think I am not “doing right, acting right or thinking well”.

Solnit says, “A city is built to resemble a conscious mind, a network that can calculate, administrate, manufacture. Ruins become the unconscious of a city, its memory, unknown, darkness, lost lands, and in this truly bring it to life” (2005, p. 89). Without my journal writing, I let my mind become a ruin. I let it go untended and have no strength to build a conscious mind, one in which I might try and be something better to myself instead of the worthless person that my mother tells me I have become. Kearney reminds me of “the right spacing between too near and too far” (2017, p. 7) in facing our traumas, and I wonder if writing my garden journal, though the subject of self is far removed and the writerly space invites self-reflection, was still “too near”. Instead I balanced myself in the “delicate equipoise between silence and speaking” (Kearney, 2017, p. 7).

There is beauty in a ruin and perhaps by the unconscious but deliberate ruining of my mind, by deepening into the lost lands of my unconsciousness I find a far more pleasing place to be than the city of my conscious mind. Like Persephone, who may have sought a new life in her place of the dark underworld, I sought to disorder the order that I was claiming in my conscious world. The tension between the two is palpably dynamic and I wonder how I came to live each day without falling from this precarious wire where I am “neither here nor there”. (Woolf, 1882-1941, p. 4). Kearney (2017, p. 5) cites Shakespeare’s King Hamlet, “The double bind of trauma: To speak is impossible, not to speak is impossible”. My narrative continues,

My mother spews forth from her every bit of saved-up determined hate and disgust at me. All her effort goes into smothering me and pounding me into splinters. There is no logic left in her and I am almost wishing that we might have a car accident so that she will just shut up. But there is no accident and she says, “You do not deserve to get married. I cannot understand what Scott sees in someone like you. I pity him. You must have tricked him into it”. I remain silent and let her continue until there is nothing left. We arrive at my step-mother’s house to talk about the funeral. I am shaking and cannot make eye contact with anyone. I feel dangerously brittle, like a lightbulb, waiting to be thrown and shattered into tiny fragments.

I live with these words every day for years and wonder why a mother would say such things to her daughter. What brings about such venom in someone to hate so strongly? I recall the words now as though they are a nursery rhyme, embedded within me only to emerge in a long, forgotten chant. They are engrained, embodied, like a splinter.

The Day of the Funeral

At my father’s funeral, my step-mother looks resplendent in black with perfect hair and make-up, the beautiful grieving widow. My mother’s unflinching appearance is there to remind the world that he was once married to her, and she is the mother of his children, as though this gives her some superior position, the one who gives birth—a primal sense of entitlement. The funeral goes through its predictable motions and then it becomes my turn to fill the necessary position of daughter. I move towards the pulpit and vaguely recite

the words handed to me by my step-mother. They are entirely inappropriate for my father and have been selected from a modern-day collection of funeral verse, designed for those who don't know what to say, or perhaps for those who cannot speak from the heart. Frankly, I am grateful for this dull monologue because I am still numbed from my mother's words.

The funeral, my step-mother's penultimate event is a success. We carry the coffin out into the hot autumn afternoon sun and I feel as though we are overcompensating with so many of us jostling about what feels like an empty cardboard box. The coffin is placed into a hearse and from there I have no idea where the body goes. He is cremated but there is no urn. The afternoon turns into evening and almost deciding not to go I arrive at my father's wake late. The house is crowded with cousins I haven't seen for years and friends of my parents, new and old. It feels like a party because my step-mother wants it to be one. She says this is the way dad would have wanted it. I spy my mother, sitting in a corner where she remains throughout the party. She looks meek and old. She is not a drinker and is thrown out of context amongst the bizarre merriment of booze. I do not go over to her partly because I can't bring myself to and partly because I know that she will expect me to be with her, after all, I am her daughter. She will expect me to forget her harsh words and put it down to something off hand like my overly-sensitive nature, just like the many times before. The drinking continues well into the night.

Kearney says,

What I am suggesting – following Aristotle's notion of *muthos-mimesis* in the *Poetics* – is that certain kinds of narrative may bring about a catharsis of our most basic passions, through 'the purgation of pity and fear'. But such healing must be understood in a very specific manner - not as facile closure or completion but as open-ended story: namely, as a storytelling which forever fails to *cure* trauma but never fails to try to *heal* it. As Samuel Beckett's unnameable narrator puts it: 'I can't go on, I'll go on'. (2017, p. 3)

Writing the narrative makes me think about my mother in new ways. Slowly, I see behind her over-protective bitterness and begin to understand that she is also a woman, alone and removed from her family and her native country and culture. I sense her absolute deep frustration at being hurt by my father and her inconsolable anger at his attitude and behaviour towards his children. Throughout the years she remains powerless to change

anything and so her rage and anger lie within her always. Soured and bitter the relationship between my mother and father is so damaged that he does not speak to her after the divorce. She turns to writing letters to him as a way of communicating. She writes about his duties as a father and pleads with him to look after his children. My father refuses to read the letters and eventually my step-mother intervenes and immediately throws any letters from my mother into the fireplace, to be engulfed in flames, as soon as they are delivered. She says that my mother's letters are distressing and that my mother is incomprehensible. Some days I believe her and other days I don't. My mother's frustration is only increased by my father's failure to acknowledge the letters. Now I think I begin to understand some of her own narrative, like me, she is silenced, but her silence is not of choice. She lets her mind fill with turmoil and like Le Guin, she lets her thoughts brew and become "vinegar". Her anger at me is an anger that she directs towards herself as though some kind of intent to hurt others will make up for the hurt caused to her.

The women in my family are strong. They are anchored to their beliefs and they let their beliefs be heard. My mother feels trapped in her role as single mother and as children she reminded us of the perils of being caught in this state of powerlessness. So strong are my mother's words that I worry if I were to have children I too would also find myself lured into the same trap where I might spend my days in regret. My step-mother is childless and, to me, her life with my father represents freedom of responsibility and commitment to anyone. Their marriage involved each other only and my brother, sister and I are unfortunate attachments. Both these women carry potentially dangerous traditions within them. Neither seeks to embrace family but rather warns of the pitfalls, such as loss of freedom, that children and family entail. Unbeknownst to either female, their unwitting guidance leads me towards taking on the dangerous tradition of seeing children as a burden and family as an overwhelming responsibility. Estés says,

One of the central and most potentially destructive issues women face is that of beginning various psychological initiation processes with initiators who have not completed the process themselves. They have no seasoned persons who know how to proceed. When initiators are incompletely initiated themselves, they omit important aspects of the process without realizing it, and sometimes visit great abuse on the initiate, for they are working with a fragmentary idea of initiation, one that is often tainted in one way or another. (1992, p. 263)

Women in the family, whether they want to be or not, have a responsibility to “initiate” the younger women. This task is fraught from the onset if no one female takes on the traditions and values of being a mother and the seemingly selfless position that asks her to give unconditional commitment and love to her children and spaces of intimate protection. If these sanctimonious traditions are damaged and the values of motherhood are in question, women may “visit great abuse on the initiate”. My perception of motherhood is damaged in such a way that it almost becomes ingrained in my tradition. For many years I make the decision not to have children because of my fear in repeating the tradition that I have been inducted into. I feel powerless to change direction.

At the other end of the spectrum is the woman who has experienced theft, and who is striving for knowledge and mastery of the situation, but who has run out of directions and does not know there is more to practice in order to complete the learning, and so repeats the first stage, that of being stolen from, over and over again. Through whatever circumstances, she has gotten tangled in the reins. (Estés, 1992, p. 263)

My soulful voice, as quiet as it is, and as suppressed as it might be recognises an injustice, or “theft”. For many years the writing represents the first stage of being stolen from over and over again. Like Salomon’s repeated metaphors in her paintings, my own garden metaphor carries a repetition of someone who is caught in a never-ending circle, unable to move forward or back but rather rearranges and builds in order to create something new. With the death of my father the cycle is broken and as Estés suggests, I run out of direction and the writing, like myself, becomes silent. I become tangled in the reins and have no direction. As I lie awake night after night and drown myself in the dangerous concoction of guilt and theft of self as daughter and connection with family I realise I repeat the stage of being stolen from over and over again.

The narrative continues...

Months pass after my father’s death and the betrayal of my mother. I travel with Scott to the South Pacific island of Samoa. I do not speak with my mother, brother or sister and wonder whether our step-mother will stay in touch with us. One day, I receive a phone call

from a family friend who is the power of attorney of my father's will. Normally eloquent and gracious, he fumbles with his words. He makes excuses for our father's poor consideration to his finances and admits to his potential wealth and how it was badly managed. He concludes by declaring that my step-mother is to inherit everything. My father does not make mention of his three children in his will. I remain silent and say, "I understand" and hang up.

I am consumed by my father's final point of communication with his children in the reading of the will. I am blinkered into thinking he is sending me a direct message, one that points towards something that he has been trying to voice throughout our lives, "You do not mean anything to me".

With a mother whose tangled anger has pummelled me, and a father whose silence declares his rejection of me, I no longer matter to myself. In my step-mother's haul, every object, small or large, expensive or not becomes hers to do with as she wishes. With this final gesture the anchors that once bound me to my family are broken. I sail as far away as possible so that I might once more, begin again.

For my narrative, Kearney suggests that my storytelling offers not closure but rather open-ended healing. Dowrick (2009) points to Siegfried Mandel who offers more depth to our understanding when he explains, "Rilke makes a distinction between two kinds of openness: 'Offen' as the open vistas of the landscape for instance, and 'das Offene' as mystical concept of pure space or the inner world space, a silent communal space that courses through all beings" (Dowrick, 2009, p. 265). My narrative is not able to heal me fully but rather opens me to my inner world space where "open-ended healing" might be possible. In the past, my writing, through my journal, attempts to bandage the small wounds as they appear. Slowly my writing evolves into something that writes to open the wound and allow for the healing process to begin. In opening the wound, I bring vulnerability and empathy to my writing and now I am grateful for discovering this gift, this alchemic creation in which hope is found in bringing empathy and vulnerability to my relationships with others. Combined, Rilke's "inner world space" and writing with the delicacy of "tact" suggested by Kearney, my own narrative continues to grow and reach towards a light where rays of hope can be found.

Solnit reminds me that it is in the ruin of city houses that artists find their homes, city ruins where “landscapes of abandon, the abandon of neglect and violence that came first and the abandon of passion that moves into the ruins” (2005, p. 89). In my writing, I have assembled stoic creations of self whilst building physical fortresses of protection. I have silenced myself into periods of darkness and neglect and finally I move into one of passion and forgiveness. Is this what my writing now represents? And what comes next, a complete restoration of the self?

Estés says, “that there is in the individuation processes of almost every-one at least a one-time and significant theft [of treasure]” (1992, p. 262). I could say that my “significant theft” was the theft of my voice and the strength to deliver my soulful self to the world through words so that others might know who I am and I might better understand, through language, who I am becoming. Without my voice of truth to call out my presence in the outer world, I am only a suggestion, a vague possibility, something distant that I can’t quite reach. I yearn to be something and write my way towards finding it but without voice, I have no clarity. Estés goes on, “The process of retrieving the treasure and figuring out how to replenish oneself...When this dilemma is met head-on...it fiercely strengthens our resolve to strive for conscious reclamation...it develops our medial nature, that wild and knowing part of the psyche that can also traverse the world of soul and the world of humans” (1992, p. 263).

My soulful voice is my “treasure” but like so many gifts, it must be understood so as to reveal its true magic. For years I use writing as a way of seeking my own inner universe where my soulful self and my voice exist and it is in writing where I might find the courage to restore my outer being. I recall Salomon’s desperate bid to free herself from her own terror through her art and the author Rose posing questions of the genesis of Salomon’s creations, “...where did she have to go inside her mind and body in order to produce this work?” (Rose, 2015, p. 78). Salomon responds in her paintings of sea shores where she inscribes, “Why are you rescuing me...Foams, dreams?” (p. 78). Painting rescues her. And I return to my own dimly lit inner paths and realise, that in the ongoing returning to my internal world in writing, I have worn tracks that take me past places of possible trauma and the fear they hold. I am ready to retrace those paths with the kind of tact that Kearney suggests, “tact in the sense of both tactility and know-how” as I come closer to understanding and practising the art of “exquisite empathy” (Kearney, 2017, p. 7).

“We must all, on a regular basis, use our instincts and find our way home,” says Estés (1992, p. 257). Through my journal I seek my way home and in failing, I try to create a home but instead build a structure. All along, I find, my home has resided within me. The objects and places of my past are the reminders of places of contentment, but they do not offer the intimacy that Bachelard suggests lies beyond the “determination of dates” (2014, p. 31) and the description of objects and places. I see my garden journal as a source of attempted redemption but for a true redemption self-restoration comes from my call to my inner universe.

Through writing I find my “spirit child”, this child has the ability “to traverse two very different worlds...This child is a spiritual power that impels us to continue our important work, to push back, change our lives, better the community, join in helping to balance the world...all by returning to home” (Estés, 1992, p. 272). My journal narrative unfolds further and in returning to my childhood, I find spaces of intimacy that bring me to purity of joy and one where I feel complete. As my narrative comes to the light, to breathe and be shaped into words, I allow myself ways in which to explore who I am. The story that resides within me is the story that my inner self carries. My inner life is as valid and important as my life that lives in real-world time and by allowing my inner self to share my story I become whole and in doing so show vulnerability, fragility, strength and courage. Here I let my voices show regard for each other in an interweaving of delicate dialogue.

Do you remember standing in the sharp shaft of sunlight that penetrates from the perfectly rectangular window frame onto the square tiled linoleum kitchen floor in your childhood home? I do and it is still deliciously clear to me now. I watch you standing there, only as high as the kitchen bench tops with your head tilted upwards. Your worldview is one of depthless, dark cupboards, bare knees and table legs. Adults and other taller members of your family mingle amongst the preparation of colourful food and the clash of crockery and glasses and bustling conversation. On this particular morning you are mesmerised by the tiny particles of dust floating around you as you stand in the beam of sunlight that cuts through the window. You reach out with your tiny, delicate fingers to touch the dancing particles but the movement of your hands creates air-filled currents in which the weightless dust particles get caught up in great whirls. They flow in a school of synchronicity just beyond your reach and then slowly drift and hang in a celestial suspension. For a moment,

it as though this is your universe and you are the radiant sun. The tiny bodies orbit around you and are both repelled and drawn to you with each wave of your limbs. An absolute sense of solitary wonderment dominates your inner and outer worlds.

I know your mother is there. She is standing at the sink washing the dishes. I can feel you try to reach out and show her the world you have discovered but you do not have the words and she is not interested. She is preoccupied with the business of fulfilling life's exhausting list of chores and expectations. It is easier for you to be silent and content.

The loss of home, of possessions and a tradition of family have a trauma associated with theft and wound. My journal, and its words suggest a denial of myself but perhaps the catharsis of writing suggests an attempt at returning my soul to home. Estés says,

The physical place itself is not home; it is only the vehicle that rocks the ego to sleep so that we can go the rest of the way by ourselves. The vehicles through and by which women reach home are many: music, art, forest, ocean spume, sunrise, solitude. These take us home to a nutritive inner world that has ideas, order, and sustenance all of its own. (1992, p. 284)

My examination of my journals that opens the past and allows possible closer understandings of who I was then also serve to remind me of who I am now. Is the self that I am now, that lives with vulnerability and openness a different person? As I consider this I am gently startled at the irony of finding myself in similar surroundings as to when I was writing many years ago in my faraway Garden House. Here, in my study, my nesting place, surrounded by my possessions, I am isolated from others. This place serves as a retreat and I continue to write from perspectives that take me to reflective places within myself.

IN BETWEEN HOME AND ADVENTURE

The body I have and am is my most intimate point of entry into the world. It serves me, at times it sustains my flagging spirit with its vitality, at other times it reminds me of my finitude with its limitations. (Kohák, 1984, p. 105)

Erazim Kohák returns me to the voices of my internal Goddesses. Now, they move freely in and out of my being. I feel the silken touch of the Goddess of Fragility. Her words, soft and reassuring and full of wisdom and truth now mingle amongst the gossamer strands of thoughts spun by the Goddess of Ethos, my writerly self. As I dance between the voices of Fragility and Ethos and listen to their easy conversation I feel myself move into the locus of the Goddess of Honour where a knowing truth dwells. The comfortable interplay between the Goddesses brings me to consider how far I have travelled to find this delicate equilibrium of my inner selves. I return to Todres who enlightens the spirit of Gadamer's notion of understanding through language through a perspective on home and adventure. Todres says of Gadamer,

In understanding, there is a linguistic re-working of 'home' that arises out of the intersection of this 'carried past' with already adventuring human existence. The aliveness of human living is already exceeding home, so understanding is also an 'exceeding'. The structure 'adventure' is thus not just elsewhere but is intimately 'in' the ongoing, carried forward 'aliveness' of being human. So, for Gadamer understanding is a linguistic happening in which the play of tradition and ongoing living become interrelated and full of meaning and significance for further living. (2007, p. 17)

To bring Gadamer's thoughts closer to me I embrace my Goddesses as the voices "of tradition and ongoing living" and my being as one who inherently adventures as part of living. Here I arrive at the delicate tension that exists between the soulful self, one who carries "home [as] the past and all that it brings in body, community and meaning" (Todres, 2007, p. 17) and the writerly self who "gathers up the past and lives it forward" (p. 17). The two intertwine throughout my narrative and I become mesmerised once more by the elasticity of past, present and future and the connection with both my metaphorical and physical journey for the search for both home and adventure and my journal that lies in between. Might my journal hold the kind of language that, Todres suggests, "is the medium and messenger of such living understanding-happening?" (2007, p. 18). With Todres' words I write to fill more gaps with the possible "understanding-happening" and find moments of poetic beauty that return me to a renewed humble awareness of my past. Here I find moments of an intimacy shared with the security of home and the adventure of standing on the edge of the unknown. I write,

Night falls on the middle of a dry, summer paddock where the small, white weatherboard community hall winks with electric lights and gently quivers with a gathering of people. From a distance music and laughter suggests that people are dancing and drinking to celebrate the annual Emita Sports Day. Farmers and fishermen, their wives and kids fill the hall decorated with boughs of eucalyptus leaves. Tweens and toddlers mingle like siblings, sipping on cans of sugary fizzy drink, high on a mixture of parental freedom and a break in the monotonous routine of island life. Outside, men smoke cigarettes and kids run around, darting in between the utes lined up in the paddock. The community is full of the kind of intimacy that comes from being thrown together through a mix of complex circumstance and bound almost too tightly by the perilous Bass Strait. These people are both captured and caressed by their environment.

It is here, on this night, in this hall, I dance with the full moon inclined above me like a blissful mother cradling her precious baby. I meet a man who falls in love with me within moments. A stranger to the island, he moves through the crowd like a far-flung foreigner with different clothes and strange ways. People quietly glance sideways in his presence but he looks only at me as though I am a goddess. I slowly begin to become wrapped in the warm embrace of his love.

Only weeks later I accept his offer to come and live with him on another island, a larger one compared to the one we meet on, but so much smaller than the one I live on with its cities and traffic jams and many people. His island is 'a town with empty streets' and 'no culture' as my mother declares when I tell her I am moving. This man is at once deeply moved that I should relocate to be near him and give up my life of big city money and ambitious dreams. Little does he know that I am also running away.

As soon as I arrive in my new island home I yearn to establish my roots by building a structure. In leaving the mainland I chose to leave the security of home, albeit an unstable home, and take the path of uncertainty, in the hope that I find a place of belonging. In this great leap I reach out to find that uncertainty, the wideness of the landscape, the unfamiliar terrain want to make me return to security, to home, where the familiar is. I am frightened of my freedom and the choice I made to leave certainty for uncertainty, home for adventure. Unable to return home, for if I did I would have to go back to perform the role of child, I desperately try to create my own home, a place to retreat from uncertainty and find comfort in the familiar. Like Persephone I delve into the underworld with my lover Hades. Here in

my underworld of wilderness and solitude I tend my wounds through the words of my journal and the creation of a garden. My Hades, waits patiently alongside me.

I am too frightened to have children. I fear that by bringing children into my world I might treat them with the same intolerance my parents showed me. I am frightened that I might feel trapped and burdened like my mother felt when she realised her own mistakes. Instead, I become a teacher and fall in love with the early adolescents and their stories. I listen to them with care and realise that many are in the midst of losing their soulful voice. Social conformity and tradition nudge some willingly, others unwillingly, into darkened corners where their perspectives become narrow and their minds cloud with anxiety about how they should act. Some want to rebel, others fall into silence and I have no answers for what is right or what is wrong other than to offer them no judgement and a space where they are entitled to share their story.

Teaching becomes like being part of a family. In the classroom I make a difference to students' lives and this is empowering. I feel as though I am slowly shedding my skin and evolving into something bright and fresh. Outside of the classroom I quickly recoil into my old skin where the death of my father and its finality of rejection, a souring relationship with my mother, and my loss of home makes me flounder. The making of a garden is my hibernation, a waiting until, like a chrysalis I emerge pregnant with hope. My hibernation lasts for twelve years and then I move towards the ultimate path of uncertainty, motherhood. I return to the journal entry introducing the birth of my son, the small beginnings of my own family.

ANZAC DAY Tuesday, 25th April 2006

I have just read my last journal entry...who would have thought I'd be where I am today? Life has taken so many unexpected pleasurable turns...I now have my beautiful boy, Ethan to keep me more than occupied and unfortunately away from the garden, BUT my enthusiasm is renewed with my new garden at Ridgeway. Finally, I am back at my old writing desk...

The love that comes from motherhood has a purity and a deep exquisiteness that I have long wished to hold onto. After the birth of my children, my partner and I make life decisions that shock many around us. We go against tradition once more and sell the beautiful house we built high up on the mountain and buy a small cottage with a large rambling garden. Both house and garden have been unattended for many years and so the place is inexpensive, leaving us with enough money to make life changes. We quit our stable teaching jobs so that we are no longer bound to the timetable of others but rather create our own world where we work towards keeping the love in our family alive and pure. With this as priority I finally find myself unexpectedly and delightfully poised between home and adventure. Once more I find in Estés, words of knowing. She says,

When we are young and our soul-lives collide with the desires and requirements of culture and the world, indeed we feel stranded, far from home. However, as adults we continue to drive ourselves even farther from home as a result of our own choices about who, what, where and for how long. If we were never taught to return to the soul-home in childhood, we repeat the “theft and wandering around lost” pattern ad infinitum. But, even when it is our own dismal choices that have blown us off course – too far from what we need- hold faith, for within the soul is a homing device. We all can find our way back. (1992, p. 268)

I wonder if motherhood and parenting tuned my own homing device. So rich and warm is the love created in our family that it sustains my soul and I no longer feel the need to purge my past but rather treat it with a poetic reverence. Each distant vignette of my life is like a splinter from my childhood buried deep into the wound of my soul. Through writing the splinter slowly, gradually works its way to the surface to be carefully attended to and hopefully extracted, leaving only a small scar. If I am to scar, I wear it with honour.

EQUIPOISE BETWEEN WOUND AND COMPASSION

The opening pages of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1985) introduce the reader to the paradox of lightness or weight of being. Kundera writes,

But is heaviness truly deplorable and lightness splendid? The heaviest of burdens crushes us, we sink beneath it, it pins us to the ground...The heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become.

Conversely, the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant.

What then shall we choose? Weight or lightness? (Kundera, 1985, pp. 4-5)

Kundera goes on to pose the deeper question, "Which one is positive, weight or lightness?" Before I begin to unpack the question, I let my thoughts meander around the meaning of burden and its implications as a possible way to come closer to living, as Kundera suggests, a more truthful existence. A burden implies weight but perhaps it is only our perspective that lets something become burdensome. If I walk the short distance from the supermarket to my house carrying a cumbersome vessel of vinegar, perhaps only to be used for rudimentary eco-friendly cleaning chores, I might perceive it as a burden. If I walk the same distance but rather than carrying vinegar, I hold a spectacular bottle of chardonnay soon to be shared over dinner in delightful company, its weight seems to diminish, almost evaporate. The vinegar and the wine weigh the same, but one is a burden and the other is not. It is perhaps the possibilities that the vinegar versus the wine offer that make one a burden and the other a weightless delight. My metaphor addresses a physical weight and now I bring this to my soul and consider the weight and lightness of being.

Beyond the literal and into my writerly world I play with the notion of memory and how it is eternally carried within me, coursing through the rooms of my corporeal frame and

finally coming to rest in the light of day as words re-remembered in the pages of my journal and now the writing of this thesis. Some memories might bear their owner a weight that longs to be unloaded or forgotten. My own memories traverse the spectrum of sheer joy and unimaginable delight to such sadness and heartache that the word pain is possibly appropriate to describe the weight carried in my heart. The burden of the pain carried does not come close to the feelings that bleed from my heart into the rest of my being. At the onset of this thesis writing my journal appears to me as a way to give shape to the pain of memory and allow for a reaching out to new horizons in an attempt to mould myself into something new. In doing so, I might become more adept at tolerating the weight of my past. In the earlier stages of entering a hermeneutics of vulnerability I am still too distant from the place of “open-wound” (Todres, 2007), where pain might be endured through compassion of self.

Over time, the writing in my journal develops and the discovery of my inner universe and the complexities of my voice emerge to bring me closer to the pain, the burden I carry. No longer is the pain a burden, but rather it changes alchemically taking me further into places where compassion resides. Compassion to self relieves the burden and pain of memory and transforms it into something exquisitely human, thus giving me a sense of greater understanding of self and a lightness that comes from a freedom of writing as an artistic process rather than simply an end-product. Writing becomes a cathartic, organic process of creating and interpreting, similar to that of breathing oxygen into the body where a transformation occurs and then is exhaled as carbon dioxide. With each exhale, like Salomon’s layering of paint on the canvas, I also layer new, almost transparent brushstrokes of meaning over the old until I begin to feel something new emerging from the original.

Le Guin (2016, p. 47) briefly calls my writing into question when she asks, “What’s a writer’s calling, now or at any time? To write, to try to write well?”. In writing “well” am I disturbing my cathartic process so that I might write “well” to be interpreted by a critical audience other than myself? Le Guin goes on to describe her own writing as an artistic process rather than a message delivery service. Her words assist in delicately unwrapping the layers of possible meaning in my writing when she sensitively declares,

A poem or story consciously written to address a problem or bring about a specific result, no matter how powerful or beneficent, has abdicated its first

duty and privilege, its responsibility to itself. Its primary job is simply to find the words that give it its right, true shape. That shape is its beauty and its truth. (Le Guin, 2016, p. 48)

Although primitive in their shape and possible meaning, the simple words and stories in my journal are like potter's clay. If the clay remains moist and kept in a cool and dark place, it can be reworked and slowly shaped into something new. Each reshaping and seeking for new words and new ways of revealing continue to bring me closer to the dark corners of my life where burdens of truth might be uncovered. Any thoughts of doubt of the competency and meaning of my writing raised by Le Guin are gently doused by the waters of my inner wells of compassion. I realise my purpose is to write not only well but simultaneously interpret my soulful voice. Being connected with the soulful voice allows me to practice the virtue of living with moral integrity towards myself and others. Writing is the equipoise between inner and outer, wound and compassion and remaining open to my inner voices of truth.

Kundera's paradox shows me ways in which weight might be shifted and interpreted through acts of writing but what of lightness in the writerly space? Can we be too light, too distant from the weight of possible truth? Kundera's title, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* reveals the conundrum that he suggests comes with "the absolute absence of a burden" (p. 5). Might we make light of our own memories by choosing to ignore our soulful voices, pushing them far away so that they become inaudible? In doing so might we miss the profound understanding that the re-remembering of memories might offer through our voices and acts of writing? In hoping that we can bury a memory, like I attempted to bury mine, in choosing not to address it and open the wound, feel its pain and embrace the compassion in the suffering of it, might we miss the understanding of being that we long for?

When Kundera asks the question, "What then shall we choose? Weight or lightness?" I might consider in my response that it is not about choosing weight or lightness but rather finding the balance and perspective so that weight and lightness become transformative. My writing asks of me to live emotionally and unearth something of my true being and expose this being to the world. This task is not simple and the bringing of something into light can

be burdensome. If done with respectful guidance, compassion might follow the writing and ask of me to recognise that within me there is a lightness from which knowing emanates. During acts of writing I am able to adjust the spacing between “too near and too far” (Kearney, 2017, p. 7) so that empathically balanced equipoise is achieved. Writing brings me closer to the wound of suffering through the wrestling of phrases and words that I find within me and simultaneously allows me to create enough distance so that pain is felt. Compassion becomes both weight and lightness of being.

Revisiting Coelho’s fable, *The Alchemist*, I find a passage in which the merchant who owns the crystal store shares with Santiago his reluctance to change the shop and the way of his life. He says, “I don’t know how to deal with change. I’m used to the way I am” (Coelho, 2014, p. 60). The merchant is trapped within himself and his fear of uncertainty becomes his burden. Santiago’s presence only exacerbates the merchant’s dismay as he reflects on his past. He continues,

Today I understand something I didn’t see before: every blessing ignored becomes a curse. I don’t want anything else in life. But you are forcing me to look at wealth and at horizons I have never known. Now that I have seen them, and now that I see how immense my possibilities are, I’m going to feel worse than I did before you arrived. Because I know the things I should be able to accomplish, and I don’t want to do so. (p. 60)

The merchant, in realising “how immense [his] possibilities are” becomes burdened by his inability to reach out to new horizons for fear of change. Does his self-inflicted burden come from apathy or self-doubt? The relationship of self-doubt that one harbours within oneself might come, in my experience, from the too distant voices of truth and compassion that lie within the heart of each of us. Bringing these voices and their words closer to our hearts and our ears we might find a harmony and strength that will allow us to bear the weight of seeing ourselves in new ways, ready to be challenged and remain in uncertainty.

Without openness and vulnerability towards self how are we to find the compassion needed to guide ourselves with truth and integrity to the soul? Estés reminds me of the difficulty of living as a woman who reaches towards her soulful self for guidance but can become lost in a world that strives to carve her into a “more acceptable form as defined by an unconscious culture” (1992, p. 4). Her words remind me of the burden of a cultural

weight that every woman carries. This is not, as Kundera suggests, a weight that brings me closer to earth, where the cool, damp soil fills me with the beautiful humility of my existence, rather this burden suffocates me with cultural doctrines that manifest in judgemental credos that continually navigate around the appearance of my body, the thin membrane that belies the magnificence of my internal universe and its potential bountiful offerings to others. It is the burden of expectation of what it is to be a woman in a time when definition of ourselves seems to be undermined by constant calls to be radically defined by our appearance. Where does a woman turn to find a place where she might return to nurture her soul? I look around and watch as desperate attempts from women shouting become increasingly louder, 'I need me time!' but are we confused by the plethora of 'me time' opportunities offered as elixirs to be free from the pressure of our society and ironically become part of the weight. Regimes at the gym, shopping malls, beauty salons keep us defined in our appearance. Have we forsaken the meaning of wellness to be exclusively of the body and forgotten the importance of our celestial Goddesses and their soulful voices? Do we really understand what 'mindfulness' implies and how this might embody the act of listening to our inner voices? How do we find our "state of being" that Estés says, "When a woman is in this state, she feels entirely in and of herself instead of out of herself and wondering if she is doing right, acting right, thinking well" (1992, p. 264)?

Our quest to hold on to our youthful appearance is perhaps another indicator of our keenness to return to a place in our past where memory is filled with joy and pain is not yet embedded in our soul. But our body and soul intertwine and in our endeavour to smooth and pluck and reshape ourselves we are breaching the body's to right to age and relax into our skins where every line, every wrinkle that appears is not something to be ashamed of but rather seen as another brushstroke from our inner artist. We are painted from the inside out. Every moment we reach out to touch something with our skin we feel it with the weight of our past. Our memories surge through our being acknowledged or not, but perhaps in their acknowledgement we can let our stories be heard not only through our voices but worn on our skin, in our scars and in the tenderness of our touch, in the openness of our thought or in our keenness to listen and connect with others.

Solitude is my both my saviour and captor. Here I am dangerously loose and can become, at times, lost and frightened and unable to make my way back to find the comfort of others. At other times I find revelation only in solitude where the ongoing discovery of self is

permitted. In solitude I find safety in practicing the “equipoise between silence and speaking, invisibility and visibility” (Kearney, 2017, p. 7). Here, I gently untangle threads of pain and in doing so, replenish my soul. Rilke shows us the possible weight that sadness may bring to its owner, but within solitude, room for compassion towards self flourishes and sadness lifts its heavy weight and moves, not into “unbearable lightness” but into a lightness that brings a fullness to the human capacity for love and empathy. I return to the letter to Mr Kappus, August 12th, 1904,

The more still, more patient and more open we are when we are sad, so much the deeper and so much the more unswervingly does the new go into us, so much the better do we make it ours, so much the more will it be *our* destiny, and when on some later day it “happens” (that is, steps forth out of us to others), we shall feel in our inmost selves akin and near to it. (Rilke, 2004, p. 49)

Here, in his place of uncertainty, Rilke brings lightness to the burden of sadness and shows us the possible transformation of weight to lightness of being. For Rilke, being open to sadness brings him closer “to the earth” where, “the more real and truthful” (Kundera, 1985, p. 5) can be felt. The transformation into lightness comes from the patience and stillness required to “make it ours”, and then it may “step[s] forth out of us to others”(Rilke, 2004, p.49). Rilke’s balance of silence and speech, solitude and community bring to question our ability to judge when to retreat into solitude and when to share our vulnerable selves with others. I return once more to the beautiful writing of Rousseau and wonder if, in his exile of “wandering and self-justification” (2004, p. 7) he finds the lightness that comes from long periods of solitude causes him to “be lighter than air” (Kundera, 1985, p. 5)? He writes of the moment in which his soul is nurtured,

But if there is a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate its entire being there, with no need to remember the past or reach into the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely but this duration goes unnoticed, with no sign of the passing of time, and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence, a feeling that fills our souls entirely... (Rousseau, 2004, p. 88)

For Rousseau society drives him to a place where only in solitude can he find fleeting happiness in “the simple feeling of existence”. Rejection and condemnation from an “unconscious culture” push him into self-imposed isolation where he writes to reassure himself that he has discovered peace and security. Peter France introduces *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (2004) with the suggestion that the “very repetition and eloquence with which [Rousseau] creates and conveys this sense of security alert us to the fragility of his construction” (France, 2004, p. 7). In this I am reminded of my own dangerous retreat into the wilderness of my first home and garden and the fragility of my construction. For me, the lightness of solitude becomes almost “unbearable”.

The chaos of Merleau-Ponty’s world is perhaps more reflective of the place in which I now exist and I sense my own urgency at wishing to remain open to the unavoidable pain but potentially rewarding connections that occur within a community of people. For me, the call to lightness, “to take leave of the earth” is always audible. Merleau-Ponty says,

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people’s intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people’s in my own. (2012, p. xxii)

Merleau-Ponty brings me, once again, to temporality and its equivocal state within the world of story and storytelling, truth and interpretation. I abandon the tight rein that perceives of only a singular truth and instead unleash the stories within me and follow the interwoven paths that link with others so that somehow a rich organic story continues to be told. Merleau-Ponty describes our intersecting lives as one in which “we engage each other like gears”. The rhythmic and fluid movement of connecting cogs suggest a harmony of mechanics that keeps moving, forever expanding as it collects the stories of others on its journey. I am humbled to be a part of so many stories. Whether painful, joyful or complex I am forged into the memories of others as they are into mine.

Estés says, “Stories are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life” (1992, p. 14). In writing the following story I wonder about the lives of those who unknowingly become part of my story. I am, as Merleau-Ponty says, “inseparable

from subjectivity and intersubjectivity” (2002, p. xxii) and my perception of self is drawn from the relationship I have with others. In this story, uncertainty confronts me. During a routine check-up my dentist finds small internal tumours that need to be removed and assessed. For a short while, I wallow in the burdensome space of my reaction, ‘What if’. I compose myself eventually and I return to Annas — I am under construction, restoration and in eternal practice of embodying vulnerability, a virtue that our tradition somehow seeks to deny us. I find Annas reminding me of how it is to actively and intelligently engage with my vulnerability. She says,

Because a virtue is a disposition it requires time, experience and habituation to develop it, but the result is not routine but the kind of actively and intelligently engaged practical mastery that we find in practical experts. (2011, p. 14)

I seek the small wound of suffering that reminds me of my presence and humanity, the wound that represents both weight and lightness. In this opening I search for the soulful voice and resume the rich ongoing dialogue in which we address the senses of the self. I ask of the soulful self—how do I prepare to find the equipoise between wound and compassion, the space in which weight and lightness of being interchange in a delicate act of nurturing the soul?

THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL

Thursday, 30th June 2016

I carry the warmth of Rilke with me to my first small surgical operation under general anesthetic.

For a week or so prior to my operation I set about creating a communion with both my physical body and my soulful self in which I question my fears and ask my soulful self to come forward and help me prepare by embracing uncertainty and vulnerability. Rilke’s ‘incantatory language’ serves to not only inspire me but also to awaken and continue my search and discovery of realising my self-potential. I am free from the burden that uncertainty can impose as long as I hold Rilke’s words close to me. He speaks to my soulful self which in turn fortifies my position in the real world.

It is almost 24 hours since the operation and I am in deep reflection. I wonder if my 'mental processes' are affected and if so, how might I use this condition to perceive things in a new way? Might I allow the quiet voice of the soulful self to continue to rise and become the carer of my physical self, and in doing so allow her to alleviate the fear and imagined pain that may be founded in the realms of real world logic.

As I sit in the hospital ward in my small cubicle I nurse a copy of Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet in my lap. My preparation, my communion between body and soul gives me strength and courage to accept uncertainty and to relinquish myself to it. And in relinquishing I become free and almost feel joy at the realisation that I am free from fear. Uncertainty is far more beautiful, and I become conscious of my own state of calm. The sensation of relinquishing to uncertainty as moving away from or above something that normally anchors me to a fear might be my experience of the transcendental. An electricity sparks and pulls me towards uncertainty and back to certainty, forever challenging my state of being.

My chamber is enclosed in grey concertina curtains. Created for my privacy, the division by curtain alone offers only concealment of the flesh and quickly becomes a redundant gesture as I tune in to hear the conversations of others, patients, nurses and doctors continue on around me. I listen but I do not want to be drawn into the cold world of reality and become grateful for my wall of curtain obscuring my sight from others and theirs from mine. Instead, I open my book and find distraction in the language of Rilke,

Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.

Are the voices within me my dragons? In the past I acted with such fear in their near presence, frightened to hear their words only to discover that they are the princesses waiting to see me act with "beauty and courage". Now, I honour their presence.

Audible conversations circling my pocket of solitude are firmly situated within real-world concerns. Harsh, cold facts are indexed in pragmatic voices that carry a decisiveness that plugs any opportunity of uncertainty to be allowed. Like a chef in a restaurant, kitchen orders are called out for all to hear, "we have two tooth ladies to go in next", referring to myself and the next-door patient—as yet unseen to me due to our division of grey curtain. Phone calls requesting urgent preparation of theatres are made from the nearby reception desk, "It needs to be cleaned before the next patient and before the staff go home". None of these words assure my patient-friend who becomes increasingly agitated by the long wait and lack of visit from either doctor or anesthetist. Her fear of needles, one of the circling conversations I am privy to, only increases her exacerbated state until she begins to make

a wailing sound, and all attempts by her harried mother to soothe and comfort her only seem to increase the volume of her cries.

Conversations between my inner and outer selves continue during which I slowly tune my corporeal body to listen only to my soulful self. The dialogue begins with time. My comfortable chair and the warm blanket that is delivered to me with care and gentle contact from the nurse also comes with her voicing frustration that the surgery is being held up and theatre is running behind time. She informs me that I am going to be there for 'some time' and 'at best' I would be out by such and such time. I respond with what I hope is grace. I thank her for the blanket and smile. She is not responsible for 'time' — that great imposition that creates anxiety and stress. I control time by allowing myself to enjoy the warmth of my blanket and the soft light from my cubicle. Winter is on us and it is dark and cold outside and I am with comfort and light. How lovely it is to be present without the urgency of time breathing a cold wind down my neck. I am in no pain, I am content.

Every now and again I am drawn to the worry of my next-door neighbour and she reminds me of my own imminent uncertainty and pain. What if I don't fall asleep with the anesthetic, what if they permanently damaged my nerve as they had predicted, and what about the pain that will follow? These fears bring on a coldness and a sensation of something like anger and defeat. I will not let this real world stamp on my inner peace so quickly. Again, the challenge to release myself faces me but somehow it is easier to let uncertainty and vulnerability behold me.

As I am placed onto the trolley and wheeled into surgery, I feel a physical pull to take in the harsh surroundings and be present in the real world. I resist and instead give up myself to the unknown. I am calm.

I follow instructions carefully as they ask me to breathe. I feel the anesthetic run through my body. I want to hold onto this sensation and I have just enough time to whisper, "It feels tingly" as though I am being taken on a joy ride. I think I may even have a slight smile on my face.

Slowly waking, I pass through fleeting passages of time, as though on an express train traversing through stations at rapid speed where only recognition of shapes and forms remain with me. I come to the present, slow and orderly. I think I speak the words, "that was amazing" and marvel at how the body can be put through such a remarkable process of going under, submerged into deep sleep where pain and fear cannot reach, merely at the will of a liquid-filled needle wielded by the hand of another.

Moving back to my cubicle for post-operative observation I become tired and relax into my numbed state and realise my lack of pain. Again, I return to a state of contentment in perhaps what might be thought of as ignorance but what I now firmly acknowledge as state

of understanding between my soulful self and my physical body and mind. In giving myself over to uncertainty I give away any of the fear that might impinge on my inner wellness, which is the source of my comfort and ultimately my strength in rejecting fear.

My friend is also back from her surgery. Vaguely listening to the scraps of sound and whisper of words that slip through the curtain, I imagine her mother holding her hand and hear her showing signs of distress at the numbness she feels in her mouth. Her urgency gains currency and panic overcomes her. Her fear at her own distress makes her lose control of her physical being. She begins to struggle with swallowing and breathing, all the while managing to still sob uncontrollably. Nurses rush into the already cramped cubicle and the manoeuvring and dragging of hard furniture reminds me of the bleak, hard edges of the physical world. I listen as the mother utters meekly, "I don't feel well". To me it was predictable but no one seemed to move fast enough to save her from collapsing, loud and heavy onto the shiny tiled floor. Wailing peaks as the patient continues to struggle in her own discomfort and now at her mother's. The cubicle is thick with noise and people. As the jostling continues I become more aware of my own calmness and realise that a great distance is felt between me and my neighbour. I ask myself, what would it do for me to be distressed about my neighbour? I resolve that it is of no benefit and so remain at peace. That night I sleep well.

The story can be interpreted as a simple, slightly humorous episode and it may resonate with others. Le Guin may ask, "Is it well written?" to which I might quote her own words in reply, "Its primary job is simply to find the words that give it its right, true shape. That shape is its beauty and its truth" (2016, p. 28). The words in my story form the shape of the place in which I discover a capacity for stillness and solitude where I become aware of something within me that cleanses my wounds and allows a dignity of understanding self. I am open and vulnerable to myself and to others. Here I might find the delicate equipoise of wound and compassion, weight and lightness.

I return to Kundera's beautiful tale of weight and lightness and the conundrum that Tomas, the workaholic surgeon and polygamist faces. He views sex and love as two separate entities. He loves his wife Tereza but sees her as a burden, a weight. Sabina, an artist who becomes Tomas' mistress delights in her acts of betrayal and epitomises lightness. Rather than blame Tomas for his infidelities, Tereza asks Tomas to take her with him when he visits his mistress. Sabina shows Tereza her studio and her realistic canvases "closely resembling colour photography". She says,

Here is a painting I happened to drip red paint on. At first I was terribly upset, but then I started enjoying it. The trickle looked like a crack; it turned the building site into a battered old backdrop, a backdrop with a building site painted on it. I began playing with the crack, filling it out, wondering what might be visible behind it. (Kundera, 1985, p. 59)

At the onset of this thesis a small crack appears in the canvas of my journal. Like Sabina I seek the lightness that comes from the freedom of “absence of burden” but my curiosity to see what might be visible behind the crack is too great. Going into my journal, revealing the silences and exploring the darkened corners I discover the pain of small traumas puncturing my soul. Now as my writing of this thesis turns full circle I find the pain is bearable and more importantly essential in discerning the richness of my inner world and my soulful self. The dramatic change of perception of self, realised by looking behind the cracks, has given me courage to live what I consider to be a more virtuous existence where vulnerability and compassion become my strengths. How then, am I to maintain the equipoise between wound and compassion outside of my writerly space of solitude? In Le Guin, I find possibilities. She says,

I think that’s how an artist can best speak as a member of a moral community: clearly, yet leaving around her words that area of silence, that empty space, in which other and further truths and perceptions can form in other minds. (2016, p. 50)

Putting our souls into our writing helps shape truth and meaning but the balance of weight and lightness might also be found in the transformative process of writing and interpreting. With vulnerability we can leave our words unattended so “further perceptions can form in other minds”. As members of a community of trust our writing offers possibilities for us to remain open. Our task is to ask others, as reader and interpreter, to bring the same trust to our words.

But my writing does not finish. This thesis acts as a passage into a new way of being where I might continue living and writing with my wounds open (Todes, 2007). I share with artists the urge to transform the seeds of memories held deep within that are gently tilled with a fertilised imagination to produce something that reaches out to the light so that it

might be interpreted, touched and understood by others. In the generous space of reader and writer, where “around her words” an “empty space” of silence might be found, vast and mysterious inner universes might come together. Here as sentient beings cracks appear, visibly and sensually through which we might observe the wounds of our souls and of others. The intersecting of shared stories in a “moral community” where layers of voices can be unearthed and heard by others allows us to continue to build and restore our own “truths and perceptions” simultaneously providing the space in which others might do the same. In this space the more we share our stories, the richer and more real they become, opening us to other ways of understanding who we are and who we hope to be.

What you read is only part of a story that once belonged only to me. In writing and sharing my lived experiences with you, I offer glimpses into the depths of my inner being, a place for the wound of compassion and rich in mystery. In my story you may find occasions where our lives connect through a shared understanding of what it feels to be human and together we become part of a greater intersubjective world. Bringing our stories together allows us to honour and acknowledge the complexity of our humanness and continue to unfold into a world where our identities are fluid rather than pre-conceived and fixed. Residues of ourselves might be found in the shape of words, ready to be taken up by others and woven into the fabric of new stories. I leave this chapter wondering how far and for how long our stories might travel, hoping that living with open wound will resonate with others and begin to open a dialogue where judgement of ourselves and others is replaced with an ethical stance that embodies inclusivity and openness.

This thesis is an invitation to release the connection of words as a pathway to the inner-world, a world where multiple voices of truth exist waiting in the hope to be heard. They are the voices that weep, that cry and that make us contort ourselves into misshapen bodies tormented with pain and sorrow. They are the voices that remind us of our uncontrolled, unpredictable existence but through their stories of pain and suffering come the exquisite beauty and compassion found in vulnerability. These are the voices that bind our wounds and help heal us. The ongoing healing process places the wounded in the cradle of empathy where she may begin to hear the delicate, fragile voice in others. Here, she can listen to others without judgement, embrace the emotional

energy that can be found within silence, and let temporality meander unleashed until it settles in fresh language where she might find herself thrown into another narrative.

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