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quake destruction / arts creation

arts therapy & the canterbury earthquakes

Deborah Green

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, The University of Auckland, 2016
Many lives have touched mine – in person, text and art.

Thank you.

And thank you to ∆.
You remade yourself by dropping through the sky.
I’ve written myself anew consonant-by-vowel.
What shall we do with these new selves?

Cover image Figure 1. ‘Kite-in-the-rubble’ reworked (Green, October 2015)
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abstract

This arts-based inquiry explores my experiences as beginning arts therapist during the Canterbury, New Zealand, earthquakes from 2010 to 2014. At the heart of these experiences lies my challenging dual-role as both quake-survivor and therapist – I was betwixt-and-between quake-destruction and arts-creation. I aimed to make sens/e of this in ways that may be useful to applied-arts practitioners working in similar contexts. My sens/e-making quest blended autoethnography, a/r/tography and arts therapy-as-research. This braided-methodology created a multi-faceted process:

I adopted Victor Turner’s concept of liminality as my central metaphor to give theoretical and aesthetic containment. Liminality resonated with my earthquake experiences, my practice-as-therapist and this arts-based research.

I teased-open the term sens/e. I used my physical-senses to generate embodiment. I befriended my implicit felt-sense and evoked my soul-sense. Drawing on the French sens for direction, I embraced therapy and research as creating life-forward direction. And I used these sens/ual processes to make meaning and render new knowledge.

I created mixed-modal artworks to explore my memories, writings, artworks and photographs as quake-survivor/therapist. I opened reflexive conversations between my creations and texts addressing arts-based research, trauma, liminality, and therapy.

I enacted this study via three roles inspired by Rita Irwin’s a/r/tography:

As artist, I created art using my quake-arts therapy-process of ‘dropping-in’ which splices Laury Rappaport’s Focusing-Orientated Art Therapy with Shaun McNiff’s images-as-angels process. These creations expressed who I perceived I was, who I currently am, and who I am becoming as artist/researcher/therapist.

As researcher, I followed McNiff’s suggestion to craft correspondence between my research process and practice of therapy. My dropping-in process, when combined with autoethnographic a/r/tography, provided a practical way to generate, gather and analyse research material.

As therapist, I discovered – via personal experience of wounding/healing, and hands-on implementation of therapy for others suffering – my quake-work had stumbled upon several notions congruent with current intersubjective and embodied arts- and trauma-therapy, exemplified in Stephen Levine’s poietic approach.

The outcome is an arts-rich multi-vocal layered-account containing emergent findings regarding: post-postmodern both-and-and...soul-based arts therapy and research approaches applicable to contexts of enduring liminality, in which imagical play invites new order to emerge from chaos, healing is reclaimed within the wounded/healer archetype, and internal communitas becomes a figural intention of trauma-transformation.
**PHASE 1: Separation**

I invite you to take a journey. We begin with a *separation*, tarry in the transformative confusion of *liminality*, and then *reincorporate* by returning to the everyday.

While my voice – through my writing and artworks – acts as guide, the intersubjectivity of this arts-based process invites you to simultaneously travel within yourself and explore your own soul-sense of earthquakes. And while my tales stem from real tremors that occurred in Canterbury, New Zealand, your quakes may be metaphoric happenings within your own personal and/or professional experiences.

We begin by ritually separating from the everyday.

I invite you to settle comfortably ... but you’re welcome to move at any time to keep your body from contracting – it’s easy to get wrapped up in the inner sensations and neglect how these affect us physically.

Take several slow breaths. Become aware of your breath travelling in and out.

Notice the weight of your body. Feel the chair against your back, the seat against your thighs, your feet on the floor, your hands heavy and soft. You are here, now, in this body, in this chair.

Shift your attention to your senses. Notice without judgement any tastes your mouth holds in this moment. Move to your sense of smell – notice any scents coming to you in this moment. Shift your awareness to your sense of touch and notice again the mass of your body, the sensations on your skin. Invite your attention to your sense of sight. Take in the colours and shapes about you, how the light and shade catches them, their textures and tones. Finally, focus on what you can hear in this moment. Listen to any noises coming from outside the room. Gently pull your hearing into the room and notice any sounds in this space with you.

Now go within. Listen for your breath. Stay with this for a while.

Go deeper. Hear beneath your breath the sound of your heartbeat. Drop into this rhythm.

Follow this primal beat down, down, down ...
... down into limbo with bangs & whimpers ...

September 2010 magnitude 7.1

The bed bucks and jerks, wrenching me from sleep. Before conscious thought awakes, my adrenalin-fuelled body has me up and riding the quake, star-fished in the doorway. The dim lump of Δ, my husband, shifts in the bed. “Earthquake!” I yell. He’s slow to move. By the time he’s struggling upright, the freight-train tremor has roared through the house and off over the Bays.

We freeze in a pre-dawn tableau.

Suddenly the post-quake cacophony of wailing-sirens barking-dogs raised-voices clanging-alarms rushes over us. I’m quivering from head to toe, charged, electric, ready to fight off demons, slay dragons, run at the speed of light, jump over buildings.

The dark outside finally settles and quietens. The power is out and little can be done until dawn breaks. The cats cautiously slope back through the cat-flap. They join us in bed and press into our bodies.

I’m meercat-alert, watching dawn slowly dust the ceiling while Δ snores alongside.
February 2011 magnitude 6.3

Beginning the day on edge, I succumb to a strange urge and climb from my car to find and kiss my cats before I leave home. I carry this sideways-ness into my sessions. As beginning arts therapist I’m interning at the Women’s Centre several stories up in an old central Christchurch building. I’m breathing deeply into a gritty tale of anxiety woven by a new client when a deep-throated roar punches through the room.

What follows, I recall in jagged shards:

- my client’s bloodless face, eyes and mouth wide -
- the floor kicking upwards, spilling us off our chairs -
- yelling loudly: Get away from the windows!! (these had broken during the September quake and policy was to move to the centre of the building) -
- riding the jerking floor as I crawl for the door -

- my hand reaching for the round doorknob -
- the carpet juddering beneath my knees while all around deafening sounds of tortured metal-glass-timber-concrete-humans, batter me -
- huddling semi-foetal with my client in the hallway, covering our heads -
- finally, the vast beast galloping on multitudinous thunderous legs through the city stampedes off -

Again the moment of frozen silence. Again the incoming blast of sounds – wailing sirens and alarms, screaming, falling glass and masonry, car horns.

My client is intact. I think: Car keys and mobile phone. I crawl to my office. The opposite wall is mostly gone, the window in the street below. I tug my bag free from the wreckage of the fallen bookcase.

Figure 2. ‘Reaching’ (Green, April 2011)
In reception, staff and clients gather. A room full of debris. A woman hopping on one foot trying to put her shoes on. Another clutching a bloody gash in her arm. The entrance door is wedged.

I’m terror-strong.

Grasping it in both hands, I jerk it free. With a shuddering gaggle of people from the floors above, we hurry down the stairs. I clutch my client’s arm – she’s wearing a blue jersey.

The street is thick with dust. Bricks from old buildings and dazed people wearing grime clutter the tortured tarmac. A fierce aftershock and young men shout: Get back from the buildings! Facades are tottering and falling.

I can barely speak. My lips are fat. I want to let Δ know I’m OK. I want to find out if he’s OK. My phone’s not in my bag. A colleague lends me hers. I try to text but my shaking hands won’t behave. My client says she lives out of town and so isn’t worried for her family. We set off for our cars, as we’re in the same parking lot.

We walk past fallen buildings. I’m numb.

Shock doesn’t let me realise people died here today.

A huge collapsed wreck is shrouded in hazy smoke. The edges of a blonde woman flicker through the cloud. She stands on the rubble in the remnants of her suit jacket and skirt. Another catastrophic aftershock punches the city. Beside a surreal gaggle of sun-hatted Asian school children in crocodile-formation, we duck for cover. When I raise my head, the ruined building has collapsed even further. The woman is gone.

Shock doesn’t let me realise people are dying here today.

We skirt gouts of liquefaction bubbling through ravaged streets. Our cars are intact. I hug and wish my client good luck.

For a moment my little green car feels like a haven.

The team at More FM have generators and are on air.

I hear from them that Lyttelton, my home, is the epicentre.

All the fight drains from me. I’m tingling, icy, scarcely able to hold the steering wheel.

-my man-my cats-my friends-
The drive lasts forever. Streets are clogged – those of us fleeing/fallen buildings/liquefaction. And yet we’re polite and caring. At interactions people are fair… we all want to get home. A man in a suit walks alongside the road. He too is heading for the Bridle Path. The tunnel and the passes will be closed. The only way home is to walk over the Port Hills. Others have realised this too. Many of us offer him a lift. He suggests he’ll get there faster by walking. He’s right.

I stand on the road looking up into the mist shrouding the hills. The track disappears. Other Lytteltonites stand with me. The tarmac kicks up and we ride the quake. Cannon fire erupts high above as Castle Rock explodes and massive boulders bound thunderously down the hillside, carving through the fog, spewing dust.

A shudder runs through me.

Many turn back. I join the gaggle determined to get home. One man has a coil of sisal rope over his shoulder – just in case, he says. Another man in an expensive suit and pointy shoes has an iPhone. He lets me text ∆.

I walk. Although fit, I’m breathless in the damp mist. We spread out according to our ability and I’m soon alone. At the top, I cross the road and begin descending. A large rock wall overhanging the track has partially collapsed. I screw myself tight and scamper over massive razor-edged boulders beneath teetering rock ledges.

As I turn the final corner I see ∆ trudging towards me. I run.

We hold each other for a long time.

The house is still standing. It’s old and wooden and knows how to be flexible. Our collection of plates and glasses hasn’t fared so well. And my cats have fled. Dexter returns quickly and complains loudly. In the street we call for Malaika. She eventually answers my calls and slinks from the neighbour’s property.

We walk into our village. The churches are rubble. Many old buildings sprawl across the streets. Roads are rent through with gaping cracks. Houses resound with hysterical dog barking. Sirens are still wailing.
That evening, we barbeque defrosting meat and drink whiskey. We laugh a lot and too loudly. Δ snores in the candle-light. I don’t sleep. Aftershocks continue. I lie in the jolting bed as new boulders are ripped from the hills to cascade down the valleys behind our house, and I think of the blonde woman who disappeared into the rubble.

Figures 4 & 5. Lyttelton buildings (Green, February 2011)
I discover later that among the 185 people killed in the city, 115 died in the CTV building, including, I assume, the blonde woman I saw vanish into the maw of the 5.9 aftershock.
June 2011 magnitude 6.4

We’ve lived in a wasteland of aftershocks and disruptions. I sit on the red couch at home beneath the large mirror we’ve only recently placed back on the wall. Δ and I are contemplating a new paragliding site.

The floor heaves up and the house beats wooden castanets all about us.

I’m electric with fiery adrenalin.

The aftershock barrels off.

Across the road, school-children pour loudly onto the playing-field and boil about.

Finally we all settle. The kids return to their classrooms. I make tea. The cats slope back in.

Δ decides to go and fly the new site. I’m too jangled to fly but also don’t want to be left alone but would rather not speak this aloud as it feels I’m imposing …

Within the hour, a larger tremor blasts through. I’m galvanised off the couch and, blinded by terror, find myself being slammed side-to-side in the front-doorframe as I try escape the booming house. Spat out and suddenly on the street, I become aware of raggedly jerking power-lines and boulders thundering from the hills above.

Finally the shaking calms and the post-quake battery of sound roars in, this time overlaid with deafening drumming as metal containers on the dock beat against each other. The children broil onto the flat again, shrill voices raised in fear and excitement. After raggedly lining up for head-count, the wise teachers encourage the kids into activity to shake off excess terror. Silver emergency blankets become capes and tinny laughter fills the playground. Parents toil up the street. I check on our neighbouring seniors, then set off to find Dexter and Malaika. My stripy boy heeds my calls, complaining loudly. But my skinny black bat-cat is nowhere to be found.

Δ returns. I’ve cleared broken glass and ceramic and restored books and files to their shelves. We circuit the block calling Mallycat. It grows dark. We keep going with head-torches as further aftershocks rumble through. Sleep is patchy. In the morning, we’re out in the frosty dew calling and calling. My heart is clenched tight.

Finally, low to the ground, she returns with plaintive little mews.
December 2011 magnitude 6

I’m lunching with friends in the city. A loud aftershock jolts the building and we spill onto the street. Fearing the double-barrel effect of the June quakes, I head home, hoping the tunnel will be open. I’m struggling to hold at bay breathless thoughts of repeating my walk over the Bridle Path.

The tunnel is open. Along with several other cars, I race through the two kilometres of claustrophobic dark, speed restrictions forgotten.

At home, I locate the cats. Δ is flying his paraglider an hour-plus away but says he’ll head home.

I’m in the street, talking with neighbours when, as feared, the second, bigger quake slams through. We scurry to the road centre, away from power-lines and buildings, and ride the bucking tarmac. I marvel at the cars rocking on their shock-absorbers. Again the docks resound with castanetting containers. Rocks in the high hills above crack as if blasted and I watch in fascinated frozen dismay as an enormous boulder bounces and spins down the valley towards us, each impact jarring the ground beneath our feet. It finally slams to a halt against the valley-side.

As the panic drains, I feel deep exhaustion settling in. Yet another night without power, without water, and with fear ever-present.
flying my kite from within the rubble

These earthquakes marked the beginning of my career as quake-arts therapist. They also mark the beginning of this research into my self-and-work as quake-arts therapist. These quakes began striking my home province of Canterbury, New Zealand, as I completed my training in clinical arts therapy*. Between September 2010 and February 2014 I endured the four major quakes, countless aftershocks, the relentless aftermath – and provided quake-arts therapy for numerous others in similar circumstances. In 2013 I embarked upon this arts-based research (ABR) to make useful sens/e of these paradoxical experiences.

During this inquiry I shared autoethnographer Lee’s (2006) sense of “the wonderment of feeling human” as I was “startled by beauty, by sudden insight, by a glimpse of my soul” as “everything [came] together and apart” (para.7). My research-journey into the liminal wonderment within this coming-together/ falling-apart began as I re-visited a potent image I had created after the February 2011 earthquake. The first version of this kite-in-the-rubble drawing arose a few weeks post-quake as I poetically re-imagined being in the rubble, seeking safe spaces between broken buildings and fallen boulders, from which I flew a kite – a periscope and symbol of hope. This image – as a gestalt and as separate components – became central to this research, delivering a plethora of possible meanings.

* Through Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design, Auckland, New Zealand
...it’s all about the string...

For this moment, I focus on the string. The importance of this kite-string was highlighted as I reworked this image in conversation with my dead mother, one of the many voices I construed as I multi-voiced this inquiry:

It’s all about the string, she cries, as I, unravelling the kite, lift a spit-dampened finger to the wind. The wind comes and goes, it changes direction, it dances and dies, she says, and beneath us the earth is heavy and hot in the sun or cool under the clouds. But between them, between us standing on the ground and the kite high in the sky, is the string! The string, she says again, with a catch in her voice. It links the two. A small thin thread, a small thin vital thread. Hold it gently but firmly, for it’s in your hands, she says.

But my hands sweat, I say.

You have two hands, says my dead mother, I gave you two hands so you can dry one while you hold on with the other.

(Conversations with my dead mother, October 2013)

This kite-string symbolises my central theme and containing metaphor of being in-between, of liminality (Turner, 1970). And during this research I – often with sweaty palms – danced, drew, painted, sculpted, wrote, enacted and storied my soul-sense of this in-between quake-shaken string-space. But while the real-life quakes tumbled me directly into this liminality with meagre preparation and little idea of an expected endpoint, mirroring this here may create excessive confusion. My kite-string thus also acts as a connecting thread and I assume the traditional role of shaman and lace this thread, like a string in a maze, through this research.

My first braid of guiding-string involves introducing the overall structure of this research. Liminality, as the transformatory phase between the initial separation and final reincorporation phases of ritual, speaks eloquently to my experience of the earthquakes. This document thus follows the structure of ritual.

I begin with a jolting separation – the earthquakes. I then piece together from the ensuing rubble a few stepping-stones to facilitate navigation of the arts-based inquiry that follows.

Next, I grasp the kite-string and present the larger body of this thesis, the liminal phase. Here, I use multi-vocal, multi-layered language, images, materials, situations, space and time (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Waller & Sibbett, 2008) to ‘create and critique’ (Sullivan, 2006) within the interstitial and vulnerable spaces opened by the quakes. I explore my quake experiences through the lenses of liminality, soul, the characteristics of liminal beings, playfulness, power/powerlessness and communitas.

Finally, referencing the kite, I attempt reincorporation by revisiting my research intention and creating an overview. I conclude to my distress that, had I been able to identify, secure and absorb the appropriate literature during the quakes, I would have arrived at this place a lot faster and with fewer bumps. I also simultaneously conclude to my delight that – via personal
experience of wounding, healing and hands-on implementation of therapy for others’ suffering – I stumbled my way to several notions congruent with current intersubjective and embodied arts- and trauma-therapy. Thus, while the seven core findings I have distilled are but modifications of already expressed knowledge, I have lived them in my bones and they come from a deep place of personal engagement.

...the thread within this section...

Within Phase 1: Separation I offer the following preparatory discussions:

- **one sens/e of direction** – many wonderings presents my research intent and questions;
- **one town** – many traumas situates my quake-work and this research within a specific context;
- **one ritualised presentation** – many time-zones outlines key choices I made regarding structure;
- **one study** – many methods, creations and discoveries describes key features of my research methodology; and
- **one life** – many stories and voices introduces my use of multi-voicing.

These explorations feature my ‘imagical animangels’ and my dead mother – visible over the page and detailed more fully later. I mention these research constructs now because their voices run throughout this section as I quote writing that emerged during my creative research processes. These cartoon-like characters are ‘imagical’ as they demonstrate my playful arts therapeutic embrace of the mystery and magic of imagination and imagery. They are ‘animangels’ as they come into being through combining McNiff’s (2004) practice of treating images-as-angels with a frisky challenge to metaxu – the idea that humans reside, like my kite-string, in-between the animals and angels. My conversations with my dead mother extend a practice I began many years ago that involves using writing to continue our relationship after her death. Each creative writing vignette references the date and the entity I engaged with while writing.
Figure 7. ‘My animangels and our research journey’ (Green, May 2015)
one sens/e of direction – many wonderings

research intentions, questions and rationale

As the Canterbury earthquakes quakes set in I felt compelled to offer my skills as beginning therapist … yet I fumbled with my own fragmentation and lack of focus, stretched taut between my need for self-care and my desire to help others. I stepped in nervously, gradually moving from group work to detailed in-depth arts psychotherapy with children and adults from all walks of life – while simultaneously grappling with various challenges. Like my clients, I was struggling because of the quakes – and akin to many, these circumstances awoke earlier woundedness in me. I was working predominantly in a small town of which I am a resident. I was the only registered arts therapist in Christchurch and being supervised by a child psychologist† rather than another arts therapist. And, I went into this complex situation as beginning therapist without a coherent trauma-recovery model.

I write these obstacles boldly in black-and-white, and wonder again why I didn’t simply fold my hands and allow others to provide therapy…

And yet, this question answers itself: Who were these ‘others’? Yes, there were encouraging words and acts from afar, and some generous souls even travelled briefly to Christchurch to run sessions‡.

But our need was too great and timeframe too extended.

And so, within these ongoing extenuating circumstances, we locals looked after each other.

The saying attributed to Arthur Ashe encapsulates our response:

We started where we were, used what we had, and did what we could.

† The extraordinary Tony White, to whom I am eternally grateful.
‡ Thank you Jean Parkinson, Amanda Levey, Annetta Mallon, Adrian Lania and Christina Virago.
Those with water left filled bottles on the sidewalk, those with food fed those who were hungry, the fit and strong righted fallen furniture and shored up teetering chimneys and cleared away liquefaction for the frail and unable, those with space offered bed and board to those with uninhabitable homes.

And I offered what I could: Some understanding of suffering gleaned from study, personal experience and a history of working with people in distress; arts materials donated by friends and colleagues§; and newly developed abilities to create a space in which people could express and transform themselves through art.

(Magpie-musings, August 2014)

**my guiding intention**

My central intention in this inquiry is to make useful sens/e of these paradoxical experiences as beginning arts therapist during the Canterbury earthquakes from 2010 to 2014. Put simply, I wanted to understand what I did in response to the quakes and identify some things that may be useful to others in similar situations.

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§ Thank you Michele Whitecliffe, Jean Parkinson and Nanette Lelaʻulu.
A more nuanced version of this central intention arrives when I embrace the multiple meanings nested within the term ‘sense’. Teasing these out helped guide my inquiry and enriched how I answered my central research question. I thus aimed to better know my quake-experiences through applying sens/e as:

- knowledge and meaning-making;
- using the five physical senses to know things more fully in embodied ways;
- befriending the implicit felt-sense (Gendlin, 1997b; Rappaport, 2008);
- evoking the sixth soul-sense; and,
- orientating, after the French sens for direction, thus embracing therapy as creating ‘life-forward direction’ (Levine, 2009; Rappaport, 2008).

This inquiry began as I begin most therapeutic journeys. I had a general sense of direction, trust in using the arts to bring knowledge into being, and openness to where this may lead. This focus on the journey rather than the destination (Denzin, 2009) invited me to embrace human inquiry as “complex, generative, curious, conflicted, nuanced, dark, particular, transitory, changeable, enduring, and hopeful as is a single human life” (Neilsen, 2008, p. xvi) – symbolised by how the sinking-sand in this sandtray of my research journey makes every step challenging.

![Figure 10. ‘My research journey’ (Green, April 2013)](image)

While this sens/e-making orientation evocatively reflects how I meandered through a maze during the quakes, within this research it threatened to lose me in a welter of data. I thus borrowed three focal areas from a/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005) and, plaiting these together like my symbolic kite-string, formed a lifeline through this labyrinth so I may traverse back and offer others useful insights into my grapples with the quake-minotaur.
This life-string comprised the following questions:

- **As artist**, I wondered: What art-processes/products will emerge as I use active imagination (McNiff, 2004) and mindfulness/focusing (Rappaport, 2008, 2014a) to open conversations with my quake-experiences and select texts? How would these express the creation of who I perceived I was, who I currently am, and who I am becoming as artist and arts therapist?

- **As researcher**, I wondered: What will happen if I follow McNiff’s (1998) suggestion that “the process of research should correspond as closely as possible to the experience of therapy” (p. 170) and use my preferred arts therapeutic processes as ABR?

- **As therapist****, I wondered: What new and old-but-re-imagined practices useful to other applied arts practitioners engaging with the impact of natural disaster and/or human suffering were birthed during my quake-arts therapy?

** In a/r/tography, the ‘t’ stands for ‘teacher’. Irwin (personal communication, October 2013) approved my use of ‘therapist’ to personalise this methodology.
one town – many traumas

**lyttelton**

Local poet Brown (personal communication, October, 2014) paints a word-portrait of my hometown (population approximately 2500), the epicentre of both the most destructive quake and this research:

Sunny day and springtime breaking out that easterly shit of a wind, got the Lyttelton shine on nonetheless, rusty seabird sailing town, time between the tides to wander words and walk the hillsides, take the long way, down in port a mighty ship loads logs like ‘pick up sticks’, a crew of Ukraine fishermen skype back home from the hotspot by the library… meanwhile four coppers drink coffee down at Samos, ‘you’ ll never take me alive’ I joke ha ha, I’ ll have a flat white thanks, now I need a cigarette— sit outside and read the weather, equinox time of year is fickle, light up into the wind and receive all the benefits of fire, burn my fingers on the flame, hold them there a little longer than I should, some like it hot, some like it hotter…

**the quakes**

At 4.35am, on 4 September 2010, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake ripped through Canterbury. Viewed as a miracle quake, this tremor did substantial damage but killed no-one. On 22 February 2011, at 12.51pm a magnitude 6.3 aftershock struck. This time the city, only 10km from the shallow quake epicentre near Lyttelton, was badly shaken. One hundred and eighty-five people lost their lives, almost 7000 suffered injuries – at least 280 were treated for major trauma at Christchurch Hospital. Massive damage was done to buildings, roads, the infrastructure and surrounding hills. A swarm of large aftershocks followed. On 13 June 2011 a 6.4 aftershock struck and another rated 6 on 23 December 2011 causing further damage and upset. Between September 2010 and February 2014 – the three-and-a-half year period explored in this research – approximately 1330+ detectable aftershocks (400+ measuring magnitude 4+) have shaken the city, 1300+ public buildings and 7000+ residential homes have either already been or need to be demolished, and economists have estimated it will cost over $40 billion and will take New Zealand between 50 to 100 years to recover (McSaveney, 2014).
my quake-arts therapy

Following the devastating February quake, Lyttelton was cut-off by the closure of the Port Hills tunnel and rock-fall on the passes. We were isolated, afraid and without water and electricity. A gaggle of locals began sewing fabric hearts seated on the pavement in the main street. I joined them and inadvertently began work as quake-arts therapist by providing what I call ‘guerrilla therapy’ – I opened conversations during which people talked through their stress and distress, and gently helped them understand that the plethora of reactions we were experiencing were normal responses.

During this time the CHART†† ANZATA‡‡ Arts Therapy Initiative was established. This Facebook group became a lifeline offering me support from arts therapists around the world. This group also lead to several acts of physical assistance – arts materials were donated, postcards and otadama (Japanese beanbags) created and sent for me to share with others, and two Australian therapists offered to come and help. I struggled to take up these offers of hands-on-assistance – funding was scarce and accommodation and work-venues even more so. To address this, Michael Herman and I created the eARThquake therapy initiative, but fundraising while working as a full-time, self-funded arts therapist living in a broken home and city proved tricky. The organisations we approached were already overwhelmed and did not have the resources to interact with a new modality. Most of our small kitty was thus acquired by running the local Saturday-morning Project Lyttelton Garage Sale.

†† Communities Healing through Art – based in the USA.
‡‡ Australia and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association.
When schools began reopening in late March 2011, I facilitated My Favourite Place workshops with class groups in the two Lyttelton intermediate schools and the younger classes at Redcliffs and Governors Bay schools – reaching over 300 five to 12 year-olds. In the workshops children used a combination of movement, drama, sensory-connection, simple focusing (Rappaport, 2008) and visual arts to each create an artwork of his/her favourite place.

Within weeks of our February quake, Japan experienced a massive tremor and tsunami. In response Michael and I initiated We are not Alone with Lyttelton West School. Postcards I received from an Italian school were given to pupils who responded with play-it-forward cards that we sent to children in Japan.

Figure 14. ‘My Favourite Place’ (ANZJAT, 2012)

Figures 15 & 16. ‘We are not alone’ (Herman, July 2011)
In July 2011, Lyttelton theatre-director Michael Friend and I collaborated to create *Tremor* with the Lyttelton West pupils. This play was performed for the community among the rubble, weeds and puddles remaining after a key landmark in our main street was demolished.

I conducted arts therapy workshops and presentations with several groups including the Salvation Army, Women’s Centre, Refugee Support, Beacon House, Ronald McDonald House, Canteen, the medical students enrolled in the General Practitioner (GPs) and Public Health Administrator programmes, various GP practices, Christchurch Anxiety Support, Presbyterian Support, the Familial Trust, and the New Zealand Association of Counsellors. I was particularly honoured to run a workshop with the staff of Relationships Aotearoa who had been in the CTV building when it collapsed taking 115 lives.

In July 2011, when I lost my rooms both at the Stables Health Centre (Lyttelton) and the Christchurch Hospital because these buildings were deemed unsafe, I established a studio in my uninsulated garden shed and worked there until 2015.
Figures 17 & 18. My studio (Green, December 2012)
Each time I facilitated one-off group-sessions, I offered ongoing individual therapy for those requiring further care. Several Lyttelton families accepted my offer using funds from the Lions Charitable Trust, I received funded referrals from the Salvation Army, Canteen and via several GPs, and I saw clients for free or raised funds to cover costs through the Saturday Garage Sale. I also accepted a year-long contract with the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) to work with earthquake-affected children. During the 42-month period informing this research, I worked with 40 children (five to 18 years-old) and 30 adults, running on average five to seven hour-long sessions per day, five days a week.

Fear and stress directly resulting from the earthquakes was the sole reason for therapy in only five child-clients. For all other adult- and child-clients, the quakes re-energised and/or exacerbated earlier and/or concurrent non-earthquake-related issues. These included: Divorce; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; obsessive compulsive disorder; childhood abuse; spousal abuse; dyspraxia; anxiety; childhood neglect; illness in the family; death and loss; bullying; epilepsy; depression; chronic pain; autism; deafness; Down’s syndrome; bi-polar; addiction; alcoholism; rumination syndrome; post-traumatic stress disorder; abortion; adoption; sexuality; anger; rape; borderline personality disorder; cancer; and blackouts.
one ritualised presentation – many time-zones

research structure

a liminal structure

Imagine walking into a room. The door’s open – you spy many open doors leading off in multiple directions. Within this room, you find yourself surrounded by a spider-web of interconnected kite-strings – made of wool, cotton, ribbon, barbed-wire, lace, fishing-gut ... At the connecting points of these threads hang small sculptures, bells, paintings, charms, photographs, chimes, poems, doodles, snippets of conversation, mirrors, jars of sky, pages from text books with sections highlighted ... there are textures and smells and sounds and tastes and sights for you to take in. As you wander about this liminal space interacting with these creations you notice how you’re always aware of not only what you’re currently exploring, but also all the other interlaced-artefacts suspended above, before, behind and below you. And your movement, your touch and breath, stirs the whole gestalt-net and this dream-catcher cradle shifts and responds bringing each creation into new relationships with the others.

(Magpie-musings, October 2015)

This is how, in my imaginings, I present this research. In reality, my lens pans back from this tactile, all-at-once, three-dimensional embodiment of my liminal quake-experiences to use the larger and more manageable container of ritual.

a ritual structure

Visually symbolised by my kite-string, Turner’s (1970) central liminal stage of ritual acts as my generative linking metaphor. Ritual resonates with my therapy and research practices which also involve journeying through uncertainty using embodied symbols to facilitate new knowledge and transformation (Waller & Sibbett, 2008). This document thus takes its primary structuring from ritual. Phase 1: Separation shakes up the everyday before providing preparatory points of orientation. In Phase 2: Liminality, key features of liminality – drawn from Turner (1970) and Sibbett (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) – provoke investigation of my quake-arts therapy practice. Phase 3: Reincorporation concludes this study, reconnects with the everyday, and invites intersubjective creative sens/e-making.

many time-zones

Liminality’s porous boundaries scramble the linear progression of time (Turner, 2004) – encouraging my iterative and reflexive research process to draw on several time-zones. This creative critique of my earthquake period reaches back into my foundational pre-quake past and explores what contributed to the sense-of-self I carried into my earthquake period. My experiences during the quake-period are further layered by the dual lenses of what-I-knew-then and what-I-know-now (as a result of this research). During the quakes my status as novice arts therapist and quake survivor, several old-school (mis)understandings about trauma, and limited access within a broken city to current trauma and arts
therapy texts all limited what I knew. My emergent present thus arises from this PhD research process which included texts, hands-on experiences, and creative processes I did not have access to during my earthquake period but have subsequently discovered/created. Through contemplating my emergent present, I discovered and constructed various concepts that catch up with and extend my hands-on practice. My hope is these nascent creative-constructs are transferrable and thus useful to other arts-based practitioners working within comparable circumstances. These do, however, come with a word of caution. To borrow Leggo’s (2008) words: “in my writing I can express a wisdom that is not necessarily the wisdom I am living successfully at all” (p. 12). I write trusting that, by journeying well in art and words, I will teach myself to journey well in the world and therefore bring about an imagined future. Thus, while what I express (sometimes with sweaty-palmed excitement) has grown from the fecund soil of my lived experiences, it sometimes branches beyond to bear imagined future-fruit.

**many strings and zephyrs**

I use my kite-string metaphor throughout to thread thoughts, themes, sections and chapters together. This string becomes many strings as I tease-out and re-braid seven core themes that link my quake-destruction-rubble and arts-creation-kite. One new strand arrives in each section to join the other themes in bold in the section summary. These themes represent my core findings and, rather than startlingly new, these are fresh perspectives on, or uses of, known ideas. Supporting these core-theme kite-strings are several secondary themes or what I call ‘zephyrs’. They are known concepts and practices within arts therapy that emerge as significant within my quake-work. And like sustaining zephyr-thermals, these established ideas support my newer, emergent core themes.
one study – many methods, creations & discoveries

research methodologies

As my practice of arts therapy is sens/e-based, multifaceted, paradoxical and frequently open-ended, I required a research approach that honoured this. I thus embraced ABR and, within this methodological frame, co-opted ideas from autoethnography and a/r/tography. These all privilege experientially kinaesthetic means of gathering and analysing data – embodying my life-long preference for visceral, lived, trial-and-error ways of coming-to-know, best demonstrated if I recount a tale from my South African childhood.

This story involves me as a wee thing – maybe five or six (coinciding with my mother’s first cancer wrangle) – and the vacant plot next to our house.

In this wilderness of weeds, dirt-hummocks and deep mysterious puddles, I adventured – sometimes alone, sometimes with friends, and other times tagging after my older brother. His exploits were grand including bombs concocted from stolen swimming-pool chemicals and wondrous forts with plastic-sheeting roofs and pee-tubes (lengths of pool-hose suited to little boy-willies, but into which it was impossible for me to pee without anointing my feet).

During our African summers, immense morning heat built lofty cumulonimbus clouds in the heavy sky, which, as afternoon dragged in, cracked open with deafening shouts of thunder and torrential hot rain. These storms quickly filled the dusty dips and hollows and the frogs – that creaked and groaned and unhinged like rusty doors through the hot-velvet-evenings – festooned these puddles with slimy eggs. I carefully gathered quantities of this jelly-like tapioca and it bobbed in glass jars on my window ledge ... until one magical day when it began to hatch. I was soon proud adoptive-mother to hundreds of small animated tadpoles, each bearing faintly discernible camouflage patterns in varying shades of black on its back and a tiny coil of labyrinthine viscera in its belly.

I was mesmerised ...
... and I yearned for these little busy creatures to share my bath! I squirmed in delight as I imagined sharing the water with them, their little shiny eyes and budding limbs and whipping tails dancing against my slippery skin. I presented this idea with great excitement to my fragile mother ...

... who quickly banned it.

(I can’t remember if she explained why she crushed my hopes.)

But I wasn’t to be denied. So, surreptitiously locking myself in my parent’s bathroom, I filled the purple bathtub and happily added two large jars of wiggling tadpoles ...

... rapidly transforming these little creatures from live tadpoles into dead tadpoles ...

... inverted, their small grey-white labyrinthine bellies bobbing forlornly on the surface of my bathwater.

For, even though my bath was tepid, frogs and their spawn are deeply sensitive with their wee bodies housed in porous mucus-membranes that offer little protection to environmental changes.

I was horrified. I’d murdered my wee clan. Every last one of them.

I was also ashamed. I’d been told expressly ‘Don’t put the tadpoles in the bath!’ I’d disobeyed and now they were dead. And not only was I disobedient, but I’d displayed my ignorance – something even more shameful for me. I knew as they hit the water and popped up, galvanised for a few frantic thrashing moments, I’d made a mistake and they couldn’t tolerate the heat.

I couldn’t own this direct disobedience and stupidity. Although never harshly punished, I hated being thought less-of. So I breathlessly gathered the limp bodies and began feeding them down the overflow slot of the purple sink in the bathroom vanity. Handfuls of small fishy bodies slid down the pipe below the counter holding my mother’s night-cream and father’s razor. I imagine now catching glimpses of my pale and earnest little face crowned with raggedy self-cut hair as I went about my grim task.

Finally done, I cleaned the bath and told no-one.

I don’t remember if I was asked about the sudden absence of my brood. I imagine providing some imaginative lie.
The story doesn’t end here, however. I wore my secret shame and intellectual humiliation for some time as the shades of the murdered tadpoles returned to haunt me. Soon a dreadful aroma began permeating my parent’s bathroom. Initially oiling around the olfactory edges but disappearing if directly sought, this changed as the summer heat amassed and the countless small bodies wedged one-upon-another down the overflow-pipe began to putrefy. My parents, faces contracted, pumped plungers up and down over the sink plughole while I strenuously avoided the bathroom.

Eventually the stench diminished and the ugly purple bathroom was reclaimed by my parents as the tadpole-corpses lost their tenuous grip on the sides of the outlet-pipe and their small half-fish/half-frog skeletons sunk down into the murky depths of the septic tank.

*(Playtime with my Wild-Child, February 2014)*

Alongside foreshadowing and symbolising the complex and potentially wayward kinaesthetic arts-based ways of knowing I wrangled with in this study, this tale focuses on the amphibious creature that was a compelling symbol for several quake-clients. Its fragile skin, sensitivity to environmental factors, transformation from egg to tadpole to frog, and its fairy-tale association with hope, resonated for clients struggling with the internal changes wrought by their quake-altered external circumstances. This sensitivity also affected me as artist/researcher – I knew for this work to be transformatory (Berridge, 2008; McNiff, 1998) and have integrity, I must thin my skin and risk boiling myself.

**many doings**

Before I dive into the many ideas from various methodologies that informed my research, I briefly describe how I applied them. Alongside identifying my general research direction, choosing self-focused ABR as my methodology and articulating my wonderings as artist/researcher/therapist, I began gathering materials. These included:

- An ever-expanding body of texts addressing trauma, trauma therapy, arts therapy, and ABR. Some were texts I encountered during the quakes and thus shaped my quake-therapy, others arrived via this research process. Some are published and others available on the internet; and

- Materials created by me between September 2010 and February 2014. These comprised client session-notes, artwork, diaries and journals, articles and reports, and various creative writing pieces.

I set off into this labyrinth of materials using a rhizomatic process:

- I read the literature and my writings, and viewed the artworks. I documented my responses in two ways: Notes summarising key points; and written emotional responses.

- I generated new materials by:
  - using unstructured creative writing to plumb my memory and describe my experiences during the quakes; and
• periodically, when my attention snagged on emergent feelings, themes and thoughts as I engaged with the gathered or newly-written materials, I stopped and ‘dropped-into’ these. I detail dropping-in below but, in summary: I used a deep inward gaze to befriend the tacit felt-sense evoked by the feeling/theme/thought; and then created and conversed with an artwork. I opened these arts-based investigations further through dialogue with one or more of my research companions – my animangels or dead mother. This led to additional artworks and creative writing vignettes presented here as Musings, Journals, Playtime, Diaries and Conversations. These, in turn, opened new lines of inquiry which led to more texts and art-making.

The visual and written creations presented here thus came about in several ways. I curated pieces made prior to this research. During the research, I engaged in free-form creation, creative sessions using dropping-in, and more cognitively driven art-as-planning processes.

Part-way through I began to lose my guiding thread within this maze of material I was exploring and creating. I started developing mind-maps using writing, drawing and art-making to articulate themes, explore connections and find structure. Along with the dominant theme of in-between, secondary themes of fracturing/multiplicity, relationship and playfulness jostled for attention amidst a confusing complexity of 18 other themes!

My discovery of Levine’s (2009) explorations of trauma and art therapy gave the themes of fracturing/multiplicity, relationship and playfulness a sense of place. And in-between-ness found breath in Sibbett’s (2004) use of liminality as central metaphor for her research into cancer and art therapy. Much of what I was trying to express resonated with several elements of Turner (1969) and Sibbett’s (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) liminality and, using these, I began the iterative process of re/interpreting, organising, editing, pruning, culling, cauterising and re-editing my excessive wealth of material.

§§ Thanks Bettina Evans.
many thoughts

I now describe core ideas that guided this meandering process (and theorise my innate preference for the hands-on visceral coming-to-know of the earlier tadpole-tale). Under a broad ABR-umbrella, I magpied and interlaced aspects of autoethnographic and a/r/tographic research with ideas drawn from arts therapy to produce this layered account (Ronai, 1995).

arts-based research

My conceptions of ABR are derived primarily from my profession of arts therapy, drawing on McNiff (1998, 2013), Chilton (2013), and Manders and Chilton (2013). I did, however, broaden my understanding by consulting theorists developing ABR in other disciplines including communications, sociology, applied theatre, education and health. This research is thus grounded in the following ideas.

ABR is simultaneously a practice, process and product that incorporates a broad continuum of research practices from many traditions. As an ‘aesthetic way of knowing’ (Greenwood, 2012), ABR “champions the idea that knowledge of the world cannot and should not be reduced to words and numbers alone” (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015, p. 23). It thus involves the systematic use of visual, performing and/or literary artistic practices in data collection, analysis, and/or presentation of research findings (Manders & Chilton, 2013; McNiff, 1998, 2013).

ABR seeks to engage researcher/s and audience through participative and experiential methods, and often features provocative use of creative and critical research acts. These complex forms of imagination and intellect offer intersubjective interpretations with creative openness. This openness aims to provoke manifold useful meanings that emerge through the metaphors/symbols found in multi-sensorial art making/viewing experiences (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis & Grauer, 2006; Sullivan, 2006).

ABR thus seeks to make the taken-for-granted everyday world visible and lead from the personal to the universal (Denzin, 2013b). To achieve this, Eisner (2004) twins connoisseurship and criticism: Connoisseurs come to deeply-know and recognise subtle but significant differences, while critics can render this knowledge in accessible language, enabling “others to ‘re-see’ the work, the performance, or the object at hand” (p. 198). Yet, as this making-visible and rendering occurs through interpretive practices, complexity of translation becomes significant within ABR (Manders & Chilton, 2013). Central to analysis and dissemination, interpretation involves converting meaning from multiplicit, meta-verbal, imaginal/aesthetic expression into linear verbal/written language. All translation is, however, an imperfect process making the validity of particular findings situated and partial. Ambiguities, diverging connections and unresolved tensions are reminders that facts are “only deliberately spotlit items in the rich and complex web of human knowing” (Greenwood, 2012, p. 18).

Manders and Chilton (2013), McNiff (1998) and Levine (2009) recommend using other arts-forms within this translation/interpretation as ‘bridges’ to synthesise knowledge within this complex web. This “both show and tell” approach (Vaughan, 2009, p. 15) invokes Sullivan’s (2006) process of not ‘solving’ a problem, but ‘surrounding it’. This acknowledges that research questions may not yield definite single answers, but rather, through collections of ideas and images, may suggest possibilities for further engagement. As Denzin (2013b) says: “We seek a new paradigm, one which doubles back on its self and wanders in spaces that have not yet been named” (p. 354).
Chilton (2013) applies Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of flow to ABR, exploring how this psychological state of optimal engagement activates both explicit and implicit information systems to process and integrate stimuli. As implicit, experience-based information is non-verbal and unavailable to conscious awareness, it must be discovered through active processes such as art-making. Artistic behaviour accesses information retained in the brain/body which cannot be made conscious any other way (Chilton, 2013). A similar emphasis can be found in current trauma theory and arts therapy. Van der Kolk (2014) believes overwhelming traumatic experiences are retained within the implicit information system and thus require embodied therapies. Arts therapy plumbs this tacit information using artistic behaviour and arts therapists who use ABR employ artistic knowledge, not only as therapy, but as methodological tools for arts therapy research (McNiff, 1998).

ABR is transformative – both for those involved and of the knowledge generated (Sullivan, 2006). In both my research and quake-therapy processes, I embraced this transformation optimistically engaging ‘critical hope’ as I aimed for life-enhancing outcomes (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015). Transformation through ABR happens when the researcher becomes active in her own biography through messy, performative, poetic, and reflexive research processes (Ellis, Bochner & Holman Jones 2004). This is exemplified in Denzin’s (2009) mystery, a simultaneous process of personal mythology and narrative, public story and performance, in which quotations, documents and texts, placed side-by-side, produce a de-centred, multi-voiced text with voices/speakers conversing to-and-fro. (Multi-voicing is so central to this research I dedicate a separate section to it below: one life – many stories and voices.)

Within this ABR frame, my research practice interwove aspects of autoethnographic and a/r/tographic research with arts therapy. This provided a poietic-praxis of reflexive ways to gather, generate and analyse information using creative art-making and writing, echoing the principles and philosophies underscoring my therapeutic practice (McNiff, 1998). Poietic-praxis is shorthand for my repeated ‘create and critique’ (Sullivan, 2006) cycles that merge the doing-and-thinking of praxis with the aesthetic creativity of poiesis (Levine, 2009).

**autoethnography**

Autoethnography is the “practice of attempting to discover the culture of self, or of others through self” (Ricci, 2003, p. 593). Autoethnography resonates with arts therapy and may “allow us to find our own voices rather than remain reliant on other disciplines for our professional legitimisation” (Gray, 2011, p. 67). Below, I explore several features of autoethnography that informed this research: Its capacity to embody fragmentation; the centrality of self-reflection; embrace of self-focused study as transformative; use of multiple voices; and writing as performative and fiction-as-research.

I chose autoethnography because, at a utilitarian level, it allowed me to embark upon a subjective yet systematic and reflexive self-focused study that enabled discovery and facilitated a personally transformative process, while encouraging me to produce a scholarly account (Duncan, 2004; Elizabeth, 2008). At a more philosophical level, a sense of emotional, spiritual and ontological fracturing is a core feature of trauma response (Levine, 2009; McGrath, 2001) and autoethnography is ideally situated to voice these multifaceted, non-coherent, subjective and paradoxical elements of experiencing swarms of earthquakes. Autoethnography challenges the epistemological position of traditional/positivist research by relying on a postmodern view of truth and reality as local, shifting,
uncertain and co-constructed. This enabled me to write in a ‘prismatic’ style from “multiple vantage points” opening new spaces and vanishing others (Davies, 2000, p. 167). Thus, mirroring Noy (2003), I hope this resultant performative-presentation evokes a felt-sense (Rappaport, 2008) of my overwhelmed, fractured-self as I strove to make sense of my quake-shaken therapeutic practice and persona by ‘drilling down’ to focus on tacit “knowing-in-action” (Duncan, 2004, p. 31).

While autoethnography may be presented as personal narrative, it does more than story-tell. The challenge in moving from autobiography into autoethnography lies in mastering self-reflection (Duncan, 2004). This work embodies my commitment to self-reflexive ways of knowing and writing (Maguire, 2006). I simultaneously explored my use of arts therapy within a natural disaster context and harnessed “the constitutive power of discourse” to write myself as therapist (Davies, 2000, p. 14). Through a poststructural lens, language “is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual’s subjectivity” in socially specific ways (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). Writing personal stories paves the way for the basic element of human agency: self-reflexivity (Elizabeth, 2008). This research invited me to heed Davies et al (2004) and become critically conscious of the discourses that held me in place during my quake-work, to simultaneously see and question their effects. This self-reflexivity was not easy – calling to mind my kite-in-the-rubble metaphor – asking me as researcher to be concurrently inside and outside, to believe and question, be emotional and rational – a process mirroring my work as therapist and assisted here by conversations with my animangels and mother.

While this self-reflexive ‘god-trick’ with its ‘stammering knowing’ was troubling (Tamas, 2009), it enabled me to re-negotiate and transform my biographical narrative (Giddens, 1991). This mirrors processes also at the centre of therapy (McLeod, 1997) as mastering reflexivity in trauma healing creates the opportunity for distancing, to enable the reverberations of trauma impact to echo a little further away. As researcher I was the situation being studied and thus engaged analysis as poietic-praxis, action-research, “knowing-in-action” (Duncan, 2004, p. 33) to establish a dialogic notion-of-self that created change directly within myself (Maguire, 2006). Following Richardson (2013), who expressly uses autoethnographic writing as personal therapy, my writing gave me “the opportunity to tell [my] story – over and over again... to alter it, delete it, over and over again, altering [my] sense of self, because [I am] reading about a newly emergent self” (p. 25). In using narration, I acknowledge discourse as both creating and constraining me, and this realisation enabled me to move beyond the conditions of my own subjection (Davies, 2000, p. 11). Autoethnography in this study thus served as a therapeutic resource and textual location for reauthoring myself (Maguire, 2006) – a means to understand and heal myself (Gaitán, 2000).

Autoethnography invited me to engage in fractured storying-of-self from multiple viewpoints. Rather embracing “an age-old discursive habit to create one author, who supposedly gave birth to the words on the page” (Davis, 2000, p. 7), I depart from traditional academic formats by embracing multiplicit voices and theoretical stances. This authoring-of-self into research text echoes my kite-in-the-rubble symbol by both blurring boundaries and weaving multiple linking-strings between object and subject, other and self, product and process, external and internal. This multiplicity, which takes many forms and serves diverse functions (Gaitán, 2000), offers answers to a key challenge often directed at autoethnography. Use-of-self as the sole data-source has been criticised as self-indulgent,
introspective and lacking in rigor (Duncan, 2004; Ricci, 2003). Hufford (1995) refers to the ‘egocentric predicament’ of autoethnography while Coffey (1999) expresses concerns about the production of solipsistic soap-operas about me, myself and I. In answer, I point to my use of multiple data sources and interpretive-practices ensuring incorporation of various perspectives (Duncan, 2004). This multi-voicing, fundamental in establishing reliability and validity within autoethnographic case studies, influenced the plethora of materials I gathered and generated during the study. It shaped my creation of, and interactions with, my animangels and dead mother. And it resonated with my multimodal arts therapy practice – used here as research-tool and through which quake-clients and I explored personal data using various arts media and processes. All of these materials and practices added different dimensions to discovery and sens/e-making in this inquiry.

Key to unravelling my use of autoethnography is understanding writing as performative within research. In this inquiry, my writing twinned the poststructural performative nature of autoethnographic writing with aspects of fiction-based research (Leavy, 2013). Central to autoethnography is self-reflexive awareness of the fluid, contradictive and explosive power of discourse as a major constitutive force (Davies, 2000). Rather than reflect social reality, language – viewed through a poststructural lens – helps create it (Weedon, 1987). Alongside conveying and reflecting upon one’s identity, the postmodern narrative “evokes, performs and constitutes it in the event of narration” (Noy, 2003). Writing is ‘a becoming’, a way to transform and change ourselves (Noy, 2003), shifting from a recording method to a method of inquiry (Elizabeth, 2008) by becoming ‘painterly’ and ‘telling’ as much as it ‘discovers’ (Ricci, 2003). This “allows the reader (and the writer) to experience something new – to feel, to learn, to discover, to co-create” (Ricci, 2003, p. 594).

Language within my research thus operated productively versus mietically (Elizabeth, 2008) as the process of writing placed my past-selves, present-selves, and various animated figments-of-self in dialogue with each other. In addition to my own stories, when I started plumbing the richly-layered data within my quake-client session-notes, I realised I required ways to explore and express these tales without compromising confidentiality. I began crafting creative-writing vignettes that blended fact and fiction using my arts therapy process of dropping-in. I subsequently discovered Leavy’s (2013) elaborations on this practice of fiction-based research. She believes slippage between fact and fiction can produce meaningful, resonant, evocative and emotional texts offering innumerable possibilities. Fiction grants access via imagination to what is otherwise inaccessible – the complexity of lived-experience and, as fiction-based research, this invites us to experience empathy and self-reflection, and thus re-examine the worlds we live in.
a/r/tography

Described as research that listens and breathes (Springgay et al., 2005), a/r/tography originated within educational research as a way for art teachers to open new knowing through simultaneously playing the roles of artist/researcher/teacher (a/r/t). In juxtaposing art-creation and writing, a/r/tography offered me a marriage between art-making and creative-writing for personal growth and professional research. This approach resonated deeply with my practice of arts therapy as it invited me as artist/researcher/therapist to explore my own practice in new, challenging and dynamic ways, fulfilling McNiff’s (1998) suggestion that research and therapeutic processes should correspond as closely as possible. Here I outline features of a/r/tography that influenced this research: Interlinked reflection and action; postmodern and poststructural constructivism; relationality; interpretations as transitional; an emphasis on life-stories; renderings rather than methods; and alternative criteria for evaluation.

A/r/tography is an embodied performative methodology that creates new knowledge through the juxtaposed actions of art-making and writing. It inspired my term ‘poietic-praxis’ and is a ‘groping’, a provocative and poetically enacted living-inquiry involving a praxis of active doing and meaning making (Springgay et al., 2005). The active doing of art-making creates openings for the imagination, challenging the predictable by embracing tangents, interruptions and unsettling elements. Traditional viewpoints are dislodged and multiple meanings evoked (Irwin et al., 2008) – resonating with the ‘one–many’ theme running through this chapter.

A/r/tography is informed by postmodern thinking, drawing on feminist, post-structural, hermeneutic and other postmodern stances that view research as both re/discovering and bringing new knowledge into being. In creating a new arts-inclusive methodology in its own right, a/r/tographers put aside traditional research criteria that seek out patterns through congruence and rather embraced the creation of knowledge as producing difference (Springgay et al., 2005). This encouraged me to unchain this research from a modernist moral imperative to prove universal truths, speak authoritatively for my profession, or justify my practice (McNiff, 1998). Using a/r/tography I construed knowledge as various, multiple, contradictory, rhizomatic, situated and shifting as time, perspectives and relationships shift. By beginning from the location of the unique, personal and individual, this notion rejects the authority of grand universal narratives (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008). Within this study, my interactions with my animangels and mother embody this view of knowledge as multiple truths evoked by various discourses and of subjectivity as multiple identities constructed and shaped through language, culture and ideology.

Reflecting these postmodern roots, all is relational in a/r/tography as multiple lenses, voices and media are used to view and speak situations. At its core, a/r/tography is interdisciplinary – Sameshima (2008) uses the concept of ‘parallax’ to open thinking about relations and situations viewed through multiple lenses, media and disciplines. Parallax is the apparent shift of an object against a background due to changes in observer position or perspective – echoing my therapeutic use of Gestalt field theory (Perls, 1973). This stance encouraged me to investigate my own kaleidoscopic subjectivities and situatedness, acknowledging that “articulation of truths and meanings in … the presentation of research is story telling, thus the more stories told, the greater our fullness of understanding” (Sameshima, 2008, p. 52).
A/r/tographers Irwin and Springgay (2008) and Neilson (2008) resonate with therapists Hillman (1983), McNiff (2013), Halprin (2003) and Chilton (2013) in proposing that interpretations are always in a state of becoming and arresting this process of change rejects the spirit of knowing and research. As in my practice of quake-arts therapy, knowledge and theory in a/r/tography are not abstract concepts but emergent, reflexive, generative, interactive, intersubjective and responsive processes. Rather than produce interpretative conclusions through products, criteria and set methods, I embraced a/r/tography as a way to distil, crystallise and invent through process and concepts. These processes and concepts are dynamic and intersubjective locations encouraging the viewer-reader to play an active role in rendering new understandings and meanings (Springgay et al., 2005). While these fluid concepts and the new meanings rendered through them may go so far as to form the basis of theory development – (acknowledging that theory has various meanings – descriptive, explanatory, predictive, propositional...) – a/r/tography radically transforms the idea of theory as an abstract system separate from practice. This invited me to view “theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxi). Theories generated in this liminal in-between are reflective, responsive, relational, in a state of continual reconstruction and thus – like my kite-string dancing in the breeze – intentionally unsettle perception. They offer rich descriptions (and possibly hint at emergent explanations) of a specific situation that, via intersubjective engagement of the reader-viewer, may be transferable to other similar cases.

Leggo (2008) believes “the stories we write and tell about our living experiences will teach us how to live with more creativity, confidence, flexibility, coherence, imagination, and truthfulness” (p. 21). He echoes the process inherent in my quake-arts therapy – a/r/tographic telling of his life stories helps him examine his interdependent personal and professional practices and experiences, opening opportunities to create more ‘life enhancing stories’. By viewing personal-narration as a quest to hold the story in the present in order to understand how better to live now and in the future, he provided a lens through which I could examine my own experiences. In addition, Leggo (2008) is not interested in whistling a single voice and living as if this were the only one available – a notion of essentialised selfhood insufficient for understanding the complexities of identity formation. He juxtaposes autobiographical art and writing to “acknowledge how each of us is composed in the intersections of multiple processes of identity shaping and re-shaping” (p. 17). These multiple intersections come alive in how I invited clients to use the arts’ capacity to express manifold stories and selves simultaneously and how I story-tell about these processes through interactions with my animangels.

Springgay et al., (2005) describe a/r/tography as featuring six interacting renderings. To render means to give, present, perform, become and renderings are not methods but theoretical spaces through which to explore. They are ways a/r/tography comes into being, is performed, gives access to and presents new knowing. Through implementing these renderings during my research, I became aware of how they reverberated with my practice of quake-arts therapy:

- **Contiguity** in a/r/tography refers to ideas lying adjacent to, touching, and existing in each other’s presence (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Contiguity of art/writing and the roles of artist/researcher/therapist create ongoing relativity and not-knowing. This “willingness to allow for discomfort, frayed edges, and holes”, for divergence and interconnection, and nervousness (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 901) echoes my embrace of liminality. Contiguity also suggested I contemplate places
where my inquiry touched and coagulated with published and other textual materials (Irwin & Springgay, 2008).

My quake-arts therapy further resonated with a/r/tographic contiguity through multiple contiguities of the personal/professional roles played by therapist and client and my referencing of psychotherapeutic/psychological theory. My use of multiple arts modalities interwoven with talking also often led clients to create richly contiguous artworks which simultaneously held multivalent and often contradictory concepts and affects.

- **A/r/tography as living inquiry** draws on action-research. Aspects of the intuitive, personal, spiritual, embodied, professional, social, and intellectual are welcomed and opened to perpetual reconfiguration. Knowing, doing and making are integrated and rigor is created through continuous reflexivity and analysis using a praxis of theory, practice and poieses (Springgay et al., 2005). This mirrors the living inquiry involved in my quake-arts therapy: Using mindfulness, the whole of the living-client was invited to be present in the moment and participate in reflexive transformations through creative action.

- **Within a/r/tography metaphor and metonymy**, as key features of the creative arts, invite ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning. Working symbolically brought to my research new ways of viewing and creating knowledge that may have been inaccessible through words alone. Again, this mirrored my therapeutic practice where I viewed metaphors and symbols as guides to unlock the essence of thoughts, feelings and states-of-being. Found every-where and -when as recurring images in art, literature, myth and religion, Pearson (1991) believes archetypal symbols reside as energy within the unconscious psychological life of all peoples. These aspects of symbol and metaphor are the specific change-agents distinguishing creative arts therapies from other models of psychotherapy (Ellis, 2001). Humans’ symbol-making propensity suggests projection of the unconscious into created arts objects – “the gift of an image is that it affords a place to watch your soul” (Hillman, 1983, p. 55). The metaphorical symbol forms a bridge between the internal and external worlds of the artist, may embody both personal and collective resonances, and can extend into the past and future. Building on Jung’s (1978) practice of active imagination, McNiff (2004) developed the concept of ‘images as angels’ to springboard dialogic conversations with symbolic and metaphorical content in artworks – processes that find echoes in the doubling of art and writing in a/r/tography.
• **A/r/tography** is a continuous process of creating and entering porous openings. These openings are not passive holes providing easy and clear passage, rather they are liminal, ambiguous, contradictory, and often resistant knowings. Evident in my grapples with my animangels and dead mother, they are ongoing exchanges that open conversations and relationships, emphasising the in-between. In these interstitial vulnerable spaces, like the space between the rubble and my kite, meanings are interrogated and ruptured and understandings reside in the ‘both and neither’ generated by simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Using the arts in therapy encouraged clients and me to move beyond what is known, to drop through holes into new possibilities and play with and create new ways of being by discovering our unknown parts and making them allies (Rogers, 1999).

• **Reverberations** in a/r/tography are movements, quaking and shaking, the perpetual motion and rattling interplay between the new and customary, expressed and unknown, causing slippages of meaning and shifting new conceptions to the surface (Springgay et al., 2005). Like Levine (2009), in my quake-practice I became one who moved between the margins and the centre, between the rubble and the kite. This enabled both clients and me to experience reverberations as we imagined new emergent possibilities and selves that challenged customary but unhelpful ways of being/doing (Mølbak, 2013).

• In a/r/tography, *excess* is encouraged while control and regulation are eroded as the process vacillates between conservation and destruction. While traditionally associated with the taboo and monstrous, excess turns writing-to-become into a generative agent of change (Springgay et al., 2005). Sameshima (2008) highlights the adjective ‘graphic’ as concerned with vivid detail, calling for research to be presented in provocative forms that move the reader-viewer. Like my quake-arts therapy, my research resonated with a/r/tographic excess by heeding the admonition from various arts therapists (Chilton, 2013; Hillman, 1983; McNiff, 2004, 2013) to linger with the image and avoid hasty interpretations. Moving too quickly into this-means-that leaches juicy multiplicity and transformative power from images.

A/r/tographic processes call for creative forms of evaluation. These should focus on the ability of a/r/tographic research to provide openings for active participation in sense-making and thereby “provide access to, and new insights about, a particular phenomenon” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxi). The conditions for assessment are thus contingent upon, and exist within, the structure itself: A/r/tographic processes determine their own possible measures and in every aspect generate themselves from within. According to Irwin and Springgay (2008), “how the research is assessed (both in terms of validity and impact) is generated during the a/r/tographical process and could be quite different for each a/r/tographical endeavour” (p. xxxii). I thus hope that this endeavour will be evaluated by:

• how it presents an authentic, honest, reflexive, imaginative, evocative, aesthetic and empathetic account of my personal and professional earthquake experiences (Gouzouasis, 2008); and

• its capacity to invite the reader-viewer to participate in making applicable, useful and artistic/research/therapeutic sense of my work as quake-arts therapist.
In practice, autoethnographic a/r/tography encouraged me to use my familiar quake-arts therapy processes to unearth, gather and create as well as amplify, interpret/analyse and re-interpret data through an iterative process of poietic-praxis – mirroring my therapeutic approach with quake-clients. This preferred quake-therapeutic process involved various applications of what I call ‘dropping-in to find what soul is doing’ – demonstrated throughout this study. Spring-boarding from Hillman’s (1983) belief our images reveal what our souls are doing, dropping-in combines core principles and practices from Focusing-Orientated Art Therapy (FOAT) (Rappaport, 2008) with images-as-angels (McNiff, 2004). These practices are explored in detail as this document unfolds, but as a foretaste: Pioneered by Rappaport (2008), FOAT involves a deep, inward gaze to locate and befriend a tacit, pre-verbal felt-sense which is then expressed through art-making; and McNiff (2004) suggests we dialogue with the images we create as if they are angels with important messages to impart. Combined, these created the foundation for the process I call ‘dropping-in’, the hands-on core of my quake-therapy and ABR approach.

As I wrote descriptions of my quake-experiences and read, viewed and wrote about the materials I had gathered, core themes, feelings and thoughts emerged. Using various rounds of poietic-praxis, I dropped-in to gain a deeper sense of these. Dropping-in entails initial present-tense grounding in the physical senses, followed by gentle inward focus to locate the internal resonances of the theme in question (or the artwork created by previously dropping-in to this theme). This internal felt-sense is welcomed, accepted and befriended curiously and without judgment. It is invited to reveal itself fully before being asked to propose a way it may be expressed through art. Once a symbolic representation arrives, it is checked against the original felt-sense for fit. When it resonates, this representation is then externalised through arts-making.

While creating, I engaged in active imagination-based dialogue, treating the artwork as an angelic messenger, usually evoking further creation as the conversation moved to-and-fro between my felt-sense, the artwork and myself as artist/researcher. This creative-dialogue acted as a core part of my research analysis and, alongside further visual art-making, often resulted in snatches of creative writing. Some of these opened conversations between the felt-sense of my quake-work and ideas within texts I was consulting. Other pieces of creative writing took the form of fiction-based research (Leavy, 2013) as I teased out threads from real-life in-session experiences and weaved them together in new ways that afforded me a greater sense of my practice.
The deeper knowing often emerging from these reflexive processes opened what I call the ‘soul-sens/e’ of each focal theme. Greenwood (2012) believes ABR facilitates expression of the significant, but often inexplicable, something-more “that we sometimes call magic” (p. 18) and that I call ‘soul’. This something-more becomes research when magic and meaning-making are brought together: “Magic may be what gives us delight, energy and ongoing provocation, but meaning is something we can unpack, play with, and use” (Greenwood, 2012, p. 18). Levine (2009) believes this form of ‘worthy research’, like therapy, “is a way of ‘soul-making’” (p. 161) that both transforms how we see the other and ourselves. This tempts me to refer to my blend of autoethnographic a/r/tography and arts therapy as soul-based research.

I thus emerge believing in a/r/tographic and autoethnographic ABR, I found exciting and congruent research approaches that, as McNiff (1998) recommends, correspond closely to the experience of therapy. And in arts therapy, ABR finds practical hands-on methods for creating and interpreting the arts.

many creations and discoveries

Like ABR, I tend to find the process often more compelling than the finished product – as Irwin and Springgay (2008) and Neilson (2008) suggest, to arrest the process of becoming is to reject the spirit of knowing. I enact this in three key ways.

I invite intersubjective sense-making by including process-artworks – quickly rendered thoughts and sensations (cited as figures), alongside finished-products – artworks reworked for public presentation.

Secondly, as I leaned into this process-orientation a kaleidoscope of dynamic interpretations and theoretical constructs emerged. I feared reducing these into impoverished homogenous findings masquerading as a new trauma theory/therapy. So, in Phase 2: Liminality, I present a layered (Ronai, 1995) rhizomatic (Deleuze, 1994) experience of my process in which I periodically voice insights that had traction for me at the time of writing. In this way, I sought to understand how I, as one individual coagulated from various unique life experiences, practised arts therapy within my quake context. My hope is these stories I recreate about my living experiences will offer some insights and cautions to others and thus teach us to live with greater creativity, confidence, flexibility, imagination, and truthfulness (Leggo, 2008, p. 21).
My choice to curate a document that, rather than leading to a conclusive destination, voices tentative new learnings, thirdly, reflects the belief that art offers each viewer-reader an individualised subjective experience leading to unique interpretations and meanings (McNiff, 2013; Springgay et al., 2005). By embracing interactive and intersubjective sens/e-making, I also invite my reader-viewer to have embodied insights into my felt-sense as quake-arts therapist. For example, rather than feeling able to actively participate, my supervisor stated he felt, at times, powerless and silenced by my creations. He vicariously experienced how I, as quake-therapist, sometimes could simply bear witness and provide containment when client-artwork and/or stories evoked emotions so deep or travelled places so alien, I could not follow.
Building upon the discussion of my research approach, here I further detail my use of multi-voicing, as this liminal ABR practice is central to understanding my process and this document.

I’m nettling Hillman’s ‘acorn theory’ – his idea that I host a seminal image that I’m living out in my biography. This research, in articulating portions of my biography, called into being several compelling images … some appear as voices speaking to me from the literature, others evoke the presence of those I’ve loved and lost, and within the inner circle are those I call my animangels – symbolic figments of me presented as creative caricatures.

No one of these feels privileged above the others. Each of my figmental-familiars seems deeply necessary if I’m to wholly acknowledge my glorious fragmented self – and of course, these are but a few of the inner menagerie comprising my-self/s … I sense I’ll continue evoking alters as long as I keep looking.

All of which begs the question (for me at least, as I wouldn’t presume to derive universal applicability from my single instance): Is there only one acorn inside, only one seminal seed to which I’m answerable, that if nurtured will grow into a central tree-me?

I seem to be inhabited by a whole ecosystem!

Some of my trees are lofty, others shelter under the limbs of the upper canopy, some are lowly bushes. Air-ferns dangle in the dappled shade and among the roots and leaf-litter I harbour mushrooms, moss and lichen. There’s even space in this ecology for the odd parasitic plant. And all these inhabitants of my inner thicket strongly resist any suggestion they should be integrated to feel whole. Leaves shimmer and shimmy as a shudder runs through me at the image dug-up by this enforced unification:

A forest felled, sawdust thickening the air, a hammer smashing, and finally a small table on which to lay glossy magazines and a coffee cup. Granted, it’s a pretty table, cleverly crafted from various woods shaped and sanded to meld together. But the diversity is tamed – the sighing breeze through high leaves, the mesmeric twist of vines, the throaty scent of leaf-matter and mushrooms, the flit and call of birds dancing in the dappled sunlight – all chain-sawed and wood-polished into distant memory.

But then, of course, maybe the forest is my acorn …

(Magpie-musings, July 2014)
As I trawled through my quake experiences, finding new openings for the story juddering around in me, I discovered, brought into being and interacted with many stories and voices. These included various established theorist-practitioners and creatives, my supervisors, friends and colleagues, my household-pets, my lost ones, my academic and creative selves, and the menagerie of symbolic alters within. To honour this multivocality, like Davies (2000) I wrote from multiple vantage points that opened new spaces and vanished others as I shimmied up and down my metaphoric string between the multiplicit fragmentation of the rubble and the uniting overview of the kite. By inviting order to emerge from this chaos, rather than imposing it from without (Levine, 2009), I sought to craft an intersubjective experience that evokes my fracturing quake-period, mirrors my follow-the-arts therapeutic process and demonstrates how I adventured through this research escapade.

Figure 23. ‘Many voices’ (Green, June 2013)

This research focuses on my lived experiences – many of which include clients and other people. As my quake-work with clients happened prior to this study and was undertaken as therapy and not research, our process of informed consent did not cover my use of their processes for research. It is thus unethical for me to refer directly to, or show, art created by these clients. I do, however, honour their invaluable contribution by fictionalising the creative adventures we shared and, while the resultant stories are not directly factual, they are authentic re-storied versions of real happenings, according with Leavy’s (2013) ideas about fiction-based research. Many other non-clients also criss-cross throughout this text. I have tried to openly acknowledge positive contributions and to offer protection through anonymity when I reference more troubling happenings.
conversing with many published voices

Throughout this research I employ Turner’s ‘incursive nomadism’ (1974) and a/r/tographic contiguity and reverberations (Springgay et al., 2005) to stray beyond disciplinary boundaries and open and re-open conversations between my experiences, diverse thinkers and key theorist-practitioners.

one academic voice, multiple poietic voices

Amongst the many voices within my excessive writing and creating, two distinct personas sang out: one felt singular, academic and analytic; the other multiple, creative and chaotic. The tonal difference between these voices initially felt too jarring. I came, however, to value the disruption that switching between these voices jerks through my work. It feels like one of the ways I attempt Jones’ (in conversation with Leavy, 2014) idea of implanting the predictable with the Trojan Horse of creativity. Juxtaposing these dichotomous ways-of-saying highlights the liminal space I inhabit betwixt-and-between my creative self/s and my academic self. I experience both as equally compelling as I ‘create and critique’ (Sullivan, 2006). My scholarly, critiquing voice sounds constricted and constipated, controlling and cannibalistic in how it devours and diminishes my fluid and limber creative work (P. O’Connor, personal communication, October 2014). And yet this scholarly-self anchors my sometimes fanciful, poietic voices by connecting them into recognised thinking.

My poietic voices include the imagical presences of my lost ones – my dead mother, father, first-husband ō, and cat Sebastian; the furry presences of my pets – cats Malaika and Dexter, dogs Louis and Vinnie; and my gaggle of symbolic animangels.

Emerging from a creative funk to gaze at my freshly-drawn Orphan-image, I delightedly claim: I’ve found my seminal image written into my acorn and to which, à-la Hillman, I’m answerable.

Mmmm, replies my dead mother. She’s silent for a while. This isn’t the first time you’ve experienced this Eureka-moment, she finally says.

I feel a little foolish. She’s right. Previous research adventures have birthed various ‘acorn-images’. First came the Cat – more specifically the photo-image of me holding the cat – that evolved into an arts-based contemplation of my creativity and my hoped-for therapeutic persona. Then came the Crocodile – or again, photo-me holding the crocodile – that arrived to provoke exploration into my creative blocks and contractions against pain. My winged-heart soon fluttered in – the heart as a symbol for my soul,

Figure 24. Me and the crocodile (Unknown, c.1976)
emerging through my art as variously torn, bleeding, barb-wire-wrapped, and hollow; while the wings symbolised my imagination, sometimes magnificent and soaring and other times scorched and tattered. But this heart isn’t only about flight, and so it grew roots, expressing my felt-paradox of yearning to simultaneously belong and feel free. Then, at the outset of this research, arrived my Magpie, cawing to me of my preference for rhizomatic ways of knowing.

And now this.

This image of a small child-of-the-twilight, hiding, alone, afraid but mulish.

(Conversations with my dead mother, May 2014)

When I began this research, I invited my Creative-Cat and Contractive-Crocodile – symbols from previous me-search journeys – to accompany me. They were soon joined by a Magpie. This beady-eyed, hyper-vigilant, black/white manifestation of my eclectic mix-and-match epistemology is a richly layered symbol – initially representing my inquisitive research-mind, it soon evoked the liminal Trickster archetype (Ellis, 1993). True to its Trickster nature, this Mind-Magpie roved far and wide and my research began growing excessive, disparate and chaotic. It challenged my faith that order can emerge from chaos (Levine, 2009; Winnicott, 1977). But then my small child of the in-between, of the spider-light, arrived. She slipped in quietly, on the wings of a familiar always-there feeling that has infused my psyche since I was little, and her presence ignites the intrinsic ordering this study required.

I find myself in a strange yet familiar space and, gifting myself time to befriend this sensation, a word floats into my awareness: Waiting. I am waiting. As I linger with this soul-sense of waiting, I recall and resonate with shades of being paused ...

... of being in a holding space ...

... throughout my life. Perhaps I’m tapping into Rappaport’s ‘wallpaper’ felt-sense coating the inside of my soul. And, yes, as I sit beside this sensation of waiting in a curious, accepting and welcoming manner, it feels old, ever-present, strongly interwoven with my mother’s cancer, my father’s murder, my brother’s paralysis, my first-husband’s suicide, the earthquakes.

And now the waiting rides on the swelling back of deep sadness.

I am waiting to go Home.
Through inscribing these words in black-and-white I give them tangible presence. My throat thickens and the peppery-edges of tears scuff my eyes. I stay with this sensation and ask if it has an image that may expand my knowing. I breathe into what comes, finding myself in a white room, alone, poised on the edge of a small stool. There are no colours as colours don’t matter here. This is after all an in-between space, a waiting room. There are no windows and the light is diffuse with no discernible source. I turn my attention to the waiting-me. I’m young, I wear a white dress and hold myself very still and compact as I perch, hands clasped in my lap and head down, gaze low and unfocused. I am waiting. This space feels timeless.

I let my wondering open to a curiosity about what this little-me is waiting for, what ‘waiting to go Home’ means for her in this moment.

I’m suddenly overwhelmed – flooded with rich colour scent texture sound as the Home this me yearns for explodes into memory. It’s my parents’ home, the home I returned to time-and-again when I needed respite from studies and work. Here I felt safe and loved. It’s where I could give-up, give-in, give-over to just-being. I’m warm under the African sun as I stand below the house and breathe the scent of my mother’s rambling garden – pink bougainvillea and green ivy vying for ownership of the trellises and walls. I mount the stasto-tiled stairs up towards the house and feel heat pulse through my feet. I enter and although my parents are not physically here I feel them in every breath – the house holds their presence as it folds about me welcomingly. The scent of my mother’s roast chicken and sawdust-cookies waft from the cool dark kitchen and these favourite meals let me know I’m expected. The calls of Hadedas and Indian-Mynahs dance on the air, drawing my gaze to the wide blue skies beyond the plate-glass patio-doors. Lazy African afternoon heaviness slides over me and my muscles slow and soften, the contracted holding-space in my belly begins to unwind, and my breath deepens. This is a place I belong.

I miss this place.

I’ve been unable to return to this home since 1996 ...

... and suddenly I’m back in the waiting room, in the white sterility. Vertigo gives way to thick sorrow. I encourage myself to stay with and wonder about these sensations and my life-narratives of which they speak. It comes to me that, while this waiting space initially took shape as I hovered, a frightened and confused child, on the fringes of my mother’s first battle with cancer, it became more fully realised when my parents and first-husband died, and has further deepened during the uncertainty of the quakes. I now know, while a sizeable portion of me – after initial struggles with denial and anger and bargaining – dropped deeply into the footless grief of my losses and crawled across the shards-of-mourning towards acceptance, healing and growth, another part simultaneously refused to accept and engage, and this self has taken herself off into this an-aesthetic waiting space.
Here she stays still, trying not to move or breathe least she scare off the return of her Home. She’s lonely and alone, dislocated, unwilling to interact as this may distract her and she may miss the fleeting moment when the small crack opens between this paused-space and her place-of-belonging, a home-place she believes must be just on the other side of that white wall. She’s certain movement away from this space is giving in; that she’s the torch-song; she’s keeping the faith. She’s an embodiment of my sense of disconnection, dissociation, numbness, of looking-in-from-the-outside.

I feel deep love for her small figure with its straight resolute back, and my wish to gather her into my arms tries to insinuate itself into her airless space … and washing back at me comes a powerful knowing that she can’t tolerate this yet … if ever. Even now she distrusts my gaze, afraid my seeing her may somehow diminish the weight of devotion she’s accrued, this dedication that must eventually tip the scales and open the passage back Home for her.

I’m not allowed too close – so I look in quietly, respectfully. And she grants me one question.

What’s your name? I ask.

I am your Threshold Orphan.

( Diary of the Threshold Orphan, March, 2014 )
This Diary came about when I realised my internal Threshold Orphan was unwilling/unable to participate in this study. Attempts to befriend her via a non-judgmental focusing attitude (Rappaport, 2008), to draw her out using active imagination and images-as-angels (McNiff, 2004), to dance her into conversation via the life/art process (Halprin, 2003) all made her withdraw further. She turned her face and body away, tore off her wings, grew roots, became younger and more skeletal, and surrounded herself with barbed-wire. I was forced to sit outside her sacred/scared/scarred space and wonder. These wonderings are captured in this Diary – writings ruminating about events in my past that may have brought her into being and speculating about how she represents certain aspects of me in the present.

This orphan archetype resonates with Jung’s shadow (1978) and Hillman’s darker side to the soul (1983) representing aspects of self we have rejected, denied and sacrificed. Attempting to protect us from abandonment, hurt or victimisation, these orphaned-alters learn to recognise and avoid situations that may cause harm (Pearson, 1991). The orphan also symbolises over-responsiveness to need in others but not in oneself leading to an inability to ask for help and a tendency to help others in order to rescue oneself (Pearson, 1991).

My Threshold Orphan resonates with, and expands beyond, this archetype. She highlights how immobilisation or freezing during traumatic events can amplify the severity of post-traumatic stress (Levine, 2010) and she embodies my felt-sense of the in-between. When I began this research, my kite-in-the-rubble artwork and my writing/thinking/talking placed this felt-concept of in-between at the core of my inquiry – a nebulous location engendering less, rather than more, structure. My Threshold Orphan’s arrival redirected the many free-flapping tendrils of this quest into an investigation of thresholds and holding spaces. Exploring thresholds introduced me to writings about liminality (Harris, 2009; Haywood, 2012; Levine, 2009; Turner, 1970; Waller & Sibbett, 2008). I delighted in how the characteristic in-betweeness and transformative flux of this central stage of ritual sent out rhizomatic threads to interlace my disparate ideas about ABR, suffering and the human condition, enduring a natural disaster, and my practice of quake-arts therapy.

Spending creative time with my Threshold Orphan enlivened my already-present animangels of Cat, Crocodile, Heart-shaped Soul and Magpie, and invited two further acorn-like (Hillman, 1996) inhabitants of my internal grove to manifest. First came my TeddyBear-Sage as I wondered if the playful but nettlesome Trickster archetype represented by my Magpie had a counterpart. This TeddyBear caricature grew from memories of my beloved grey cat, Sebastian, who was a contemplative and calming presence through many life-storms. This Bear evokes my wisdom, my capacity to hold the space for others in pain.
Following the Bear, came the counterpoint to my Threshold Orphan.

Everyone is partnered bar the Threshold Orphan. Initially this seems appropriate ... she’s an orphan after all. But this feeling is replaced by the sense that her seclusion is relative, that she’s in isolation in-relation-to ... what or whom?

This wondering hovers ever-close for days.

Then, one winter’s evening as dark crystallises and I set-about lighting the fire to counteract the chill seeping through our as-yet-to-be-repaired, earthquake-cracked home, my gaze is drawn upwards. Above the fireplace lives a wee self-portrait I painted in 2010. I crouch on my haunches like a supplicant before this glowing oil of an aquamarine-coloured, straw-haired, snaggle-toothed child-self wearing nothing but a borrowed school tie as loin-cloth, gently holding a soft-belly-up relaxed stripy red cat against a background of deep black, pin-pricked with stars. This is the image that initially articulated my hopes for myself as therapist – to be stripped-bare, alive-to-the-moment, playful and ever-a-beginner, tender, a little bedazzled by the magic and mystery. And now she squints down at me cheekily and suddenly I begin to giggle.

Of course!!

Figure 26. Sebastian and me (Green, October 2009)
There she is and there she’s been all along, playing hide-and-seek during this research journey. My Wild-Child. The oppositional twin to my Threshold Orphan. She’s the child who runs and leaps and growls like a tiger, who builds forts and keeps frogs in jars on the sunny window ledge, who stamps in puddles, who drags her small plastic garden-chair into the deep green-heart of the flowering honeysuckle to be within the syrupy scent and drowsy hum of the African summer watching close-up as the ants go about their business, who rolls about deep in the delicious crisp pellucid swimming pool beneath the heat-warped blue sky, who hangs by her knees and feels blood pound in her temples, who tells fibs to keep out of trouble (think tadpole-massacre here), who shinnies up doorframes and is always sporting bruises and scrapes, who surreptitiously kisses cats, who melodramatically gags when presented with brussel-sprouts, who hugs and laughs and lives out loud.

(Playtime with my Wild-Child, July 2014)

This gaggle of internal figments interact around my Circle-of-Self, a form of internal Arthurian Round Table which invites them to speak and be heard equally – because within this inquiry, each animangel brings to light key ideas. These unfold throughout this presentation, but in summary:

While my Threshold Orphan embodies many traits, she quintessentially symbolises my own enduring liminality, speaking of being stuck and held in double-bind – an enduring situation in which endurance is key to survival. Her avoidance is challenged by my Wild-Child, a manifestation of my healing, my ‘life-forward’ energy (Rappaport, 2008) and limber ability to say ‘Yes!’ to life despite my wounding (Levine, 2009). This Threshold Orphan/Wild-Child dyad
expresses my embodiment of the wounded/healer archetype, while also multi-voicing features of the earthquake context. This, for many Cantabrians, has been and continues to be one of enduring liminality requiring a paradoxical blend of the capacity to wait and the ability to take action.

We were thrust into this paradoxical context without preparation or a traditional ceremony master to guide us. In assuming the role of therapist, I attempted to address this lack of guidance. Yet, as I too was subject to our situation of enduring liminality, I became a neophyte/shaman – personally experiencing the uncertainty while guiding others. This evoked within me the liminal archetypal dyad of Trickster/Sage embodied in my Magpie and TeddyBear anime who make visible the playful and the mindful within my work as quake-arts therapist of enduring liminality.

I experienced this enduring liminality as the felt-sense of increased porosity between the world of flesh and the spirit-world (Turner, 2004) conjuring forth the metaphoric image of my Heart-shaped Soul. This winged and rooted entity invited me to acknowledge and explore my arts therapy as an ensouled and ensouling practice (Hillman, 1983; Levine, 2009; McNiff, 2004) aimed at healing imaginations wounded by historical and quake-induced harm. This act
of placing imagination central to my practice called forth further fragments of self to speak on behalf of my own creativity. My internal Cat and Crocodile enact my ongoing tussle to remain creatively limber and warm-blooded in circumstances that threaten to render me leathery and coldly contracted.

Laced throughout this presentation are my interactions with these animangels and my dead mother, referenced variously as Musings, Journals, Playtime, Diaries and Conversations.
In this introductory Phase 1, I separated from the everyday by describing the Canterbury earthquakes. I then spooled a kite-string through the resultant rubble by outlining key features of how I researched my work-and-self as I responded to these quakes. I outlined: my research intent and questions; the quake context and my quake-work; choices I made regarding thesis structure; key features of my methodology; and my use of multi-voicing.

Now I grasp this kite-string and re/enter the liminal quake-maze to revisit my quake-arts therapy, seeking to make useful senses of these experiences. There are six sections in this chapter:

- both betwixt and between and... describes liminality as my central metaphor;
- both soulful and cynical and... situates soul-healing as central within my quake-therapy;
- both neophyte and shaman and liminal monster and... uses these archetypes to articulate my position as neophyte/shaman and wounded/healer;
- both playful and mindful and... explores liminal playfulness within my quake-therapy;
- both powerful and powerless and... grapples with chaos and control within our quake context; and
- both singular and connected and... describes liminal communitas as an emergent intent within my quake-practice.

Phase 2: Liminality is a process-orientated chapter and I travel back and forth between the rubble and kite as my liminal string splits into many threads. The six sections in this chapter embody my attempts to lace together these many strands that connect my homely, complex, nuanced, tacit, and covert view from a rubble-bound-body with the pretence to transcendence of an authoritative kite-high view from above (Conquorgood, 2002).
PHASE 2: Liminality

a groping to know

We’ve separated from the everyday and grasped some guiding threads for our journey into the liminal. Now follow your heartbeat to the place within your being that knows earthquakes. These quakes may be real or this idea of tremors and reverberations may be a metaphor for other experiences you’ve had.

Take your time. Nothing is forced.

In reading the first chapter you have, like a ritual neophyte, prepared yourself for this journey into the in-between, into this liminal space of discovery. But this is a strange place, a place before and below words and logical thoughts. A place between worlds.

Take your time.

When you find your own earthquake felt-sense, be gently welcoming. You may be able to journey right into the centre of this internal place, or it may want you to stay on the perimeter. Accept this with curiosity and non-judgement. If you can’t or don’t want to enter this shaken place, sit next to it and keep it company in a friendly and open-hearted way.

Don’t rush.

When you’re ready, focus into this quake felt-sense. Does it have a smell? Do you taste anything in its presence? Can you feel it on your skin? If you touch it, what does it feel like? What can you see? Are there colours and shapes, images and symbols? Does it make sounds? Allow yourself to be fascinated. Stay present as your quake felt-sense unfolds and reveals itself to you. Notice any ways it changes as you stay with it, as you befriend and accept it.

When you’re ready, ask this deep feeling to gift you with some way you may express it using the arts. Invite it to suggest words or a phrase, image, sound, movement or gesture, story, or any combination of these ...
Figure 2. ‘Kite-within-the-white’ (Green, October 2013)
This little girl who, like her hyphenating-curl, felt herself always betwixt-and-between, was born to a loud gregarious father and a mother who hid from the world. A wild noisy little creature, she seldom sat still – acting-out made-up stories, singing at the top of her tin-whistle voice, wrestling on the shaggy carpet with the household cats and dogs, secreting bottles of wee and other naughty experiments in her bedroom.

But don’t be fooled into thinking she was wholly bold and trouble-free. For just like the curl in the middle of her forehead, she’s our in-between child, the threshold one. And so, inside our wee girl there lived many selves.

One was a tiny-self who sat still as a mouse under the gaze of a predatory komodo-dragon (she thought the dragon was outside of her ...) Even before the events that-rocked-her-world, our little girl suffered at night, frequently waking her parents with frightened cries. For on either side of her heart-shaped soul beat the two large wings of her imagination. The feathery-white angel-wing that filled her days with magic folded like a dove with the sunset. As darkness thickened, her heart-shaped soul rolled over and monsters crawled from its pale belly, unleashing the leathery-black bat-wing.

Maybe this came in her genes – her parents had endured the horrors of the Second Great War.

Maybe these stars and scars were awoken when her parents fled Zambia when she was tiny.

Maybe this mingling of light and dark is simply evidence of her humanness.
When the girl was four, her mother became very ill. But no-one told the little girl, thinking she would be too upset.

So it was a Big Secret.

All she knew was suddenly her mother was away a lot and when home she was pale, and sore, and vomity, and she didn’t want a small energetic wild-child jumping about on her – even if it was to bestow hugs and kisses.

So the little girl ran rampant during the feral days and whimpered even more when dark invaded the house. She grew clusters of cold-sores on her face, her legs and hands became a rugged morass of warts and she developed a painfully confusing eye-condition that baffled the doctors.

Adults whispered, in sterile corridors, of potential blindness.

For over a year she wore an annoying eye-bandage attached with tape that made her tender skin blister. No amount of cajoling convinced her this was a pirate-patch, for her eye burned and ached and she was subjected to test after test. Four different experimental surgeries didn’t help. At one point they even scalped the nerves in her eye and for several months, searing iodine was inserted every few hours. To endure the pain, she clutched her brother’s muscular grumpy black-and-white cat, Mischief, to her chest. Mischief would heave against her skinny ribcage with all his might as she gripped fast, the red pain of his claws a welcome distraction from the agony in her eye.

Feeling her world teeter so on its axis made the little girl desperately uncertain. So she consoled herself by kissing her beloved stripy cat, Scratchy. After all, cats are specially designed with an irresistible kissing-triangle on their foreheads! The silkiness of Scratchy’s fur and his deep resonant purr, his willingness to be held tight and carried about, made him the only one who listened and understood the anguish in her wildly-beating tiny-mouse-heart.

Figure 28. Scratchy and me (Tromp, c.1973)
For now the little girl knew the dragon was in her.

That she was to blame for the calamities befalling her mother and her.

In the absence of better evidence, she concluded she must’ve done something to turn her mother from loving comforter into inconsistent stranger. She tried her best – not only with her mother but with all the adults – to suck-up and gain attention and affection. But she was the little girl with the curl ... so despite the insistent voice of her tiny-mouse-self saying, ‘Be good. Be quiet’, she couldn’t stop herself from sometimes letting her inner wild-child be bad and therefore horrid. While we may interpret the ugly warts and cold-sores and weeping eye-infection that plagued the little girl as evidence of her distress, she knew differently. In the deep, quiet space inside where her waiting mouse-self stayed still as a little stone, she knew these afflictions were punishment for her sins. After all, even though she’d been banned from kissing her cats, as they were blamed for her many infections, she couldn’t help herself. In a world torn between rampant days and ragged nights, surreptitiously kissing cats seemed to be her one-and-only solace.

And then the cats were gone.

Mistakenly released from a holiday boarding-kennel by a drunken keeper.

Or so she was told.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, December 2014)

My connection with ritual, and specifically the central liminal phase, takes its breath from my origins in Africa, my personal experiences of loss, and my choices of previous transformation-orientated careers. These experiences opened me to cultures with ritual-rich and holistic cosmologies and steeped me in various ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner, 1970) discourses and expressions of the liminal.

Discovering anthropologist Turner’s research (1969, 1970) gave voice to my hitherto unspoken felt-sense of liminality. Turner studied ritual processes in Africa and developed detailed theories regarding the structure, nature and role of ceremonial rites. He identified three stages that constitute ritual. The first separation phase sees initiates or neophytes removed both physically and metaphorically from everyday society. The middle liminal phase involves mystical symbolic processes, usually guided by a ceremony master, to facilitate transformation. In the final reintegration phase the transformed neophytes re-join society (Turner, 1970).
Levine (2009), Harris (2009), Sibbett (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) and Haywood (2012) have drawn Turner’s ideas into their varied practices of arts therapy, specifically emphasising the concept of liminality because they view this threshold transformatory period as symbolic of the change process embarked upon during therapy. Liminality is characterised by feelings of limbo and uncertainty as known social structures and hierarchies disintegrate, everything becomes mutable, the boundaries between worlds and individuals become porous, and extremes in all forms are possible. Trauma and liminality share various characteristics and Harris (2013) views trauma as a form of liminality. Trauma refers to the response an individual may have to an event or series of events that is/are extremely upsetting, at least temporarily overwhelm the person’s internal resources, and cause lasting psychological symptoms (Briere & Scott, 2015). The resultant sense of “overwhelming psychological strain” (Dyregrov, 2010, p. 11) can be pervasive, multifaceted and manifest through a wide range of signs and symptoms (Breire & Scott, 2015).

Liminality can be temporary and/or permanent (Turner, 1970), a distinction that finds traction with Sibbett (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) and Haywood (2012). Sibbett’s (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) exploration of cancer frames the initial diagnosis as separation followed by treatment, remission and/or recurrence as forms of permanent liminality that interfere with reintegration. Haywood (2012) proposes that childhood sexual abuse casts the survivor into ongoing liminality. Levine’s (2009) worldview suggests human existence is itself liminal. And situations of ongoing or permanent liminality call for an approach to human suffering that acknowledges this.

My Magpie-mind weaves an especially bright gem into the messy nest of my earthquake knowings. Etched into this glittering bauble I spy Levine’s words:

'Tragic wisdom’...

This iridescent puzzle-piece expresses the hope that my process of quake-arts therapy facilitated transformation of suffering into wisdom. My Magpie’s beak stitches in-and-out, weaving this bead in place using threads connected to other examples of how pain – honoured rather than avoided – can transform into growth. I zip-line down these strands to my African childhood and early workplaces steeped in Zulu culture where I nod thanks to the traditional healers and shamans of transformative rituals. I revisit my formative careers in ritual-rich and transformatory drama and adult education. And now, the transitional power of ritual, evident as a golden thread within my life-story, finds new breath through Turner’s vision of ritual and the liminal as ancient archetypal sites of human social and individual transformation.

A new Magpie-flurry ensues to weave in tit-bits garnered from those within the field of (psycho)therapy who have embraced these ideas. Concepts drawn from ritual periodically surface in Jung, Hillman, Levine and McNiff’s works ... but surprisingly few arts therapists have directly engaged with liminality as a framing concept ...

Sibbett explored the cancer journey as liminal,

Harris used ritualised dance/movement therapy with war veterans, and

Haywood likened child sexual abuse trauma to permanent liminality.
And so...

Since teasing out this golden connective thread of liminality, Magpie-me has been nest building with vigour. Into this nest, made of bobs and baubles nicked from the literature and plumbed from my experiences, it weaves strands that resonate with the betwixt-and-betweenness of the liminal – beginning with my kite tugging on its string high above the rubble of Christchurch caught between the stately old buildings of before and the new concrete squares to come – then braiding in Plato’s metaxus which locates humanity between the angels and the animals, Gendlin’s zig-zag that opens spaces between the known and the unknown implicit felt-sense, the dance between the centre and the edge in Levine, the both/neither of Vermeulen and van den Akker’s metamodernism, the openings and reverberations in Springgay, Irwin and Wilson Kind’s a/r/tography...

... before stitching in my personal teeter-totter between wisdom and waywardness and my enduring crusade of wounded/healing...

... and my push beyond these both-and’s into the extra-and... that opens all to a mysterious something-more...

My Magpie is finally still. We now more fully understand why my Orphan, appearing at the dawn of this research quest, identified herself as inhabiting the Threshold.

(Magpie-musings, April 2014)

Using liminality as my axial metaphor opened core aspects of clients’ and my experiences of uncertainty, fear and anxiety. It highlighted our often unbearable sense of precarious suspension-in-limbo between a previous normal and something yet to emerge – all paradoxically juxtaposed with our heightened feelings of community and tingling frisson of new possibilities. Referencing Turner’s (1970) ritual structure: We Cantabrians were violently separated from the everyday; cast into ongoing liminal instability and transition; with no identifiable endpoint reintegrating us back into normality. McFarlane, van Hooff, and Goodhew (2009) highlight the “disaster after the disaster” – while a disaster may commonly be conceptualised as the time during which a catastrophic event impacts, for
individuals directly affected, the experience “has an ongoing impact on their lives, which reverberates in many domains” (p. 54). My focus as arts therapist thus moved from working towards reintegration – there is as yet no new-normal for us to re-join – towards helping clients live day-to-day with what I call enduring liminality.

This enduringly liminal sense of eternal twilight framed by fleeting flashes of separation and reincorporation, resonates with my life experiences and with this inquiry.

In the company of my dead mother, I contemplate this research. It rises within as the felt-sense of a perilous quest reminiscent of my recent crazy scurry along the ice- and snow-covered knife-ridge summit of Single Cone in the Remarkables Mountain Range. A three-hour crampon-ascent in the lowering mist – hoping we were on track in the deep snow – led to 40 metres of unprotected vertical climbing, weighed down by a heavy pack, up an ice-gully using a single ice-axe and gloved fist. We arrived at a small saddle between sheer drops lurking in the whiteout on either side – one swooping down to the ski-field from which we had come and the other even further down cliffs to the lake below. The summit waited 25 metres away, hidden in swirling white. Getting there involved precarious scrambling up a mixture of icy rock and snow clumps, again using crampons, fist and ice-axe, all bedevilled by howling wind. We dithered, trying to decide whether the risk was worth it …

... and then, as I often do when confronting a challenge that sends my inners into tumult, I simply set off, unroped, alone, afraid ...

Carefully placing my crampon-points into nooks and niches in the ice and rock and setting my ice-axe into the chunks of snow, I concentrate on each tiny move, each breath candy-flossing the cold before being whipped away by the chill wind. My world reduces to heartbeats, gentle careful movements, the prisms in the swirling icy-haze fracturing tiny rainbows about my head, the crunching of my crampon-points into the snow snatched by the wind and muffled through my woollen beanie and helmet.

Within seconds, I’m alone on the sharp ridge, cocooned in white.

In this echoing moment of pure solitude I’m both totally alone and yet not: I now invite my lost ones to accompany me whenever I feel fear burst its bright spray of acid bubbles inside my being. So on this frozen threshold between two deep valleys, high in the dragging cloud, you – my mother – and my father, my late-husband and my comfortable grey cat hover on the wind, holding the space for me. This invitation is partly an acknowledgement of the ever-presence of death which settles about me like a
shroud when I actively step into my fear. By asking my lost ones to attend, I’m softening my own potential death, setting up an etheric welcoming committee, reminding myself that, if my ending isn’t just black ceasing-to-be, I’ve delighted reunions to celebrate. This opening-and-inviting-along is thus a calming meditation, a making-bigger, a moving beyond the contraction of terror into a deepening of breath that loosens my muscles making me more capable of carrying out whatever action is needed – moving up above a bolt or a piece of not-so-well-placed protection into a tricky crux sequence high on a cliff-face that may spit me off; launching my paraglider into the air at a new flying site festooned with hungry trees and a long glide to the emergency landing-field if I fail to seduce the thermals; tipping my mountain bike over the edge of a rocky drop-off ...

... and of course, being strapped to my seat during a flight while turbulence buffets and bashes the plane (compared to my other pursuits, seemingly trivial ... and yet the one that frightens me most!) ...

Memory whisks me back onto the flight that, thrusting me into the liminal zone between departing and arriving, first opened me to the calm of inviting my etheric-others to share and carry my fears. Then there were only two, you and Dad. Husband number-one was still alive and Sebastian was a glorious adolescent cat, cutting a distressing swathe through the White-Eye population in my garden. I was returning from Johannesburg and, common to summer afternoons, as we crossed the Drakensburg Mountains the tumultuous uplift of heated African air created ferocious thunderstorms engulfing the plane in darkness and smashing us about the sky. From you, Mom, I inherited a terror of being aloft in man-made contraptions and – as we bounced and plummeted, my stomach swooping into my throat, my veins awash with the bite of adrenal fear, knuckles whitely clutching the armrests, palms sweating and my focus narrowed to ‘breathe-in, breathe-out’ – I found myself calling to you and Dad. ‘Ok, so I might be coming to see you soon’, I whispered in the airless confines of my clenched mind. ‘So I hope the fanfare’s ready and the milk-tart and sawdust-cookies are baked, Mom, and your arms are open for a tearful bear-hug, Dad ...’

And I noticed – while I still gripped the armrests and squirts of fear still etched through me at each bump – I could breathe more easily, I could lift my head and look out the window, I could endure. And slowly the jolting stilled and we emerged from enveloping cloud into a bold African sunset – deep blue-black rolling from one horizon over us to merge with scouring red as the last trickle of twilight-sun wrinkled the horizon opposite. And pulling my gaze, at the point where light and dark were in communion about the end of the day and the beginning of the night, was a single bright star.

My summit of Single Cone wasn’t marked by a bright star. It was shrouded in whiteout. Yet within me, I say to my dead mother, I hold both – and then some. Being in the liminality caused by the quakes and in the liminality of this inquiry, I summit and re-summit awash with obscuring mist punched through with moments of bright starlight.

(Conversations with my dead mother, February 2014)
...feeling invisible tweaks on the string...

In this first section of *Phase 2: Liminality*, I voiced resonances between Turner’s (1970) ritual liminality and my lived experiences and introduced the figural concept of *enduring liminality* as my way to characterise our quake experiences. Using liminality as my central metaphor shapes the sections to come as I seek answers to my core query: What useful sens/e can I make of my experiences as quake-arts therapist? Next, I expand upon liminality as evoking soul and explore my quake-work as soul-based.
both soulful and cynical and...

My embodied sens/e of liminality thrums with Plato’s metaxu – I’m an ensouled-being both strung between, and composed of, animal and angel. Spurred on by soul-builders Hillman, McNiff and Levine, my contemplation of soul takes many twists and turns as I own my simultaneous delight-in and scepticism-about this transcendent intangible (and possibly non-existent) aspect of being. I invite into sessions my clients’ and my soul/s – and our connection to the archetypal World-Soul – as sources of imagination, intuition and creativity ... while simultaneously shuddering at the away-with-the-fairies-ness of this.

This research escapade plumbed my formative experiences of pursuing the great ‘Why?’ in happy-clappy Christianity and atheistic Existentialism before the losses in my twenties led to tumbling confusion ... The earthquakes shaped this into a quest for a soul-aware practice in which soul is big enough to simultaneously encompass both the singular and multiplicit, both belief and scepticism, wholeness and fracturing ... 

... and be open to something-more.

This practice of trusting the life-forward energy-of-soul and its desire to express itself/s using the arts and archetypes, if only we are able to hear what our felt-sense reveals about our soul-sense, has emerged as concurrently a most fundamental and most fricative aspect of my therapy.

(Magpie-musings, May 2013)

Ritual liminality is traditionally associated with soul and spiritual practices and this research revealed liminal soulfulness as foundational within my quake-arts therapy. Liminality, which evokes the “medium in which we all live that is permeable from person to person” (Turner, 2004, p. 99), enables souls to cross thresholds to connect with each other, the dead and non-human beings, and to call upon mystical transcendent powers/beings to intervene, assist and/or bless transitions (Turner, 2004; Harris, 2009).

My dawning awareness of the centrality of soul within my quake-work created a struggle for me. The cynical Many-Monkeys in my Cartesian-influenced mind jabbered in discomfort at grounding my work in something so ephemeral and non-empirical while my black/white-Magpie swooped between soulful and cynical. Again, I am the liminal string tugged betwixt-and-between.

My Mental-Monkey-Carousel has been particularly active of late, as I contemplate ensouled arts therapy as my response to enduring liminality. Accustomed to being in charge for most of my four-plus decades in this body, my pooh-flinging Mind-Monkeys yodel objections: firstly to being replaced by a Magpie (WTF!!) and thus almost completely excluded from this inquiry; and secondly to the attention and credibility I’m giving to other bits of me.

I want to ignore and move on, but trip over my avowed commitment to honour all parts of me. So, to a chorus of hoots and jeers, I attempt an explanation.
Ok, firstly, you’re side-lined in favour of my Magpie, I tell them sternly, until you can learn to play nicely with my other animangels. A host of elastic faces present me with fat-lips and spit-raspberries. See what I mean, I say, hands on hips.

As for your second query ... Listen-up because this is tricksy stuff. It begins with your need to dominate and shout-down or pick-apart the other bits that make up me. I’m challenging this head-lead-ness by believing that meaningful transformation can happen at a below-the-eyebrows level: that therapeutic-stuff can stir the soul, move the body and evoke emotions – without needing to be pried apart by rational analysis ...

... and yet STILL HAVE A LASTING EFFECT!

You see, with many clients, especially children, I never get to work at a ‘thinky’ level that directly relates our process to their outside-of-the-session-everyday-life. And this poses me with a destabilising dilemma.

My arts therapy training was riven between two lecturers operating from different paradigms. One was soulful and embodied. The other taught that, if problems aren’t discursively analysed – allowing the client to become cognitively aware and develop conscious strategies to apply in everyday-life – she won’t benefit from therapy. My Magpie flutters, connecting this approach to ideas about implicit and explicit information-storing, and how distress lodges in the short-term/sensory/implicit memory in image-rich fragments. Recovery thus involves these being dredged from the implicit and/or right-brain and/or short-term and/or sensory memory and raised to consciousness. This awareness is a bridge into the cognitive/verbal/left-brain which allows them to be analysed/strategised/historicalised so they move from unconscious triggers into areas that can be consciously controlled/mastered/

regulated/managed using strategies applied by the cognitive mind. This bilateral integration or melding of the unconscious/implicit, conscious/explicit, right/left aspects of the brain/mind emerges as a figural theme within many trauma texts.

(My Bear and Magpie roll their eyes while my Monkeys spin and screech in delight at this welter of words!)

I push on.

Yet this linear progression from unconscious to conscious is nettlesome for me. I’m concerned that this approach again places you, my Monkeys representing the conscious mind, at the apex, re-enacting the Cartesian split and the paradigm that conscious, rational control-of-self-and-the-world is a possible and desirable indication of highest-order functioning.

(I hear a whoop and tinny music as my Monkeys spin even faster. I glare at them).

Connecting, however, with the more embodied wing of my training, I wonder if meaningful change can happen without analytic intervention. For example: When a client and/or I have experienced a significant shift through the art and this metamorphosis is a felt-sense not a cognition, it often seems respectful to honour this transition by spending time welcoming it and inviting it to speak further through the arts … without trying to intellectually deconstruct it.

These body/heart/soul-shifts are akin to water – running through our fingers but holding up ships.

Just as trying to capture the gestalt multiplicity of a painting or dance within the linearity of words, some felt-shifts don’t translate/aren’t confined well into reductive discursive cognitive concepts.

In addition, the transition from following our pleasure as a free-flow of creative formlessness tapping into the implicit, to a cognitive voicing and analysis of this process often shuts down the play. Tuning into Winnicott, McNiff and Levine, I find inviting our arts-creation to answer and re-ask questions that arise within the imaginal world created through playfulness, is often as far as I can go with children (and some adults). Prodding the imagical with cognitive analysis to forge links into their everyday family/school-life snuffs the energy, shutting us down.

So I try to gently bracket my own cynicism and trust our souls are bigger-than, that they’ve an elastic magnetism which keeps all these other bits – cognitive-Monkey-Mind, body, feelings – together and thus are greater than them – so working at this level is higher (or maybe deeper or ‘beyonder’) than cognitive thinking ...

A quiet ‘ooook?’ and a wheezing tinkle reminds me I’ve Monkeys to attend to. And while my Magpie evokes the liminally-eclectic, hunt-and-peck, black/white-betwixt-and-between mindset I require for this research adventure, my Monkeys still need a muck-out, a snuggle and a crate of bananas.

(Magpie-musings, February 2014)
Mid-2011, in the thick of my burgeoning quake-work, my grapple to locate my arts therapy practice was at its zenith. With the clarity of hindsight, I now characterise this as a struggle between my soul and my intellect – between my embrace of the arts’ creative mystery and my felt-obligation to follow medicalised trauma theories framed by psychology and neurobiology. I had internalised how these bio-medical and systems/ecological/postmodern orientations were often set in opposition, creating a tension that radiates throughout my profession. McNiff (1998, 2013) voices concerns regarding the pressure many arts therapists feel to justify our work using (often unsuitable) theories, models and research approaches derived from psychology and medical science. On the other hand, Trauma-Informed Art Therapy, pioneered by Malchiodi (Steele & Malchiodi, 2012), uses advances in neuroscience to inform and validate her body-first, art-rich interventions.

Initially, during my quake-work, I shied away from the mystery and leaned into cognitive/bio-medical perspectives – swayed by my status as novice and my desire to be taken seriously within the tenacious discourse of our cultural paradigm that privileges evidence-based, scientifically-proven factual knowledge above softer human-connection-based, soul-rich, innate, intuitive and anecdotal wisdoms. I steeped myself in ideas borrowed from neurobiology; I spoke of the amygdala and Broca’s centre, adrenalin and cortisol, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and the fight/flight/freeze response; I searched for studies into the mirror-neuronal, biological location of empathy. Yet this over-intellectualised and medicalised approach was problematic and limiting – clients grappling with physical, emotional, intellectual and existential ‘overwhelmedness’ drew little benefit from my scholarly explanations of what was occurring to them. And this yearning to be accepted by the centre, even as I stood within a profession on the margins, shifted my focus away from the clients’ worries and onto my performance.

In late 2011, the friction became too great between the cognitively-focussed, discursive, analytical, rational and pre-planned slant I felt I should be implementing and the pre-verbal embodied distress expressed by clients and my innately playful, non-directive approach. I realised I was side-lining creativity and the arts. What should be at the heart of my approach had become a tool, a routinisied means-to-an-end.

Then, one bright morning while fossicking on Facebook, I encountered a quote attributed to Thoreau:

“It is usually the imagination that is wounded first, rather than the heart; it being much more sensitive.”

These words struck deeply, ushering in a sense of homecoming, of (re)discovering my primary purpose as arts therapist. They recalled the “Art First!” advice given in April 2011 by disaster art therapist Asawa* and reconnected me with Hillman (1983), McNiff (2004) and Halprin (2003), all of

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* USA-based Dr Paige Asawa was brought to Auckland by Whitecliffe College for a seminar in response to the Canterbury earthquakes.
whom privilege creative soul-making. I followed suit, re/placing soul-building through imaginative poiesis at the centre of my therapeutic practice. Aligned with this, I discovered Gendlin’s (1997a) characterisation of humans as an ‘ever open edge’ – a large, numinous-self extending beyond the biological brain which is merely the substratum or filter that allows this more-than self to encounter the world. In using the arts to help clients transform their suffering, I shifted my focus to address the damage done to the imagination and soul by distressing events. Thus, as my work deepened with those enmeshed in the distressing liminality evoked by the quakes, I returned time-and-again to what I call ‘dropping-in to find out what our souls are doing’ ...

Amidst hoots and jeers, my Monkey-Carousel demands an example of this soul-rich way of working.

So I say warmly to my TeddyBear-Sage: Let’s fictionalise the non-fictional by teasing out textures and flavours of the many times I’ve encouraged clients to drop-in on their souls, find images and bring them into tangible being through the arts, so we may see, touch, smell, taste, hear and feel them fully before beginning whatever process of aesthetic transformation they call for. We’ll locate our (re)creation of dropping-in within an imagined process of working on troublesome feelings ...

She enters the studio with false cheer, smiling too brightly, shoulders resolutely back, chin forward. But at the ends of her arms, her hands are tight and her eyes slide from mine. She sits, unconsciously moving her chair as far back as possible. She crosses her arms against her chest and then, realising what she’s done, quickly uncrosses them but doesn’t know what to do with her hands and so they land upon the art table, flutter down to her lap, clasp and unclasp, scratch, flap, settle and then rise again. We’re both aware of this strange jangle of movements. It’s as if we’ve been joined in the studio by a pair of fretful five-tentacled aliens.

I wonder aloud if we should drop-in to what her hands are telling us. She tries to capture them, making them clutch onto each other, but they strain to part and continue their restless tango. They really seem to be wanting to have their say, I suggest. She sighs and places them purposefully onto the table, fingers spread, and we both look at them closely.

Ok, she says.

I invite her to sit comfortably but also say she’s welcome to move as much as required to stay with sensations that may arise. I suggest, as her hands are very talkative today, they may even want her whole body to move with them. If this happens, she’s welcome to follow this inner urge to dance and move about. Her hands perk up at this suggestion, making peaks on the table, but her eyes look out at me from a pinched face.

I ask if she’d like music. She nods. Something soothing? Again the nod. I look at her hands. They seem to agree, as they’re now turned palms-in, touching gently and rhythmically rubbing back and forth.
I fill the air with lyrical violin by Vanessa Mae.

I take several deep breaths, my body inviting her to do the same. We slow down and once I feel we’re both settled, I begin.

You’re welcome to close your eyes or keep them open – whatever works best. If you keep them open, let them go fuzzy so you’re looking inwards rather than outwards. She gazes into the centre of the table, her hands drop to her lap and stay there for the time-being.

Become aware of your body in this moment. Feel the weight of your thighs and back against the chair, your feet on the floor. You are here, in this solid body, in this moment.

Her eyes close and breath deepens.

Shift your attention to what you can taste in your mouth in this moment… Now let your awareness move to your sense of smell. Notice what you can smell in this moment… Let your attention drift to your sense of touch. How does your skin feel in this moment? Now become aware of what you can see behind your closed eyelids. Gaze at the shapes and colours… Slide your awareness to your hearing. Focus on what you can hear outside the room. Move your hearing inside the room. Now listen deeply to the sounds inside your body… your breathing… and even deeper, your heartbeat.

She’s still and breathing slowly in-and-out as if sleeping.

Follow your heartbeat down into yourself. Stay with your heartbeat for a while. Feel your solid rhythm, your life-force. When you’re ready, ask your heartbeat to take you to the story your hands want to tell.

Her hands flutter in response, but settle back into her lap. They know they’re being honoured, their tale will be heard.

Allow yourself to be gently led to the place within holding this story. Approach this inner-place with curiosity. Be welcoming of this felt-sense. You’re fascinated, not judging. Sit next to this internal space in friendship. Silently tell the feeling that you want to know it well, ask it to trust you and to reveal itself fully. If distressing images come, remember your heartbeat is there with you, calming and grounding you.

I see her frown briefly, her hands moving again, finding each other, holding tightly. She breathes into the sensation and I stay with her, matching her breathing, honouring her journey with my silent whole-bodied support. Slowly her hands relax, still holding each other but more gently now. Her face grows smooth.

As you stay with this soul-sense, take note of any smells and tastes, sights and sounds and sensations connected to it. Now gently invite it to offer you a way to bring it into
being using art. It may wish to be expressed through an image you can paint or draw or model in clay or wire. It may want you to write some words or make sounds. It may want to be represented through a sandtray or gestures and dance. It may even come up with an idea we’ve never tried. Wait patiently while it lets you know how best to depict it.

When you have something, check-in with the original feelings and story to ensure it fits – that this symbol resonates with, and expresses, the whole felt-sense.

She concentrates before nodding.

Thank your felt-sense – it’s bravely opened to you and you’re validating the way it made itself vulnerable … Now, bringing the symbol with you, reconnect with your heartbeat. Follow it back towards the sound of your breath. Follow your breath to the sounds in the room. Become aware of any tastes and smells in this moment, of the weight of your body and the touch of your clothes and the air on your skin. Notice the colours and shapes behind your closed eyelids … and when you’re ready, open your eyes, breathe and stretch … and begin creating your symbol …

She opens her eyes slowly, unfolding her body as if emerging from deep sleep. She blinks several times and when she seems ready, I ask, art materials? Clay, she replies. I gather this, placing a board with a chunk of potters’ modelling clay in front of us each. As I quietly collect water, paper-towels and clay tools, she’s already creating, her hands now using their energy to shape the clay. She speaks a few words, letting me know her central theme:

I feel powerless, my heart and hands useless and silenced …

I drop-into her words, connecting them into my sense of other stories she’s told of herself and her life. The earthquakes have shaken free older hurts inflicted during a neglectful childhood and abusive marriage. I allow these wounds to find reverberations within my own soul and I sit with these feelings as I hold the space for her to create. I see her hands forming a heart and feel my own hands twitch in empathy. I let them begin to mirror her movements.

Side-by-side, in silent communion, we mould and press soft clay with our knowing hands. Two women with different life experiences but connected by the common thread of being human – embodied, alive, feeling-creatures.

Finally, she slows, her clay-caked hands sated and falling finally into stillness, lying heavy on either side of her creation.

She takes a deep breath. I match her and we join eyes and breathe out slowly, smiling slightly.

We look at her creation. Are there any words? I ask.
I found a huge wall of loneliness inside, she begins. At first I couldn’t do anything about it. It blocked out the light. I just had to sit there. Usually when I feel like this, I run away, distract myself, but this time I just sat there. And as I sat with this wall, it started to feel less threatening. I became aware that something was on the other side. The wall was letting me know something was on the other side. I wanted to get to the other side. But still the wall felt too big. Then I realised I could move and so I got up and walked along the wall … and suddenly I could see around the edge of it! Behind the wall was my heart and it was very quiet. So I went to it. I wanted to make it beat again but it wasn’t ready. So I just sat next to it, like you said to do, and kept it company. I gave it lots of love and it felt so good. And when I asked for a way to make this feeling into art, I saw my heart covered with plasters and bandages.

We look at our creations – two mended hearts, side-by-side.

What comes up for you now you’ve created this treasured heart? I ask. And can you connect this to your very talkative hands?

I think my hands were all about action and trying to do things and failing. I felt like this all the time when I was with him – like I was powerless, a failure. I feel like this again now, waiting for insurance and EQC† to decide my fate – I’m being abused all over again and there’s nothing I can do about it. But … even when the loneliness of this was blocking me and choking me, stopping me with a big wall, I realised I could still move and be there for myself, I could love my own heart and keep it company. So I sat with my heart … and then I noticed my hands … these hands … (we look at her hands, now grey and scabbed with drying clay) … these hands

† The Earthquake Claims Commission is the national body responsible for partial financial support to those adversely affected by natural disasters in New Zealand.
that’d felt so useless, were gently massaging my sore heart behind the wall of loneliness. So, even if no-one else is there for me, I can be there for myself...

She stammers to a halt. We have bright tears in our eyes as we gaze from her artwork to mine. I touch her arm. She places a self-nurturing hand over her heart.

She smiles at me. It’s a very different smile to the one she wore into the session. This smile melts the edges of her mouth in softness, infusing her face with vulnerable strength ...

I ease away from the telling, becoming aware of my TeddyBear-Sage sitting on my shoulder. He presses his warm fur into my neck and gently strokes my damp cheek with his paw.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, November 2014)
what ‘soul’ means to me

Gendlin’s ever-open-edge harmonises with Mølbak and Levine’s belief that therapy should invite newness. My concept of soul, as gateway to this newness, is fluidly nascent but hinges upon the felt-sense of magnetism holding the other bits together – soul is the more-than halo radiating out beyond the sum total of mind/body/affect. (In practice these categories have blurred boundaries but are a useful convention for referencing various aspects of being human). Soul may be eternal or merely temporal; have a collective/universal aspect or be purely individual; be capable of wholeness or be intrinsically fragmented; or it may be all of these entwined in complex ways thoughts and words can’t capture. But, however it’s constituted, it doesn’t respond well to reductive processes, it needs trust and freedom within safety, and clear but not oppressive boundaries to take flight on the wings-of-imagination …

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, September 2014).

Neilsen (2008) advocates we practise therapy with ears and wings bristling because it is our capacity to imagine that enables our empathetic and vicarious connection with others, it is how we learn from each other and transform ourselves. My quake-arts therapy sought to activate ensouled-imagination in two key ways. Firstly, to open my imagination allowing me to connect with others (Nielsen, 2008).

And, secondly, to awaken imagination and soul in clients, transforming their suffering (Levine, 2009) and nurturing a life-forward direction (Rappaport, 2008) aimed at enabling them to not only endure the ongoing quake liminality but also to call out a limber ‘Yes!’ to life (Frankl, 2004; Levine, 2009).

one word – many evocations

Despite being familiar with McNiff (2004), Hillman (1996) and Halprin’s (2003) emphasis on soul-building, until recently I stumbled over the word ‘soul’, feeling its blurry connotations evoked flaky and/or unhelpful stereotypes. This study suggested I challenge this and articulate and own what soul means to me.

The Free Dictionary (2014) defines soul as the animating and vital, central or integral principle in humans. It is an immaterial entity, a person’s emotional or moral nature, and is often viewed as akin to ‘spirit’ – immortal and separable from the body at death. Moving away from definitions, I warm to Levine’s (2009) suggestion that soul refers to what enables each person to come alive, to be the particular being that they are.

Aspects of other conceptions using different names – such as unconscious, psyche, energy, life-forward direction, spirit, ‘…’, chi, gestalt, and the enteric nervous system – resonate with my notion of soul. When I began my quake-work, I adopted Jung’s (1953) term ‘the unconscious’ – possibly mirroring the unease that may have encouraged his framing of soul in terms more acceptable to his medical contemporaries. ‘Psyche’, another catch-all term, holds soul-connotations but broadens these to include collective archetypes alongside aspects of conscious cognition (Hillman, 1996). Within contemporary New Age practices, ‘energy’ and vibrations carry currency as non-religious words that reference soul. Mindfulness practices aim to clear the conscious mind and facilitate direct contact with a ‘life-forward direction’ evoking the observer- and wise-self (Rappaport, 2014a). ‘Spirit’,
with its often religious connotations, overlaps with soul while specifically implying life beyond the temporal and corporeal. Gendlin (1997b) bypasses words, referring to the something-more as ‘...’. McNiff (2014) likens soul to ‘chi’ used within Eastern philosophies while Perls’ (1973) use of ‘gestalt’ carries greater-than-the-sum-of resonances with soul. Other terms associated with soul are ‘intuition’ and ‘imagination’. My investigations into clinical intuition – a health practitioner’s innate hunch about a client’s illness – revealed emergent explorations of the ‘enteric nervous system’. Differentiated from the brain and spinal column, this vast neural-network in the gut is provoking discussions about the mythology of gut-feel as this area seems to have a thus-far unexplained ability to know (Shepherd, 2010).

When I introduce clients to arts therapy, I talk about art as a language of the soul. I suggest many of our experiences live in places other than our conscious minds – in our bodies, emotions, and the unconscious portions of our minds. But our soul might know what is going on in these other areas. And this soul often struggles to use the rigid codification of pre-determined language to communicate these knowings, because we’ve not yet invented words for such sensations.

We do, however, have art – colours, shapes, textures, sounds, movements – to help us express these feelings. So we use the arts to both give soul a voice and converse with soul.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, December 2014)

While I sought to be sensitive to various soul-conceptions held by clients, my own notions of soul emerged through this inquiry as harbouring distinct characteristics. Two key concepts, grounded in my interpretation of soul as more-than mind/body/emotions, shaped my quake-practice: imagination; and intuition. A third aspect – selectively shared with clients – is my belief in soul as the magnetism or net holding together multiplicit figments-of-self.

**soul and imagination**

Imagination is the creative ability to form a mental image of something not sensorially/really present and to address problems (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014). Soul reveals itself through imagination, according to Hillman (1983). He distinguishes between the language of psychology and the speech of the soul, emphasising how the soul brings newness into being through imagination expressed in images.

Figure 32. ‘Wings of imagination’ (Green, January 2015)
This inquiry clarified my emphasis on expressing, healing and growing imagination through quake-arts therapy. I share Levine’s (2009) struggle with the notion that art provides logical meaning in extreme suffering. Only a poietic approach using traumatic imagination to find expressive forms true to the chaotic meaningless character of suffering is adequate for comprehending and addressing the essence of anguish. Distress is transformed by the creative act of repeating it differently, allowing remembering to become a form of imagining that channels our capacity to shape experience through imagination. The suffering is thus not minimised or eliminated but rather is gifted with new meaning and value through the transformative act of soul-building poietic imagination.

This healing-through-poiesis is inaccessible, however, to those with wounded imaginations …

I’m opening ideas about my quake-arts practice by inviting the art to guide me. During my previous creative session my Threshold Orphan tore off her wings and grew roots. She committed this brutal act to impress upon me and the other inhabitants of my inner menagerie her determination to remain in parenthesis, to wait without distraction. At the very end of the session, as I finished my rough artwork and scrawled words exploring this image, a sequel flashed behind my eyes: a Victorian, vaudeville-style stage-hook sidling on to whip the battered wings off the stage/page!

So I begin this session intending to drop-into this image. My dance/movement sequence is awkward, misshapen as I heed an inner imperative to stagger about, fluttering and falling. Bemused, I call for clarity and in a flash envision the Cat and Crocodile fighting over the stolen wings. A tale tumbles into my imagination: they’ve stolen the Orphan’s wings, and unclasped their own wings eager to clumsily try-out these illicit and battered, but beautiful, Threshold-wings.

My being fills with an image of a Hall of Wings in various states of repair.

Drawing this, I waver in and out of delight and concern. Is this Hall of Wings predatory? Am I stealing the wings-of-imagination from clients and hoarding them? Is this the Trickster triumphing over the Sage? Is this how the wounded/healer archetype manifests for me – I feed off the creativity of others to heal my own fractured imagination?

As I pose these questions to myself, scrawling answers around my scabby drawing, healing themes begin to emerge. Perhaps the clients who come and keep coming are those who have stunted, broken and torn, mismatched, scorched and/or frozen wings. Their capacity to imagine, create and fly to new soul-destinations has been wounded. And so they’re stuck.

Maybe, even when bristling with all the skills and strategies and willpower in the world, without imagination we cannot bring anything new into ourselves and our lives.

So these clients drag into my studio the damaged wings of their wounded imaginations. These become sacred liminal symbols in the form of artworks. Sometimes their broken wings stay with me for a while, as if admitted to hospital. Sometimes, like outpatients, they go home after each session.
Some clients notice my studio is full of wings.

Some of these belong to me (after all, maybe a girl needs more than one pair of wings), some are those left temporarily by current clients and yet others are the ghosts of healed wings that remain as gifts when the client has ended her therapy and taken her healed and iridescent wings back out into the world with her.

Many clients like to try out the different wings in this special Hall of Wings. It’s like a Library of Wings, a source of great inspiration, where trying something new is welcomed and celebrated.

And yes, there’s a faint vampire-ish tinge to the air, as I gain life-blood from being surrounded by the fluttering hosts of alive and creative wings. But the collective healing-power of a room full of gathered imaginations generously invites me to benefit from their glory alongside my clients.

(Magpie-musings, January 2014).

**soul and intuition**

Intuition, from the Latin *intueri* – to look inside or contemplate – refers to knowledge which arrives through unknown processes and often cannot be empirically or rationally verified (Flora, 2007). Intuition can link individuals with archetypes from the collective unconscious (Jung, 1953) and/or with the spirit-world/God. And within the individual conscious, Sadler-Smith (2008) suggests accurate intuition uses imagination to seek and predict patterns based on previous knowledge and experience.

*I commune with my dead mother as I create an artwork to honour my lost ones held gently within my soul and carried aloft into creative newness on the leathery and feathery wings of my imagination. This soul is a hollow heart, a battered and torn cavern in which I place...*
symbols representing my mother, father, first-husband and Sebastian. This brave Heart-shaped Soul, wounded but sprightly, is alive with Levine and Hillman’s suggestion that meaningful healing is possible when the scars are sacred, present but blessed, transformed by intuitive poiesis married with tragic imagination freeing the survivor to joyously call out a resounding ‘Yes!’ to life.

As my hands squeeze and mould the white paper-clay, I muse about the relationship between this soul I’m crafting and imagination, intuition and mindfulness within my practice of therapy. Gendlin and Rappaport’s mindfulness practices, I say to the imagined shade of my hovering mother, are shaped by belief in something-more – that we’ve a soul or essence which knows, has a life-forward direction, a central chi or spirit that seeks healing. The practice of focusing and FOAT reach for the intuitive wisdom and calm contained within this deeper-self. I’m ambivalent about this …

... my dead mother cocks an eyebrow ...

Ok, I’m less ambivalent than I was. My ongoing work with my own and clients’ art has diluted some of my scepticism. But this has been a raggedy painful process! I’m not innately intuitive – I’m pallid and panting with the effort to develop my capacity to hear an inner voice and the willingness to trust and go with its suggestions. I quiver at the paradox set up between imagination and intuition – that maybe when I think I’m being intuitive, I’m actually imagining things; and yet when my or my client’s intuition is accurate, we need imagination to amplify and work with these knowings.

As I snivel, my hands are clumsy in the clay, fingers fat as I try to mould the tiny symbolic shapes I feel called to create, forms that cannot become any larger as I’ve no space in my earthquake-ravaged two-bedroom home that now houses two dogs, two cats, two humans, our numerous toys and my therapy studio ...

My dead mother cuts into my melodramatic wailing to remind me of the many who have praised my intuitive powers.

I feel a spark of prideful delight at her comment.

So I sit with this idea ... and a new possibility dawns.

I awkwardly spin this into words:

I easily fall prey to stereotypes, I say. A portion of me likes clear-cut edges and so quickly wants to place labels on or boxes over things. Maybe I’ve done this with the slippery concept of intuition, allowing popular media to dictate my sense of what it is, how it feels when it arrives, and the types of things it’ll say. So I expect these knowings to arrive haloed in a golden glow, that they’ll feel markedly different from my everyday thoughts and feelings and bodily sensations, that I’ll know I’ve been visited by an inner-angel as the messages will feel profound and be expressed in hallowed words and images.
In addition, my mental schema casts people who experience these internal bursts of enlightenment as deluded or holier-than-thou. Internalising these stereotypes has ensured I’ve thus far experienced very few, if any, moments of intuition.

But what if I grant myself permission to trust that, while such luminous moments may visit others, my own intuition is more mundane, gritty, fractured and grounded in images and words I mistake for everyday thoughts and feelings?

I feel the warmth of my dead mother’s presence as I fall silent. We both look down and between my hands lies a wee clay heart, frisky and talkative, ready to take flight.

My mother radiates irony: Yip, very ‘everyday, mundane and gritty’, I feel her saying as a wry smile warms her voice.

(Conversations with my dead mother, October 2013)
In shifting my practice from reliance on consciously-held psychological models into the more fluid domain of soul-nurturing through imagination-building, I demoted my rational mind to submissive-supporter of my intuitive-self. And this opens a can of wriggling conflicts. If accurate intuition is grounded in prior experience, did I have enough as beginning arts therapist? In partial answer, I cite my involvement in aligned professions ... but do these provide adequate foundations for therapeutic intuition? If intuition is a non-rational, inner process, how can I evaluate its accuracy? Again, in partial answer, I point to this ABR inquiry. How can I ensure my inner soul-sense of a situation is appropriate to my client’s needs and not imposed by me? A more detailed answer begins below ...

My multitudinous notes of quake-client sessions reveal my ongoing grapple with these queries. As I experimented with ways to share my intuitive-hunches with clients, my process began to feature co-creation and co-questing. Re/searching these notes, I read repeatedly how I tapped into my felt-sense of what a client was expressing and reflected this to her – in words, with my body and/or in art – while inviting her to consider whether this resonated, opened new ideas, or seemed purely my own response projected onto her. In this way, my process seemed to model – and thereby make available to clients – ways to draw on the essence of focusing (Gendlin, 1997a) and FOAT (Rappaport, 2008) to work with soul-intuition.

I’m with my Threshold Orphan, trying to stay open to her unnerving chilly stasis. As distress bubbles in me, I wonder how she can remain so very still. Without moving she pushes me back – she wants nothing of this energy fizzing in me, this hot-zing so contrary to her corpse-like immobility.

I allow myself to slide away into this bubbling disorder ... and find juddering and frothing inside my soul an echo of my response to several child-clients. I nudge these experiences into a composite fictionalised tale to ponder how I learned to focus into and contain my own responses while awakening my empathetic imagination and intuition with clients who evoked strong reactions in me.

A small client (let’s call him Charlie), like many of my quake-effected wee-ones, is beset by mess. A comet-tail of chaos follows in his wake oozing masses of spilt black paint and slushy clay, upending the elusive spangley contents of glitter-pots, and scattering sand from the sandtray. I sense this disarray is not misbehaviour or physical clumsiness. Rather it seems linked to fear and deep feelings of insecurity expressed variously through creatures buried in the sand, a small monkey who donned several inches of staunch clay-armour, and insistence by a clay-self that – for the first six months of our process – he stay safely within a small plastic glasshouse from my sandtray collection.

Session-upon-session I find myself breathless, icy, and internally balled-tight, fighting my urge to curtail his energetic clutter, to impose control, to clean up after him as we go along, to stay his hand as yet more paint spills, to run from his flattened and numb emotions, his snuffling laugh and rigidly-fixed smile.
Finally, during a session in which a body-map we’re creating again succumbs to large swathes of black paint and I find my all-too-familiar sense of chilled-to-the-core helplessness rise within, I resist hurrying past this felt-sense.

I stop and welcome this ugly sensation. I notice and make friends with these feelings of rising panic, suffocation, of being out-of-control and having things gallopawayfromme ...

... and I wonder if this is how he feels too ...

... if these repeated chaotic sessions are his innate way of inviting me to be inside these sensations with him, to come in and find him there in his stuckness so that, together, we can figure a way out. This leads me to ponder why I’ve been trying to hide these feelings from him ...

I feel a rush of loneliness at how isolating this may have been for him.

I screw up my courage and speak some of this aloud, “The black paint seems to be taking over again. My heart’s beating very fast and I feel like I can’t breathe. It makes me feel scared, like I should be able to control it but I can’t. I wonder if this paint is showing us how you feel inside?”

The room becomes very still. I’m rewarded with a very steady stare – for the first time he’s looking deeply into my eyes as if checking my sincerity.

I look back with all my heart and soul.

“I wonder if that messy black needs our help to feel better, to feel a bit calmer?”

He nods.

And so, together we begin planning ways to help the black paint feel better. He becomes animated and alive. Based on his design we create cardboard spatulas and begin scraping off the excess paint, gathering it onto paper we later turn into glittery prints. Through modelling, I keep us checking inside to see if what we’re doing is helping the messy feelings expressed in the black paint.

And, as sometimes happens when the art-angels are encouraged to sing, a spark of magic ignites and we delightedly discover that all the bright colours he’d applied before the explosion of black are still there, waiting to spring out again from beneath the suffocating dark.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, September 2013)
Alongside imagination and intuition, the third core feature infusing my notion of soul is multiplicity. My life-story reveals an ongoing quest for something more than the everyday. This search grew wings when, researching for my Masters’ dissertation (2010), I realised my interpretations of arts therapy stemmed from one key assumption: the existence of an inner essence. I had internalised this concept via several sources. My childhood immersion in modernist Christianity, descriptions by artists of their creative processes, and written accounts of many arts therapy approaches (Ghiselin, 1985; Weisberg, 1998) all featured a singular self-essence communicating to the conscious mind through symbolic images. Initially, uncritically embedded within this humanist discourse which I viewed as ‘natural’ (Butler, 1990), I presupposed my centre held an immutable, congruent, unique and ‘unify-able essence’ (Weedon, 1987) – the seat of my creativity and imagination.

Yet, in choosing autoethnography for my dissertation, I was obliged to embrace uncomfortable postmodern/poststructural critiques of this essentialist discourse. I opened to a worldview of reality as mutable in which soul-as-essence becomes questionable. This encouraged me to explore Hillman’s (1983) archetypal psychology. Rather than a substance or thing, he conceived of soul as a perspective that eludes reductionistic definitions – it is multiplicit, ambiguous, mysterious, playful, creative and polytheistic. Levine (2009) adopts Hillman’s (1996) representation of soul and re-visioning of psychology as polytheistic. In this view, soul hosts numerous archetypes, manifests in multiple ways and serves many gods. In following the kaleidoscopic images of psychological life, we are led further into soul – and soul-making via poietic imagery becomes the goal of therapy.

We make our souls by entering into their imaginal workings. As we come to inhabit and know each of our archetypal images, we will develop a richer and more variegated sense of ourselves. The poverty-stricken ego, embattled and alone, will be replaced by a community of celebrants. (Levine, 2009, p. 135)

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† This mythical net of the Vedic god Indra which, at each vertex, has a multifaceted jewel that reflects all the other jewels, is used in Buddhist philosophy to symbolise interconnectedness.

§ In Arts Therapy, through Whitecliffe College.
Towards the end of my dissertation research, however, and despite my passionate romance with postmodern fragmentation, I birthed a confusing artwork. When this Doctoral inquiry reopened debates around the meaning of soul, I recalled this image – which now appears to interweave my postmodern, more variegated, sense-of-self with the modernist soul-wholeness I have at times also experienced. This prompted me to embrace my felt-sense of grasping the numinous string between absolute modernist kite-high truths and the fractured rubble of postmodernism. This in-between positioning expresses a worldview more congruent with how I often experience myself as simultaneously whole and fractured or oscillate between feeling centred/singular and decentred/multiplicit. This both/and // both/neither stance is expressed variously as after-postmodernism (Gendlin, 1997a), metamodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010), and amodernism (Gouzouasis, 2008).

Here, I call this stance post-postmodernism and use both-and-and... to reference this liminal location. This opens conversations between my yearning for universal truths and relativism, desire for sens/e and doubt about the sense of it all, hope and melancholy, sincerity and irony, knowingness and naivety, construction and deconstruction, soul and cynicism. This way-of-being is typified by what sometimes feels like incessant repositioning between – and other times like an uneasy co-existence of – attitudes and mind-sets that evoke both the modern and the postmodern but ultimately awaken a new sensibility that is both/neither of them – the extra-and...
My art (as often happens) knew this Schrödinger’s-cat-like both-and-and... soul-sense well before my cognition wove it into conscious words. Several earlier images host disparate happenings taking place within the outline of my self; in recent endeavours my Heart-shaped Soul becomes a container housing the antics of my animangels; and a many-stringed net/nest emerged when I juxtaposed my rhizomatic ABR process with my seminal kite-in-the-rubble image. These creations imaginally express ideas fluttering beyond the black-and-white confines of sentences:

A sens/e of my soul as simultaneously the container and glue and threads of a net holding the shards of me in juxtaposition.

At its most healthy, this immaterial web contains suggestions of transcendent holiness – of wholeness – and yet is full of holes allowing flexibility and limberness, contraction and expansion ...

... reconfiguring my head/heart/hands/holy-bit representation of self, developed to encourage clients to be inclusive.

The holy-bit now becomes a w/hol(e)y-bit.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, December 2014)

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** See figure 29, p.63.
soul-based arts therapy for enduring liminality

By ‘ensouling’ my quake-arts therapy I strove to evoke “something both human and timeless” (Fox, 2014, p. 135). I aimed to encourage us to become the string forging links between the rubble (the temporal, corporeal and human) and the kite (the timeless, transcendent and numinous) within ourselves and our context of quake-induced enduring liminality. In lacing this thread between the temporal and eternal, I hoped to nurture in clients and myself/our strong, buoyant and limber souls.

creating limber souls to cope with enduring liminality

I’m again circling my Threshold Orphan using clay-creation to know her better. She’s been invisible for some time now, leaving me gazing at her cage of thorns, her small stool, her roots and torn-off wings … and feeling chastised for my desire to have her manifest. Her absence resounds with the fracturing and crumbling-to-nothing of spiritual and existential beliefs that often accompanies suffering.

My hands begin creating this felt-sense in clay and I feel my Orphan relocate from my heart to my belly – the traditional site of spirit in some cultures. As I craft the labyrinth of intestines that cohabit with my soul and my Orphan in this enteric space, I feel deep seesawing within.

I contract against this … but then take a slow breath and invite wondering.

Nudging into this sensation summons memories of many quake-clients with tummy problems ranging from periodic upsets to chronic pain. I return to my own internal queasy oscillation and notice my body is rocking side-to-side, enacting the internal swaying …

… I ease aside intrusive intellectualised thoughts about Sartre’s Nausea …

… and invite this felt-sense to present its own image. What arrives mirrors a symbol appearing often in clients’ artwork:

A teeter-totter from a child’s playground.

Clients used this metaphor to speak of imbalance, uncertainty, being out-of-sync. It evokes memories of Amanda’s dance/movement workshop†† in which we explored how softening our knees – both physically and symbolically – allowed us to remain fluidly balanced as our world rocked. I open my soul-sense to active-imaginal exploration of how one needs to be limber to ride the perpetual limbo of this liminal seesaw.

My hands work, bringing into clay-reality this seesaw balancing on the tip of an iconic Cantabrian road-cone. I’m staying with the unpleasant sensations, stretching my capacity to tolerate the seasick-gut/soul-dis:ease caused by the absence of order.

†† In June 2011, Amanda Levey (MAAT programme director and then ANZATA President) visited to run a workshop for the quake-affected.
As I create, my mind kites free, inviting contemplation of this theme in my quake-work: The normalisation of uncertainty, the validation of ‘I don’t know’. I ponder building tolerance and flexibility for adapting to ambiguity, for separating areas that can be gently ordered from those that can’t, for developing inner homeostasis that can absorb and lean-into the ongoing changes, that can flex and bend and keep growing and thriving.

The wire artwork of various clients comes to mind. They created and re-created bendable creatures, flexible wire hat-stands, springy nests, malleable wire-framed homes, and supple flying-contraptions. For many, this softened even further into the creation of felt and fabric creatures. These painstakingly hand-sewn characters, filled with stuffing scavenged illicitly from my bed-pillows, could be beaten and/or snuggled and/or tossed across the room without suffering injury. They were limber and robust without losing their integrity or huggable-vulnerability. And I realise — as I feel a rising bubble of love for these clients — this aspect of their healing was characterised by slowly, creatively and playfully, crafting their own bespoke ways for their souls to unclench, move through and past the instinct to tense against the random swaying, to breathe deeply and soften their knees, becoming flexible and limber enough to ride the liminal seesaw of ongoing earthquake instability.

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(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, July 2014).

‡‡ Clients and I would forage in the recycling bin and I frequently raided my home for desired materials.
This notion of soul-limberness resonates with Kass and Trantham’s (2014) belief that, central to trauma healing is the re/creation of internal composure. Internal attunement makes space for us to ride strong, troubling emotions without the difficult feelings controlling us reactively. This awareness and flexibility helps us engage and withdraw as needed for growth and defence. Those affected by distressing events often lose internal composure and this results in dysregulated triggering of the stress response and/or immobilisation (Kass & Trantham, 2014) – making rides on the internal see-saw jagged and painful. A central feature of my ensouled quake-therapy thus became this journey to re/created internal composure, to riding the inner teeter-totter with flexible grace. Here I explore how this process depended upon my engagement with the possibilities and problems of: trusting soul; staying with soul; finding soul through the body; allowing form to emerge from chaos; and light and dark soul imagic. These discussions also introduce several secondary zephyr-themes that breathe life into all the sections in this chapter on liminality.

**trusting soul**

Rothaus’ (2014) term ‘organicity’ describes humans as inclusive living-systems, honouring our innate wisdom regarding what we need to heal and grow. McNiff (2004) echoes Rothaus’ suggestion to use the healing potential inherent in the imaginal realm by trusting the process and allowing creative intelligence to organically unfold. I both embrace and pull away from trusting this inner soul-savvy – if the answers are within all along, why do we get lost or stuck in our wounding?

*I’m plucking at a worrisome conundrum. I seek out my TeddyBear.*

Are all souls equally knowing, equally wise?

*I ask.*

*My Bear smiles sagely. He lauds my attempts at a Rogerian-person-centred approach grounded in hopes that we host detailed knowledge of our own pain and healing, plus what will bridge the two. In this worldview, he intones, your role is to help your client find her own inner Sage, which may be undernourished or shamed into the shadows or itself wounded. Once an imaginal connection to this Wise-self is forged, you must continue to build a language of symbol and colour and texture and shape and sound that will allow this knowing to grow and stretch its wings.*

*But my Trickster-Magpie sniggers, its sharp beak threatening to burst this simplistic bubble. Are you suggesting, it caws, that while a client’s hands-heart-head may only be x-diminutive-years-old, her holy-bit is older/wiser? So as the rest of her struggles with an issue from the perspective of an x-diminutive-year-old, when you tap into her soul you’ll find a wise ageless-self capable of expressing this wounding, and designing a healing programme to wing the whole-self of the client towards wellness? That, it squawks derisively, opens the way for arrogant impositions and impingements. How’ll you know when this inner voice belongs to the client rather than your own projected wishes and worldviews?*

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89 ‘imagic’ blends imagination, images and magic.
I shake my head at my two familiars. My lived experiences are not this black-and-white, I say ... (not that my beginning and often not-fully-awake experiences are hugely substantive) ... but as I sit with the becomings of this conversation, I recall clients who’d access to vast tracts of wisdom beyond their chronological ages and other clients who seemed young in every aspect.

And indeed, my romance with poststructural intersubjectivity suggests clearly separating the client’s fuzzy-edged/inner/pre-verbal knowings from my equally-gelatinous soul-expressions isn’t entirely possible as both are called forth by the intimacy of relationship in the creative therapy-space and so both blend and belong, at least in part, to each/both of us.

As we sag in fatigue, my Sage offers a final suggestion:

Trust your own soul to be big and flexible enough to accommodate all these queries and contradictions – and this may enable your clients to learn to do the same.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, September 2014)

**staying with soul**

Open interpreting is a zephyr-theme dancing throughout this arts-based study. Avoiding translation of complex imagery into simplistic this-means-that rationalisations emerged as particularly important within my soul-based quake-arts therapy. As life does not have one absolutely fixed meaning, we must allow our images to “point past all meanings given, beyond all definitions and relationships, to that really ineffable mystery that is just the existence, the being of ourselves and of our world” (Campbell, 2012, pp. 8, 9). This emphasises staying with soul and allowing images to animatedly walk about on their own legs (Hillman, 1983).
finding soul through the body

I embraced a soul/body connection in my quake-work. Levine (2009), Halprin (2003) and McNiff (2014) follow the ancients in linking body and soul/spirit, suggesting our fundamental experience of the world is via our senses and therefore aesthetic. The root-meaning of aesthesis refers to breath. Breath is often identified with life: to expire is to die; to be inspired is to be filled with spirit or breath. “To live in an an-aesthetic world means to be unable to breathe; it is a world without spirit or soul” (Levine, 2009, p. 49). Like Levine, I believe aesthetic poiesis restores the body to life through inspiration, by animating or ensouling it – just as Gendlin’s (1997b) philosophy of the implicit suggests everything we persons-in-bodies say ultimately comes from the ever-open-edge of our embodied felt-sense. I discovered that activation of sense-awareness helped with present-moment-grounding, enlivened creativity, imagination and soul, and provided rich material for poietic expression. Just as, through this study, I resonated with several practices described in Mindfulness in the Arts Therapies (Rappaport, 2014b) which emphasise accessing the now by initially becoming aware of what is entering moment-to-moment through the sense-doors.

My dead mother and I sit quietly. I’ve just finished a creative session that began with a sense-enlivening walk in the windswept hills, followed by dance/movement, clay-creation and then creative writing. I’m deeply satisfied – my body is now still and my hands heavy and spent in my lap.

But I also feel deep sadness. Without a physical body, the creative richness available to me via my senses is no longer accessible to my dead mother.

Next to me she sighs and reaches out with her imagination, remembering what it felt like to smell and taste and touch and see and hear, to be in a body that allowed such pleasure … and such pain.

(Conversations with my dead mother, June 2014)

allowing form to emerge from chaos

Stepping back, opening the transitional space, and inviting new form to emerge from the chaos of our enduring liminality, is a core theme woven throughout my practice and this research. This process lies at the heart of soul-building but:

... can happen only if we learn to tolerate the anxiety which chaos brings, to wait while a new totality is forming itself out of the fragments. Chaos is the mother of all beings... Out of the soul’s womb a new birth of forms can occur. Not with the forceps of the intellect but with the gentle hands of the imagination will we be able to assist this birth. (Levine, 2009, p. 140)
light and dark soul imagic

I seem to have imbibed core connotations of soul as glowing with golden goodness. This is challenged, however, when soul and imagination interlink. Alongside Klee’s *Twittering Machine* (1922) writhes Munch’s *The Scream* (1883). Imagination created the H-bomb and the terribly-inventive tortures inflicted in World War II death-camps. Imagination dreamed-up the felling of the Twin Towers. Imagination spawned necklacing as a torture in my native South Africa, and fills cinemas with screams, blood and gore, and human skin made into masks while chainsaws and axes creatively carve human flesh.

Winnicott (1977) tackled this challenge by distinguishing between imagination and fantasy. Fantasy is an obsessively repetitive defence against existence, and is incapable of arriving at creative or symbolic form. Levine (2009) agrees – unlike the productive, variable and multiplicit chaotic of imagination, fantasy operates to rigid recurring compulsive themes, offering no capacity to let images find their own diverse ways into new emergent forms.

Unconvinced these two categories are so distinct, I plumb my own experiences – as child holding her terrified breath in the gnawing darkness; as widow holding the cold hand of her dead husband; as therapist holding the space for suffocating-s swathes of black paint and slumping clay. Here I find a more tangled view...

My internal Circle-of-Self surges to life. Across the Round Table from my imagical Cat, my primal Crocodile thumps his fist, seething with fear about this magical-soul-thingy. I take a deep breath – my Creative-Cat slowly soothes her raised hackles, my Wild-Child settles gently into her chair (she tends to hover), the bells tinkle on my Magpie’s tricolour-hat, and my Sage folds his hands over his fluffy belly.

My Threshold Orphan is, as usual, absent.

I ask those present to listen – for all of us that make up me – to attend without judgement, with friendliness, to just listen deeply to the Crocodile. My leathery critic slowly slides his clawed hands off the table – slithering back in his chair, the slitted look in his reptilian eyes softens as he realises he’ll be heard without the need to fight.

As he and his Cat-counterpart are pre-verbal emanations, he channels his thoughts via my very verbal Magpie. ‘His reptilian, survival-orientated brain doesn’t get this imagination thing!’ the Magpie interprets, ‘So he worries that unbalanced attention to magic and imagination can be a cop-out... a way to avoid facing and tackling some very real life-issues. This may develop skills that don’t fit the life our clients face outside the sessions. They could begin to think that magic is real!’

‘Ah, magical thinking,’ interjects my Sage. ‘Thinking unrelated things are linked and strange rituals will help – don’t-step-on-the-cracks-in-the-pavement sort of thinking,’ he explains.

‘Besides this,’ my Magpie reclaims the narrative, as the Crocodile fixes my magic-loving-alters with a steady gaze, ‘the Croc says we’ve all been worried (whether we admit it or not) about the darker side of imagination and magic.’
We sit silently with this thought.

I agree. This is a riddle we haven’t yet cracked – how those with the largest imaginations, the greatest ability to evoke fantastical things and feelings and creatures and situations, often suffer greatly. Oftentimes, just as the light joy-filled white feathery-winged magic-side of their imaginations grow, so too, does the shadow-side, the black-magic batwing-side that sneaks monsters under the bed and turns creaking floorboards into invasions of blood-lusting zombies. So any activity that energises the magic of the imagination can stimulate not only the light/helpful/positive, but also dark/unhelpful/negative/destructive aspects of the psyche’s ability to call into being ideas and images.

Again, we sit with this.

‘Ahem!’ My Sage gently rubs his round furry belly. ‘This dilemma’s been around since humans began scratching their world into images on cave walls and creating rituals to dance their understanding of life into embodied form. These tussles feature in myths and legends from the dawn of human history, are passed down in fairy-stories and, despite various Western cultural/religious attempts to cast them out or sanitise them, they persistently feature in most of what’s viewed as good art, literature, dance, and music.’ My Magpie chips in, ‘Look at me, I’m both black-and-white!’ ‘Plus,’ my Teddybear-Sage resumes, ‘if we can help the person whose imagination is creating these images to embrace her agency in their creation ...’

But as these hopeful words float across the table, Crocodile-me swells, snagging Magpie-as-mouthpiece to scoff at this idea of individual-agency. ‘He says remember how many of these terrifying archetypes are shared – seeming to lurk in the primordial swamp of the World-Soul.’

I nod, therapist-me even uses the enduring concept of the muse/daemon to characterise clients’ images as coming from elsewhere – and although this is an attempt to help clients gain some distance from their creations and see them in fresh ways, this active imagination approach may feed into the sense that, tucked beneath the images-as-angels, shadowy images-as-demons do really exist!

Staggering, I emerge from this internal wrangle.

I thank my animangels for their insightful convolutions and, after a steadying breath, lean back into Levine and Martin. Despite experiencing the worst, the healthy soul — according to Levine — still cries ‘Yes!’ to life. And Martin encourages an appreciation that, while life can be darkly painful, it’s also brilliantly bright. I thank these mentors — and all the countless others — who express this intricate bricolage of chaos-and-order, dark-and-light, black-and-white magic, and harmful-and-healing imagination ...
My internal mediation between those speaking with the voices-of-feathers and those using leathery-tones suggests overlapping entanglements that invite limber, flexible souls to make space for both the ugly, painful darkness and the bright, brilliant ‘Yes!’ – thereby opening to the extra-and... of something entirely new...

(Magpie-musings, January 2014)
In this second section of *Phase 2: Liminality*, I grappled with how soul, as a core feature of liminality, became central to my quake-work. In seeking to make useful sense of my quake experiences, I revisited how my work with human suffering found breath when I realised my role was to use the arts to heal wounded imaginations. This, in turn, nurtured limber and flexible souls, able to endure the teeter-totter ride of quake liminality and still call ‘Yes’ to life.

To better understand my interpretation of soul, I explored imagination, intuition and multiplicity – revealing my sense of soul as both singular and multiplicit and something-more. This introduced the core theme of *both-and-and...* a stance central to my therapeutic practice, as well as several central zephyrs. Along with the core ideas of *enduring liminality* from the first section and *both-and-and...* from this section, these zephyr-themes feature throughout this research. Woven through the next section – exploring liminal archetypes within my work – and the sections to come, they include: multiplicity and fragmentation; soul-limberness; the primacy of relationship in therapy; trusting the process; not interpreting too hastily; the power of embodiment; inviting order to emerge from chaos; and the interweave of light and shadow within the psyche.
both neophyte and shaman and liminal monster and...

_Liminality evokes a slew of archetypal characters and characteristics._

Neophytes, shamans and fantastical monsters

_journey through or inhabit the twilight betwixt-and-between. The Eurocentric Christianity I learned interprets these threshold-beings as either/or, separating angels from outcast demons, while for indigenous cultures — such as Māori and Zulu — they’re complex, often contradictory characters. In these communities healers/shamans/spirit-guides harbour characteristics that are both-and-and…. A prickly enigmatic blend of wounding-and-healing / SageSacredness-and-TricksterProfanity that opens doors to the extra-and… — the mysterious something-more at the heart of being._

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, October 2013)

...the string tugs in several directions...

In the previous sections, I explored my conception of our earthquake context as _enduring liminality_ to which I responded with a soul-based _both-and-and_.. approach to quake-arts therapy. I now build upon these notions by making-sens/e of my quake-work using the lenses provided by various characteristics and creatures brought into being by liminality (Turner, 1969) including:

- human initiates or neophytes undergoing transition;
- ceremony masters, elders and shamans guiding those travelling through the twilight; and
- fantastical mythological beings, creatures and monsters, often hybrids or presenting as oppositional dyads, inhabiting this marginal space.
As I meandered this research-labyrinth using liminality as a guiding string, I recognised various traits of liminal neophytes, shamans and monsters within myself, my clients and my practice. Tossed into enduring liminality by the tremors, my clients and I became unwitting neophytes, stripped of previous roles and structures (Turner, 1966). As therapist guiding clients through this enduring liminality, I was subject to characteristics associated with both the shamans and the legendary hybrid fantastical-beings that traditionally inhabit and/or help others transition through the betwixt-and-between.

In this large section, my familiars and I investigate Deborah as quake-arts therapist by illuminating my embodiment of liminal archetypal characters and their characteristics. These traits evoke the personal and the collective (Jung, 1953) and I interpret their meanings through both these sometimes-separate/sometimes-overlapping lenses in ways that echo my use of symbolic imagery in my quake-arts therapy. This section is thus often rhizomatically confusing as I follow tangents, but its underlying thread is as follows:

- *liminal beings* begins this section by exploring liminal neophytes, shamans and fantastical beings. Here I introduce my dual role as neophyte/shaman of enduring liminality;

- *internalising these traits as hybrids and dyads* discusses how, in assuming this neophyte/shaman role, I manifested key characteristics of legendary dualistic liminal-archetypes;

- *the wounded/healer and me* explores in detail my embodiment of this liminal archetype under following headings:
  - *writings about the wounded/healer*;
  - *my wounding*;
  - *my healing*;

- *the value of my wounded/healing as neophyte/shaman* summarises ways in which embracing the archetypal characteristics of wounded/healer neophyte/shaman benefited by quake-work; and

- *hazards I faced as neophyte/shaman of enduring liminality* investigates some pitfalls I faced in assuming these complex roles within our liminal context.

The liminal archetypes of Trickster/Sage also manifested in my quake-work. Alongside my Sage-infused capacity to empathise that resulted from my wounding, runs the equally vital role of my ongoing healing and Trickster-like playfulness. While arising in this section on *liminal beings*, this oppositional-dyad, however, speaks more eloquently to the theme of liminal play in the next section. My exploration of how my Magpie-Trickster and TeddyBear-Sage inform the healing features of my quake-therapy thus comes later in *both playful and mindful* and...
liminal beings

traits of liminal neophytes

In the chapter ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage’ (1970), Turner attributes certain characteristics to liminal initiates. These aptly illuminate clients and my responses to our unstable context, fracturing of known structures, sense of being caught in-between, and possibilities for transformation. Turner’s neophytes, often nameless and referred to in general terms or with symbols, are status-less, unclean outcasts secluded lest they pollute those who have not been inoculated in some ritualistic way. These initiates are ensnared in a de-structured situation (being both unstructured and pre-structured) yet experience a peculiar unity or communitas characteristic of the liminal which is not this or that (and yet is both), resonant with my concept of both-and-and...

Thus, despite having no possessions or rights, the disempowerment of their sacred poverty (Turner, 1970) is not solely deconstructive. Rather, it can facilitate transformation, growth and reshape old elements in new patterns. Just as wax is imprinted by a seal, neophytes do not transform merely through acquiring knowledge, but via a holistic “change in being” (Turner, 1970, p. 51).

traits of liminal ceremony masters

In contrast to the neophytes’ comprehensive equality with each other, the traditional shaman has complete authority and controls the ceremony using sacred symbols and rituals to evoke the mysterious spiritual and/or ancestral domains (Turner, 1969). On one hand, this resonates with my quake-arts therapy which also sought the mysterious something-more that lives beyond the conscious mind. On the other hand, the traditional shamans’ wisdom and power to grind-down and make anew the naïve complaint neophyte (Turner, 1970) contrasts with my tense duality. I was quake-survivor/naïve-neophyte alongside my clients as well as trained-therapist/shaman. In my therapeutic relationships, I thus sought to establish dynamics different to the complete-authority or complete-equality governing traditional shaman-to-neophyte and neophyte-to-neophyte relationships. I aimed for a sense of different-but-equal, congruent with my previous experiences in applied theatre and adult education (influenced by Boal, 1993; Freire, 2014; Kidd, 1985).

traits of liminal monsters

Like the quake-minotaur I hinted at earlier when I spoke of my research as a maze, legendary liminal monsters are often hybrids, merging human and non-human features, and serene and savage characteristics (Turner, 1969). In this hybridity the different parts seldom co-exist amicably – rather this amalgam is frequently between opposing characteristics making the creature both wise and unpredictable. Examples abound across history and cultural mythology and include: Zulu sangomas, Medusa, Bacchus, the Māori taniwha, Spiderman ...
internalising these liminal traits as dyads & hybrids

We all become tadpoles in the hot water of liminality as liminal porosity enables these characteristics of neophytes, shamans and monsters to infiltrate and influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of those within threshold spaces. Alongside the unity of communitas, neophytes often experience disintegration as the shadows within liminality evoke internal “undifferentiated monsters” from the unsavoury agonistic ‘dark mirror’ side of humanity (Girard, 1988, pp. 156, 168). These liminal creative/destructive and sublime/atrocious characteristics resonate with Jung’s (1978) enantiodromia or opposed internal couple. This inner psychological balance, in which each characteristic evokes an opposing urge, is framed by Gestalt therapy as organismic self-regulation which evokes top-dog and under-dog qualities (Perls, 1973). Our tolerance for the darker, under-dog partner in these internal dyads is often low and we banish these aspects into the shadow (Jung, 1961). The central task of Jungian individuation is thus integration via the identification of these duos and acknowledgment of the shadow or orphaned aspects.

My experience suggests these dyads are seldom simple good/bad dichotomies. My animangels superficially presented clear-cut light/dark and good/bad oppositional dyads. Closer inspection, however, revealed how each contains both light and agonistic dark-mirror aspects (Girard, 1988) which combine to create the something-more of my extra-and... This resonates with Turner’s (1970) observation that liminal sacred symbols are often sublime and monstrous – their distortions or exaggerations challenge the taken-for-granted and birth new ideas, morals and issues. These variously translatable, multivocal symbols blend the grotesque and the glorious, emphasising the incomprehensible mystery at the core of things. Liminality is thus a fruitful darkness in which evidence, proof, logic, facts, procedures of analysis and logical thought become secondary or unimportant (Turner, 1970). As a stage of reflection and reconsideration, liminality (like the early stages of my ABR) “is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence” (Turner, 1970, p. 53).

Liminality juxtaposes opposites, often embodied through monsters and fantastical-beings – such as the human/animal hybrid Chiron, centaur and prototype wounded/healer, forever caught betwixt-and-between by his wound’s refusal to heal; such as my animangels, the figments of my internal imagical liminality ...

My black/white Trickster-Maggie dancing disparate duets with my steadying Sage-TeddyBear ...

My leathery Contracted-Crocodile snapping yellow fangs at my playful in-the-moment Creative-Cat ...

My isolated paralysed Threshold Orphan withdrawing from the intrusive explosive energy of my spontaneous, sun-kissed Wild-Child ...

My heart-roots burrowing deep as my soul-wings tug towards the sky ...

Jung’s shadow-dwelling internal-couplings we seek to reconcile through active imagination.
My internal dyads are liminal beings who spoke through my quake-arts practice - shaping my both-and-... style of working just as mindfulness and playfulness wove complementary colours throughout my sessions. They also held threads and threats from my story as wounded/healer within their oppositional twosomes. As arts therapist within enduring liminality, I became a neophyte/shaman of the liminal. My role was to be simultaneously in and out. Within the liminal rubble I was wounded-neophyte companioning others as we developed orientation and suppleness to endure separation, dislocation, fragmentation, and un-differentiation. Simultaneously, I had to ensure part of me remained kite-high outside the fug of this marginal zone, that I created and held a safe playspace, witnessed and opened options, that through careful affective self-disclosure of my own healing, I modelled our incredible buoyancy as human beings. As wounded/healer, I was both wise-Sage who lovingly guided and Trickster who shook things up, I was protective cynical Crocodile and open gullible Cat, I was withdrawn Orphan and in-your-face Wild-Child, I was grounded roots and enchanted wings.

At my very best I embodied the transitional – I straddled chaos-and-order, life-and-death, before-and-after, dark-and-light, agony-and-ecstasy, success-and-failure … and then opened these both-ands to the extra-and... of soul.

(Magpie-musings, June 2013)
the wounded/healer and me

I am compelled by the sustained tradition of woundedness as a figural liminal archetype within a shaman’s calling. Within various cultures, shamans (and in some traditions, priests and prophets) realise their calling after suffering and healing from a serious illness or wounding which supposedly allows them to transcend the physical and commune with the spiritual (Jackson, 2001). The wounded/healer shaman has credibility as one who knows suffering first-hand, can voluntarily journey into the spirit world, encounter dangerous and disturbing spirits, and emerge stronger and wiser to serve others as healer of souls (Jackson, 2001; Martin, 2011).

My heart swells with deep sad love for my determined little Threshold Orphan. Using clay and wire, again-and-again I craft her stool, her roots, torn-off wings, protective and impenetrable bower. I add fire-ash to evoke quake-dust but use clay to express hope.

Yet time-and-again, she remains absent.

I loiter quietly and respectfully with the void she leaves … awakening stories of how my life has over-and-again shuddered and shaken and cracked open. These events shape who I am, how I cope, how I relate to others and construe myself as arts therapist. My wounding and survival-of-wounding has wrought what I fear, what I embrace and value, avoid and aspire to, the internal and external spaces I will enter and those I avoid. And this is all passed to my clients, if not directly, then through a myriad of gestures, abilities to be present to or removed from myself and them, what I open and offer for them and what I don’t even see, how I breathe and when my breath catches, what and when I create with or alongside them. So it becomes crucial I embrace and know my own wounding and healing… and my embrace/avoidance of wounding and of healing.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, December 2013)
The wounded/healer archetype describes a person whose own experience of illness and/or trauma has left lingering woundedness in the form of lessons-learned and symptoms, vulnerabilities or characteristics that crucially enhance his capacity to minister to and heal other sufferers (Jackson, 2001). During the quakes, I was confronted with the role my own woundedness plays in how I am as therapist. My woundedness combined both historical losses and present-tense quake stress and I initially worried this hybrid neophyte/shaman wounded/healer status was unethical and unsafe. And yet, during my quake-work two aspects called for honest affective presence from me. Firstly, clients wanted assurance that I too knew what it felt like to suffer quake-related fear, loss and uncertainty. Many spoke in-session of outsiders who ‘didn’t get it’ and a common culture evolved suggesting only those present for the quakes and struggling through the aftermath fully comprehended our plight. Secondly, my own history of striving for openness and transparency rendered hiding my own wounding unethical. A third, and vital, strand became fully evident only during this research. In grappling with my wounding in my ongoing quest to heal, I know not only suffering but healing too. I could empathise with my clients’ pain while simultaneously offering an embodied example of healing.

I have subsequently discovered recognised voices validating the wounded/healer. Jackson (2001) traces this archetype through history beginning with the Greek myth of Chiron the Centaur – renowned as a healer despite incurable wounds inflicted by Heracles’ poisoned arrow. Jackson (2001) references the sustained history of woundedness within shamanistic cultures throughout the world. His descriptions resonate with my work alongside traditional healers as HIV/AIDS/Lifeskills educator and counsellor in South Africa. These Zulu diviners believed they were called to heal through an initiation illness. The symptoms of this ailment, incurable through conventional methods, were diagnosed by a powerful sangoma as twasa – the ancestors’ calling. Many initially experienced fearful reluctance – refusing this vocation – and consequentially suffered further illness that only cleared when they conceded and began their training (Cumes, 2004).

Jackson (2001) references Freud and Jung, each of whom evolved his mode of psychological healing influenced by how he resolved his own suffering. Jung (1953) initially construed the wounded physician as a dangerous archetypal dynamic. The wounded doctor’s latent disposition towards certain psychic disturbances may be infectious to the patient. And the vulnerable doctor may be infected by a patient’s wounds, or have his own wounds reopened. Viewing each treatment as a dialectical process in which the doctor-therapist participates alongside the client in a mutually transformative process strengthened Jung’s insistence that all analysts undergo personal psychoanalysis. Over time, Jung became increasingly supportive of the positive possibilities of this archetype. His Red Book, eventually published in 2009, embodies his grapple with, and eventual embrace of, his personal wounding/healing as a valuable part of his therapeutic practice. Jung (1953) does, however, warn against splitting in which the wounded-part is projected onto the patient and the healing-part onto the therapist. Rather, both aspects are viewed as present within each individual.

Jackson (2001) also references Frankl and Nouwen. Frankl’s (2004) World War II incarceration led him to develop logotherapy expressing his belief in man’s freedom to transcend suffering and find meaning. According to priest and psychologist Nouwen (1972), using one’s wounds as a source of healing does not mean sharing “superficial personal pains” but calls for “constant willingness to see
one’s own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition” (p. 90). He coined the term ‘wounded healer’ to which I have added a /slash/ to highlight my location in-between. Jackson concludes his overview with examples of contemporary organisations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, that base their healing-work on peer counselling and support.

Martin (2011) felt compelled to research the wounded/healer phenomenon after his own wounding profoundly impacted his work as counselling psychologist. Like me, he was initially uncertain about the acceptability of this personalisation and his research found for “many therapists woundedness is a hidden secret” (p. 10). Seventeen psychologists participated in his exploration of the role woundedness played in their professional work, leading him to conclude we therapists forge more authentic alliances with clients if we celebrate our “scarred, glorious, mis-shapenly successful, and often faulty selves for what we are” (p. 10). Rather than view woundedness as a deficit, he proposes we consider it as another metaphor for humanness. This transforms woundedness from the common discourse of exception, accident, or punishment, into understanding the wound as essential in helping the therapist be compassionately available to others while simultaneously holding a deep personal belief that the worst is endurable. As therapists we are whole people, inclusive of wounds, strengths “and the glory of human imagination and ingenuity” (p. 13).

This resonates with Levine’s (2009) belief that woundedness can be therapeutic if we define ourselves not by our wounds but by our capacity to respond – by refusing to remain victims of our distress, we stop being “the ones who are done to” and “make a world out of the fragments of our brokenness” (p. 178). Through creative acts we find ways to respond to pain and suffering in ourselves and in the world and still say ‘Yes!’ to existence (Frankl, 2004; Levine, 2009). And, because woundedness helps break-down the subject/object divide, therapists who continue to creatively be with their own wounding, are able to hold the space for clients to do the same.

My naïve childhood Christian-esque belief in the human soul as inherently whole and only fragmented when impacted by external events has shifted towards a stance that re/imagines interwoven stars-and-scars as integral to the human condition. As Levine (2009) says: “We are wounded by our very
humanity” (p. 177). My experiences of wounding and healing suggest that healing from suffering is about weathering chaos until a new form emerges from the formlessness (Levine, 2009; Mølbak, 2013; Winnicott, 1977). The wounded/healer archetype implies that the ability to hold this delicate process is gained through personal experience of suffering and can only be partially taught to a therapist. In light of this, what disorder and fragmentation have I endured, and how do my experiences as arts therapist during the earthquakes reveal, contract away from and/or expand what I have learned from these life-events?
my wounding

I know my wounding was useful to me as therapist but, as I strive to make sense of my earthquake experiences, will it be useful to disclose in this research? I find support in Leggo (2008) who believes we need to share more life-stories as these “teach us how to live with more creativity, confidence, flexibility, coherence, imagination, and truthfulness” (p. 21). Yet I simultaneously risk that I may “intellectualise my dirty secrets, dishing them out as thrillingly abject pseudo-intimacies supporting a pseudo-recovery and pseudo-insights, performed cleverly on the page for my scholarly audience. I am that vain, that desperate to make some use of loss rather than just being with it” (Tamas, 2009, para. 17).

1971-1973

A protective cone of silence around my mother’s cancer isolates me. I’m responsible for the whole world, having caused my mother’s withdrawal from my disgusting surreptitiously cat-kissing and tadpole-murdering self, suppurating with a persistent, weeping eye-infection and crusted in justly-deserved warts and cold sores.

The Uses of Sorrow
(in my sleep I dreamed this poem)

Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand that this, too, was a gift.

(Oliver, 2006, p.52)
January 1996

My mother sits with her back straight, face grey under an oily sheen, hands clasped like white-knuckled claws. My father is clumsy and awkward on the couch opposite.

“It’s back.”

“The cancer.”

“I have lung cancer.”

She’s telling both me and herself.

I’m numb. I don’t (can’t) cry.

That night, back home a hundred kilometres away, I gorge on KFC and sob greasy tears because I’m lost in a welter of unfamiliar emotions. This time I know she’ll die. When she fought breast cancer she had two small children to battle for. Now, she rattles amongst the rough edges of a resentment-filled marriage, home empty except for his attempts at joviality and her silences.

My mother is 69, an Englishwoman etched into independence by the Second World War, strengthened in resolve by her fight to overcome an interrupted education and train as a nurse, armoured by gender politics that labelled emotion and vulnerability as weak, enticed by the wild freedom of the crazy Happy-Valley days on the Zambian mines, and then shackled into marriage and motherhood and a long, slow decline of autonomy, self-respect and will. She’s separated by a vast ocean from the estranged remnants of her birth-family, in a land that, even in 26 years, she’s never learned to call home: she abhors the racist culture, finds the South African humour brutish and the sexism stifling. She has few friends and little sense of self. She lives vicariously through me. I’m the only one for whom she can muster any fight.

And I’ve abdicated. I now have a man.
February 1996

The call comes as I’m running from the house to join friends at the climbing wall. It’s Friday afternoon and I’ve scrambled from work-clothes into ragged trakki-bottoms, shedding the weeks’ stresses in anticipation of a wild weekend at the crags.

My mother’s voice: “There’s been an accident.”

An icy surge roars through my belly and burns its way to my extremities, black spots leaping before my eyes.

I don’t (can’t) ask.

“Get $₦. Pack some clothes. Bring your toothbrush.” Her voice is thick, clamped down with rigid control lest it free itself in screaming.

“Is someone with you?” I ask.

I strangle the steering wheel for an hour, $₦ white-lipped in the passenger seat, fearing we’ll never reach our destination.

She holds her cancer-ridden body stiffly upright, bones pressing against parchment skin in her hollowed face. I hold her tight, shaking, and she tells me: “It’s the worst. It’s both of them.”

My father and brother have been shot.

Although dismantled two years ago, the boiling residues of apartheid still surge through the nation – the whites remain privileged while the majority of other races still live hand-to-mouth. Three such marked Dad and Derek as easy pickings during the Friday on-site pay session: it was my father’s habit to sit on a beer-crate and pay his building-crew cash from a cloth bank-bag.

Now, I’ve lost my father and she’s lost her husband. And Derek is fighting for his life on an operating table.
March 1996

We’re standing in the kitchen, aimless with heavy hands. I said goodbye to my father today in a sterile ceremony performed by a stranger amongst velvet curtains in a darkly oppressive crematorium chapel. Generic words of comfort were offered. A few, seldom-seen family-members shuffled uncomfortably from foot-to-foot.

Mom chose rather to stay in ICU with Derek, where, paralysed from the chest down, he’s struggling to breathe through fluid-filled lungs.

Now we’re in her home where everything is in its usual place and yet nothing is usual and never will be again. I’m trying to persuade her to have at least one bite of something, anything – but the chemotherapy has set fires in her belly.

Suddenly, a guttural moan and she’s bent over the counter, arms protective about her body. These are the first tears I’ve seen from her. Before her lies the opened post – something official, something showing her new status in black-and-white: widow.

Oh, Mom. My heart breaks so silently for you, locked in your British, stiff-upperlip, World War toughness. And I, product of your upbringing, a woman who has clamped tight her softer feelings, becoming masculine to compete in a man’s world ... how unfamiliar we both are with open emotional expression.

September 1996

Surrounded by vases of sweet-peas at my mother’s funeral, the stranger-priest infuriates me by distorting my words about her bravery into an adage about loneliness and how we must learn to let others in.

If only our culture of separation had not colluded so against us.
March 2001

The call comes as I’m leaving a fraught counselling session. He’s been threatening, I’ve been trying to intervene and losing myself in the process.

Again the icy hot surge. Again the wild drive – but this time just down the road and this time alone.

In the street are a police-van and ambulance, neighbours clustered, shiny-eyed with grim excitement. As I run up the driveway, someone calls, “What’s happened?” and the words, “I’m his wife ...” tumble out.

He’s on the floor, loose-limbed and grey, eyes fixed – their bright-blue dulled. The hacked rope’s still around his neck. His pants are soaked with pee in the tight airless room. Our bulldog, Wallace, sits at his head, slack face mournful. The friend that found him stands with heavy feet. The paramedics have hooked him to things that breathe and beep. I crouch on the cold floor and massage his stiff chilly fingers.

But I know he’s gone.

That first night, friends stay with me. I drug myself with sleeping tablets but wake at 4am and sit in the kitchen, scalding tears oozing from under the cool teabags I’ve placed on my eyes.

The following night I’m alone in the dark. I hang by my fingertips from the purple spiral-staircase, biting down deep howls, trying to convince my cells not to explode in every direction.

Dad is gone. Mom is gone. Derek is broken beyond repair.

And now He too is gone.

(Unclenching, July 2004)
These tales begin charting my ‘fragmented totality’ — maybe I can make-sens/e of myself “in terms of what’s broken down in me, what ruins have been left for me to play with and to use to build something new” (Levine, 2009, p. 172). These ruins were further fractured, tumbling into new patterns, during the Canterbury earthquakes and their aftermath.

October 2012

I’ve become fascinated by the Nippers. The city and our small town teem with them — lumbering yellow alien beasts with heavy rumbling bodies and long delicate necks ending in a fierce, many-toothed steel T-Rex head. Along with several other Lytteltonites I sit, coffee in hand, in the sun at Samo watching a huge Nipper unfold its graceful neck, reaching high up Shadbolt House. Despite my dislike of this view-blocker – the only structure towering over five storeys – I feel great sadness as it comes down. I recall, as relative new-comer to the port, sitting in the Volcano Community Radio studio on the fourth floor awash with a sense of disbelief that I was here, running a wee show on arts therapy while looking out at this spectacular view of the Port Hills heavy with spring-blossom beneath a wide blue sky.

Now the Nipper opens its voracious jaws and, spraying a stream of water to reduce dust, it carefully bites into the corner of the room where I sat so blissfully two years ago. A deep crunching squeal of distressed concrete and steel blunders over us at the coffee shop, as windows explode and a chunk of wall is prised free. The Nipper carries this segment of twisted metal and concrete daintily down to the ever-growing pile at the foot of the diminishing building.

I’m deeply moved by this eerie juxtaposition of brutality and care. The Nippers are beasts of demolition tearing apart our already ravaged world, like scavengers, like vultures ... and yet they’re doing it with such mindful and delicate apology that my heart breaks.

(Magpie-musings, January 2014)
"...a string of many strands...

The many strands within this next section on my embodiment of these wounding events mirror my waywardly fragmented experience of wounding. I periodically reintroduce a sens/e of direction through reminders that the following structure laces this discussion together.

I begin by:
• placing my engagement with trauma texts in context.

Then I explore how my wounding manifests as:
• fracturing references my embodiment of the psychological fragmentation, splitting and creation of alters that can result during intense suffering;
• over-stimulation explores the hyper-alert state of my being in response to stress and distress;
• numbing and running describes my use of avoidance in attempts to side-step suffering;
• re/living and re/stressing investigates how my experiences open me to re/experiencing distress; and
• martyrdom exposes my tendency to sacrifice myself to help others while secretly bartering for admiration in return.
my embodiment of these wounding events

It’s July 2013 – for several days the upper South Island has been shaken by earthquakes. The largest, a magnitude-6.5, was 19km deep and out in the Strait thus less devastating than our cacophony of shallow quakes. But I picture those affected, wide-eyed and restless awake at night waiting for the Big One … and in Christchurch it’s awoken outbreaks of ‘remember …’

... the days without power; queueing at the water trucks; repeatedly clearing liquefaction; backyard hole-in-the-ground toilets; night-upon-night of aftershocks and fearful wonderings; unable to wash properly or do laundry and then, when water was restored, having filthy silt and even pooh-water pour from the pipes; washing hastily afraid of being caught slippery-naked by a shake; keeping an emergency kit to hand; always carrying a large bag containing water and underwear and my MP3 radio and head-torch ...

Riding bareback on these memories, I re/experience the queasy mix of horror and elation I felt then. This invites me to face a knowing about myself: skulking within my wounded/healer psyche is my resultant partial addiction to tragedy. While in the thick of uncertainty and fear during and directly after each major tremor, I loathed the contraction of terror while simultaneously loving the centre-of-attention-ness, the urgency, the things-are-happening quality. These aren’t new appositions for me – I found myself hosting them after my parents died and again after Ṭ hung himself; while part of me recoiled in dismayed horror, another part strode forward, relishing the attention, demonstrating with dramatic flair how good she was at coping with trauma, she felt defined – given edges-and-shape-and heft by the misfortune of it all – and she was magnificent and she worked it. While this Crocodile-self rode the adrenalin as if it were cocaine, the rest of me flopped about stranded, soft-belly exposed, gulping for air, feeling everything I’d thus far learned about life was a tissue of lies.

(Magpie-musings, July 2013)

I have been repeatedly wrenched down my metaphoric kite-string into the liminal rubble-zone of wounding. The resultant scars, impaled into my soul, were foregrounded during the quakes and thus shaped my emergent work as therapist. Here I instigate conversations with residues of my hurt and in doing this I open my ‘box of darkness’ (Oliver, 2006) and model Jung (1953), Levine (2009) and Martin’s (2011) suggestion that therapists who continue to creatively be with their own wounding are better able to hold the space for clients to do the same.

placing my engagement with trauma texts in context

I leap into the air and swat at black-and-white winged-words dancing about my head. My Magpie has mutated, splintering into a multivocal myriad of multifarious malapropistic mammering Magpies!

These words won’t behave! I pant and wail to my dead mother. Like Levine, I’m feeling traumatised by trauma theory. I’ve written and re-written and once again re-written the trauma-stuff so many times I’m losing grip of my already marginal mind!
I feel my mother’s fleeting wry smile of solidarity as she watches the erratic flurry of dizzying dissonant vowels and consonants beating about my head. Drawing on her own misshapen experiences of trauma from the War and her bouts of cancer, she knows how I’m feeling.

So, I sigh and say to my hovering mother, I’ll try again.

But this time I’ll follow the suggestion by arts-based researchers, Ellis, Bochner, and Holmon Jones, and concentrate on texts that fit with my own embodied experiences – rather than try to fit my experiences to the texts! In this way I may be able to form a heart-beating and breathing, mutable and malleable living-philosophy of human suffering that is inclusive of the contradictions that come when working with real-live people rather than theoretical constructs.

Startled, I feel a pair of bony – yet strangely warm – feet land firmly upon my shoulder. I look sideways into a beady Magpie-eye. Around it still flit several iterations but the central bird is now more settled. My dead mother smiles and says: Ah, now there is your Magpie.

(Conversations with my dead mother, November 2014)

In this section I investigate the impact of my wounding experiences by cross-referencing my personal narratives with published texts. I concentrate on texts I resonate with (Ellis et al., 2004). I therefore favour words like ‘suffering’, ‘distress’ and ‘wounding’ and downplay the word ‘trauma’ as trauma has been appropriated by an array of different theories and approaches not all of which accord with my experiences. My embodied-wounding does, however, cross paths with some core meanings attributed to trauma and I magpie these texts in a post-postmodern way. This is visible in my tendency to rhizomatically (Deleuze, 1994) draw on trauma literature from both historical/cognitive/bio-medical and current/holistic/embodied and emergent/mindful/ensouled ways of thinking.

This eclecticism provoked anxiety during my research and I still feel vulnerable about confessing that I do not ground my therapy-practice in deep study of any one branch of established trauma theory. Rather my influences are multiplicit, sometimes contradictory and guided by my lived experiences of wounding/healing and my willingness to come present to the lived experiences of my clients.
To soothe my feelings of fraudulence, of flakiness, of flitting from one attractive theory to the next, I recall my delight at a science programme I watched avidly as a child. The presenters dramatically demonstrated how loo-paper – flimsy in the extreme as single sheets – becomes a rope strong enough to carry a man’s weight when plaited together. Maybe this how I create a robust kite-string, by braiding together rhizomatic-strands from many sources ...

(Magpie-musings, October 2015)

I spent too much time feeling ashamed of this ‘incursive nomadism’ (Turner, 1974) both during my quake-work and this inquiry. I disparagingly judged myself as the proverbial Jack-of-all-trades-but-master-of-none. Yet this dilettante-feeling usually melted away in sessions. When I brought my multiplicit-wounded/healed-embodied/ensouled-neophyte/shaman-self fully present with clients and we dropped into the transformatory power of the arts, this patchwork of text-derived knowledge simply became one resource among many.

Thankfully, my feelings of precariousness began to subside as I journeyed through this study and connected with theorist-practitioners who voice similar knowings to those I crafted experientially. I explored the influence of mindfulness on arts therapy and celebrated the emphasis on presence (McNiff, 2013; Rappaport, 2014a). My reading of van der Kolk (2014) and Peter Levine (2010) and workshops I attended by Harris (2013) and Malchiodi (2015) corroborated my use of a body-based approach to trauma. Yet while these body-first/bottom-up advocates supported my move away from top-down cognitive processing, the more-than of soul – essential to my quake-work – was not their primary concern. My emphasis on healing the soul-wounds inflicted by our context of enduring liminality was validated when I discovered Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy (Stephen Levine, 2009). Levine – philosopher, social scientist, artist, psychologist, and therapist – challenges prevailing conceptions of trauma which privilege cognition over imagination, emotion and embodiment. His stance offered a home for my focus on wounds wreaked upon the imagination by trauma. Within my farraginous approach to trauma texts, his voice thus resounds most consistently throughout this thesis.

fracturing

At the heart of my wounding lies my sense of being fractured. Herman (1992) identifies how traumatic experiences may result in the psyche splitting or creating alters. This speaks to Jung’s (1961) shadow which hosts aspects of self we have, in fear and loathing, exorcised. Levine’s (2009) critique of trauma theory goes a leap further. He states that much current theory is grounded in a Humanist Cartesian paradigm which presents the world as essentially ordered and human beings as fundamentally whole creatures capable of understanding and governing themselves and their world through rational thought. Within this framing, negative life experiences and traumatic events are intrusive foreign bodies that cause distress by fragmenting this centring. Levine (2009) wonders if this vision of the integrated self is a myth we invent to avoid the fragmented self. He voices his experience of life as multiple and contradictory, citing his inability to reconcile the Holocaust, 9/11 and various other disturbing contemporary events with a perception of the world and its human inhabitants as essentially ordered. Rather he harbours a sense of humanity congruent with my own – as intrinsically multiplicit and contradictory, caught in anxious finitude between birth and death, walking a tightrope between chaos and order, hope and despair – rendering a centred, integrated view of the human being illusory.
To embody these ideas, my animangel-alters answered my invitation to find form through art and gather around my Circle-of-Self. Without pathologising my so-called splitting, this allowed me to better understand some more troubling aspects of myself that may otherwise furtively bedevil my work as therapist. I have already introduced my familiars. The Cat and Crocodile were the first-responders, embodying characteristics traceable back into my childhood. My winged and rooted ‘Heart-shaped Soul’ grew into being as I trained to become a therapist. The Magpie and TeddyBear, Threshold Orphan and Wild-Child arrived to embody new understandings emerging during this research. The yearning-for-neat-edges part of me forged in the fires of my modernist upbringing wanted to present these figments as this or that, singular in their representation of either light or shade – but they rebelled. These are postmodern and post-postmodern liminal entities who, while locating themselves slightly more towards one or another side on a continuum between day and night, are capable of both and... more.

**over-stimulation**

Alongside fracturing, my wounding manifests as heightened sensory and affective sensitivity. In this research, these found concrete symbolic form. My reconection with the tadpole-murder; the repeated appearance in my sandtrays of two meercat; my Creative-Cat’s capacity to listen with her whole body; and my Crocodile’s insistence he have large, articulate, threat-detecting ears all express my hyper-vigilance.

![Figure 42 & 43. Vigilance symbols (Green, 2014)](image)

The hyper-arousal demonstrated by these symbols is one of four diagnostic indicators for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The medicalised labelling inherent in conferring a diagnosis of PTSD sits outside the ambit of my ensouled approach. Yet I wrote above about how my post-postmodern leanings manifest in this eclectic magpie-esque borrowing from all spheres of trauma literature. During the quakes I thus drew on whatever seemed appropriate to my client at the time. In this case, I partially-appropriated PTSD as a useful lens for exploring my own and clients’ reactions. I then overlapped this with Aron’s (2014) recently developed concept of
the Highly Sensitive Person (HSP). Many clients related to the HSP descriptions – for some this held true prior to and was exacerbated by the quakes, others felt their heightened sensitivity derived from their quake experiences.

I also saw echoes in clients of the various ways my own history of heightened-sensitivity manifested. Here I explore the effects of: over-stimulation in my body; in my mind; and in my soul.

**over-stimulation in my body**

I have noticed multiple ways my body responds to and holds stress – initially traceable to my loss-history, but now also arising in response to distress in clients. I struggle to separate thrilled excitement from terror, my confused body no longer distinguishing between adrenalin secreted in delighted anticipation and the adrenal-surge of raw fear. Kass and Trantham (2014) and Levine (2010) suggest if the fear-induced fight/flight/freeze response is repeatedly activated, the body defaults to this primitive survival-reaction. I link these reactions with my Crocodile animangel as the brain regions responsible for basic survival responses in life-threatening situations have close correlations with the primitive reptilian brain (Godin, 2010). My reaction to (perceived) threat manifests in eye tics and contorting facial muscles; my body thums, buzzing electrically, my heartbeat in every extremity; I flush hot and sweat cold; and although it has settled considerably, my gut complained strenuously for several years after each loss. And then, of course, there were the sleep disruptions.

Another body-tell indicating my proximity to something strong and difficult is, for me, the most compelling. Now vastly reduced, when I first began practising quake-arts therapy, I felt hypothermic, frozen in deep shuddering waves that radiated from my core.

![Figure 44. 'Bound' (Green, October 2013)](image)

*I feel into this now, wondering about its connection with my tendency toward contraction – fearing clients and/or I would fall apart, I pulled towards the opposite extreme of compression. I imagine this contraction tightening until it freezes, tucking itself into itself again-and-again to get away from the heat of real-live feelings, my own scarred and stunted emotionality creating a black-hole, an icy vortex of dark matter heavier-than-heavy and colder than liquid-nitrogen, birthing my Threshold Orphan.*

*(Magpie-musings, September 2013)*

I now know to sit with these multifarious difficult sensations when they arrive during sessions. I quietly wonder what my body is sensing and ask these sensations: Are you wholly mine? Are you something generated by the intersubjective space evolving between the client and me? Or are you an empathetic embodiment something projected from my client? This may happen in the silent halls of my imagination, but I have learned that opening this conversation – using words and/or art – may help the client become aware of her own dis/embodied responses.
over-stimulation in my mind

My quake-woundedness seemed to privilege my survival-orientated lizard brain regions over my so-called higher logical thought, problem-solving, reading and language processes (Godin, 2010; Kass & Trantham, 2014). This numbing of the frontal cortex – that many of us Cantabrians called ‘mental liquefaction’ – is well documented in those struggling with trauma (Kass & Trantham, 2014; Malchiodi, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014). Most child-clients were identified by their parents as struggling with various negative cognitive changes and many adult-clients complained of poor focus, forgetfulness, rumination and obsessive thinking.

My own cognitive-compromise challenged my practice – while still able to access knowledge deeply patterned through years of hands-on experience in the related fields of community drama, education and development, I struggled to read and absorb new learning about trauma therapy. As beginner with so much yet to learn, I felt compelled to read further …

... yet, while I was pointy and dark-ringed from ragged sleep and nightly was woken if not by quakes themselves then by dreams of quakes or fear of quakes, when I walked the middle of streets to avoid high cornices that may fall and watched the Bays for tsunami-infused risings – I was crap at reading. My reptilian-brain had little use for the small page-bound black and white squiggles that make meaning blossom in my higher-brain. My mental-reptile was crouched, ready for flight at the slightest rumble, haunches aquiver, hungrily drawing energy away from higher brain functions. This Crocodile-in-the-back-of-the-cave me needed action, he wasn’t good at concentrating or being still.

(Magpie-musings, October 2013)

Plus, our libraries colluded with the lizard-in-my-head. Local libraries were broken and barred or inside the red zone. Large sections of the city were deemed unsafe and thus were red-zoned and many buildings were red-stickered after the quakes. This meant they were cordoned off and only accessible to emergency and construction/demolition personnel. In addition, the only comprehensive arts therapy library was in Auckland, and from within the quake-zone this felt like another planet! So I turned up the intuitive dial in my gut-sense, dug deep into reserves of past-learning, opened myself to what was happening here-and-now, and got on with beginning where I was, using what I had and doing what I could.

Figure 45. Red Sticker (Green, August 2011)
To be honest, I say to my dead mother, this degradation of my reading-concentration goes further back. I used to be quite the reader. Remember how weekends found you and me, warm with unspoken intimacy, ensconced in large armchairs nestled deep in books. Finding the messiness of real-time warm-blooded emotion challenging, we used shared literature as a way to connect. You even died with your hand on a book. ‘Reading by osmosis,’ I called it.

And since that day I’ve found my love of reading compromised. As I commit these thoughts to words a deep burning scuffs my throat, these almost-tears suggesting in this sorrow, in my past losses, lies a knowing about myself, about my desire-for and struggle-with the soft-edged-ness of emotion, my ambivalent relationship with reading now I can’t do it in the safety of your couch with you opposite ... an anticipatory knowing both stimulating and fearful that this research journey is carrying me deep into the bowels of my own historical grapple with suffering.

(Conversations with my dead mother, May 2013)

over-stimulation in my soul

My heightened sensitivity further manifests in existential dread. My soul and body leap to envisage hurt, experiencing imagined harm physically. Confronted with situations that may cause bodily harm, I felt this winding even if unscathed. For example, for years post-quake I struggled to rock-climb, jangled by my imagined rock-breaking, body-falling, flesh-and-bone crushing sensations. I am only now playing again (with fierce releasing joy) on our quake-altered crags.

numbing and running

A third characteristic of my wounding is numbing and/or avoidance — also a feature borrowed from PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). My over-sensitive and hyper-alert psyche often tries to cope by deadening and/or running-from situations and thoughts that may trigger distressing sensations and memories. In the short-term, this may be protective — like liminal hybrid-beings, most of the scars/stars I have earned intermesh light and shadow. This trait of retracting from pain can be defensive, avoidant and/or healing — depending on context and timing. For me and several clients this avoidance, however, became entrenched as it colluded with an upbringing that valued toughness and a ‘harden-up’ attitude. Our persistent knee-jerk use of numbing/avoidance as a coping-strategy resulted in thoughts, feelings, sensations, and experiences staying in shadow and thus retaining their power to furtively disrupt and erupt (Jung, 1981).

My mother’s voice, unwelcoming of emotional displays, flat-lines in my mind: ‘Don’t use that tone with me, my girl’. Such formative experiences helped entrench my problematic numbing/running responses. Below, I describe several ways I embody these numbing/running responses by: Refusing to be with pain; minimising suffering; busyness; diverting focus onto healing others; and my tendency towards control and contraction.
numbing/running by refusing to be with pain

Tim, the psychologist who helped me survive my’s death, frequently referred to my inability to ‘sit in the shit’ and be with the tragedy invading my life. I refused to stay close to difficult emotions, re/imagining them as humorous or silver-lined. In my MAAT dissertation (Green, 2010), I used an evocative dream as creative-goad – birthing a symbol foreshadowing this research.

Despite great dread, in the dream I’m compelled to descend into a dim basement. A large chest-freezer hums within a green aura. In this icy box, I discover a frozen heart. The heart is puckered and torn.

It’s my heart.

A knowing blossoms that it was placed there by the Crocodile.

Part of me wishes to rescue my heart, to drag it out into the sunlight. But I know this heart was put here for protection and so needs gentle rewarming. The best I can do is prop the freezer door open so that my heart can begin to breathe and slowly defrost.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, October 2014)

Revisiting the profound impact of this dream, I see it foretold my need to learn to stay present in the dank bat-cave of difficult stuff. This ability to be present to troubling sensations is identified as central to many therapeutic processes (Levine, 2009; Martin, 2011; Rappaport, 2014b). Hurrying away from unpleasant sensations in myself and others may be as counter-therapeutic as staying locked in these places – akin to the (somewhat misguided) intention of some trauma therapies to try and put everything into words believing things that stay buried remain unprocessed (Başoğlu, 1992).

numbing/running by minimising suffering

Mom, I say to my dead mother, when I look back through my quake experiences, why don’t I feel like I’ve worked with any real trauma?

We sit quietly with this thought.

Maybe I have, I eventually concede. I must’ve! If I do a mental audit of my clients, many were very distressed and embroiled in emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual troubles. And some sessions were deeply emotional.

So why does my memory mute the suffering?
A therapist-friend regularly Facebooks how her clients breakdown/yell/throw things. Don’t I allow my clients to express their anguish? Am I doing my own version of ‘Don’t use that tone with me’ to dampen expression? Or do I absorb it so well that it feels normal? Am I so familiar with distress that it has to be really severe to move me?

Or is real trauma deeper, duller, more insidious and ongoing than Hollywood trauma?

Am I comparing my experiences with some fictitious melodramatic doppelgänger of anguish?

Incorporating maybe my own trauma-touchstone – my dramatic finger-tip-hang from the spiral stairs to keep my body from flying apart.

And can real everyday, lived-trauma perhaps not be more grinding and grating and slow and semi-invisible?

(Conversations with my dead mother, June 2013).

Numbing/running through busyness

I shared with clients for whom the quakes re-awakened pre-existing pain a worry about unleashing the chaos of our feelings. We drowned in clichés, doubting our ability to ‘keep it together’ if we ‘let it all out’, dreading that releasing the untamed monsters within would ‘tip us over the edge’ and we would ‘unhinge’ and ‘fall apart’.

Many clients began therapy in a state of overwhelm. They were using busyness as avoidance and, just as I discovered, this soon became onerous as threads unravelled or ravelled too tight. When we dropped-into this busyness, we often encountered a disjuncture. Yearning for greater spaciousness – to think, breathe, notice, feel without rushing through, notice and be noticed – vied with the opposing drive to stay occupied. This desire for breathing-space went hand-in-hand with two responses. Fear that openness would instigate an invasion of threatening thoughts and sensations and/or terror this space would echo as emptiness, revealing our little lives as meaningless.
My Threshold Orphan and Wild-Child are (dis)appearing regularly in my clay-creations and I contemplate the different inner sensations they awaken. My Wild-Child sculpts into being not only obvious playfully beginner-minded aspects of self, but also my use of busyness to avoid pain. The Threshold Orphan leans in the opposite direction, symbolising contraction and numbing, pulling away and closing-up.

I follow these threads to see where they may lead ...

Dropping into my childhood to scan memories of myself, I encounter a child with an electric wire in her soul. I was a busy little person with a voice ‘like a tin-whistle’, ‘like a foghorn’ my mother would cry, shaking her head. At school I commanded attention, a bossy-boots fountaining with ideas, poo-poohing the seated girls to play stingers and marbles in the playground with a grubby gang of little boys. At home during the day I dashed about the garden, climbed trees, hung upside-down from the elaborate jungle-gym my father constructed, leaped high on the trampoline, swam squealing in the deep pool, created extravagant scenes with my army of soft toys, built forts from banana leaves and sticks, threw stones, made up songs and plays and dances, designed ornate costumes, collected frogs and tadpoles and spiders, drew horses and created board games, cut my own hair, refused to wear a conventional bathing-suit preferring knickers-only for maximum freedom.

At night, my lively imagination that basked out-loud in the sunlight would turn dark and surly, beset by terrifying shadow-creatures with claws and fangs and hot foetid breath. Tucked in bed among my carefully arranged farrago of fuzzy friends, I’d struggle to sleep, suffocated by the surging tide of fantasy-fed terrors pushing in from the sinister corners of my mind. Most nights, I’d startle awake feeling myself contracted tight in abject fear, cold to the core yet sweating, too terrified to move, eyes sliding from the window to the door and back again.

Finally, gathering my courage, ‘Daddy!’ I’d whisper urgently. ‘Daddy!’ investing this hiss desperate carrying-power. I’d hear my father, alert to my lightest call, grunt awake. The hot tide of dread would pause as his rumbles were joined by creaking springs when he heaved his legs over the edge of the bed. I’d pour myself into my ears, reaching down the corridor and into his room, willing him to hurry as his feet thumped to the floor and with another grunt he hefted his sleep-clogged body upright. The sound of his footfalls down the corridor as he plodded to my rescue were the magical glue keeping my childhood together.

As I write into being my new appreciation for this sound-of-rescue, this clarion-call that I’m not alone in the darkness, I feel another memory sidle in. Another footfalls-of-my-father memory… but this time heralding no rescue at his arrival.

The morning after he was killed. I awake choking on tears from a dream in which I hear his stamping feet, shedding building-site mud, approaching the front door.

I run to greet him – ‘They told me you were dead!’

‘They were wrong!’ – He replies, enveloping me in a bear-hug.
This wealth of relief and delight, a massive amplification of my childhood waiting while he trundled to soothe my night-terrors, explodes into shards as I awake and the boundary between liminal dream and real-life congeals again.

But I was exploring numbing and avoidance — constructing a narrative linking my innate pulling-away with my high level of activity and arousal as a child. This busyness carried me through the tumult of university and various careers, allowing me to sidestep many difficult emotional responses by throwing myself deeply into work, rehearsals, meetings, committees, social gatherings.

Yet every weekend I returned home to be with my parents.

Perhaps, in the same way my childhood daily brightness was sustainable because my father remained ever-ready to stump to my rescue at night, my adult daily achievements were sustained by my regular return to my status as child in the safety of my parents’ home.

When my parents died, I got very VERY busy, multiplying my achievements to keep at bay the deeply distressing and newly emergent realisation that, when frozen in terror, never again could I call out in a hoarse whisper and evoke the awakening grunt and footfalls of my rescuing father ...

... and although I know m was unfailingly by my side throughout these losses, I’ve little recall of this ...

... maybe because he wasn’t my father, even though he held me at night and brought me tea each morning ...

... but I recall myself as resoundingly alone ...

Stop

I ache at this memory. It’s a thick-but-hollow cave dropping down into the centre of my being making breath difficult. This throbbing evokes sadness for the me who thrashed her way blindly through this time. But I also ache for m, trying his very best for me while battling his own demons. How difficult I must have been, busy and perfect during the day and mean and selfish and grief-stricken at night. My very exclusion of him from my memories speaks loudly of my spiralling in, my clenched self-obsession.

As that year closed, I remember us lying in the dark, feeling bitter with each other about something. He says to me, “I’m tired of being your whipping-boy.” I’m outraged! How can he be so insensitive! Doesn’t he know how I’m suffering! Who is he to tell me of his pain, when I’m torn apart by my loss!
Yet now, as the ugly colours of this conversation ooze within my chest, I feel so wretched. I can only apologise to his spectre for my tightness, for my singular narcissistic vision that simultaneously excluded him and used him as a scratching-post on which I vented my frustrations and fears. He did in so many ways step in to the large and vacant spaces left by my father and mother.

And I rewarded him with anger and bitterness.

I’m opening and softening as I write this – I imagine my Wild-Child and Threshold Orphan pausing – one ceasing her hurrying, the other her pulling-away. For a moment they breathe together and their eyes meet.

I gently own the shame of never having acknowledged it fully.

“I’m sorry and thank you,” I whisper in the still halls of my imagination. “Please forgive me for my innate busyness and clenching and numbing-against and running-away-from.”

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, July 2014)
Numbing/running by healing others first

At a psychodrama workshop in 2012, I stumbled onto a vital insight. The Akaroa setting was spectacular, enlivening deep parts of me. Each morning at dawn, I fled the close confines of the marae-style sleeping arrangements* and walked up along the volcanic crater forming the Banks Peninsula. From the vantage of Purple Mountain I gazed down on azure bays in either direction – the harbour in the crater’s centre sheltered boats while on the other side the wide-wild-Pacific Ocean basked. These rambling mornings helped me meditate on aspects of myself birthed or nudged to the fore during the quakes and re/energised in reaction to the psychodrama sessions.

Renewed dialogue with my mother took centre-stage. I had been neglecting her – our dedicated conversations culminating in Unclenching, written to her while I lived in Scotland in 2004/5, had slowed. My Masters’ dissertation had drawn deeply on my father’s memory – specifically The Crocodile Story he told Derek and I repeatedly during our childhood (Green, 2010). In addition, when I began working with children in 2011, I channelled my father’s playfulness and ‘Yes!’ attitude. Being obliged, however, to sleep in one room with eight others, drew from me a mother-based reaction. My mother was a fiercely solitary individual from whom I inherited and learned many introvert characteristics. I thus found myself contemplating her life, calling to memory the few morsels of knowledge I have, rolling them about to see if I could draw any more nourishment from their sparse bones. As self-orientated child and young adult, I did not ask her to fill the many gaps in the few tales she shared about her life before children. And the focus on family during the workshops confronted me with how very tiny and fuzzy is my collection of mother-stories. As I gnawed at this realisation, a thin narrative sinew about her War years was plucked in my mind. It remained taut and vibrating as I walked into and out of the hills each morning.

On the final day, we were instructed to offer a significant childhood story for psycho-dramatic enactment. While others presented snippets of beloved childhood books, I waged an internal war between mother- and father-stories. The Crocodile Story is delightfully loud and would keep me in safe territory. My mother’s wee yarn, in contrast, is spider-web translucence framing large gaps. I admonished myself: be brave and dive into the unknown! As I began I realised I did not wish this tale enacted – I simply wanted to speak it for the first time ever, have my telling witnessed and leave it there. I asked for this space and my request was granted.

This is the tale I told:

*My mother was born in 1926 and raised in Cockney London where her father owned a small grocery store. She was 13-years-old when the Second World War erupted and, like many city-children, she and her younger brother, Derek, were evacuated to the countryside. A born-and-bred Londoner, my mother was unimpressed with this state of affairs. She and Derek were separated and ...*

*At this point my recollection of details runs low – I’m unsure if my mother told me and I’ve forgotten, or if this part was never fully explained – so I’m uncertain of exactly where they were sent, how far apart they were, how long they were there for, if and how they*

*The Māori marae is a meeting-house in which participants gather, often for several days and nights, to be together around specific issues. At night, mattresses are pulled into the communal space and everyone sleeps within reach.*
communicated, or if they were treated badly ... but the upshot is that my mother decided she needed to rescue her little brother and bring them both back to London. Again, my details are hazy, I just remember her telling me she collected him and they caught a train to London and she refused to leave again.

I finished with tightness in my chest, vast sadness shaped of holes and not-knowings, opportunities and stories lost and parts of loved ones lost along with them. As I honoured this inner burning, I realised I was being spoken at. Around me the group was gathering to enact my scanty tale... and in the thick of my funk I did not stop them. Flaccid and compliant, I found myself enrolled as my mother and then as her little brother, feigning a fear I did not know he had felt, creating activities to fill the gaps: dramatic missives sent secretly to-and-fro, a daring night-time escape from a high window, a dashing skulk onto a passing train. To protect myself and the meagre threads of this treasured tale – now even more tenuous under the plucking of clumsy fingers – I retreated into acting, farcical make-believe. Pulling the mask of my father the raconteur, of my inner Crocodile and Wild-Child, up over the raw face of my introverted mother, my soft-bellied Cat and mute Threshold Orphan. I thus turned this tender, naked, little whisper of my mother’s past into a derring-do girl’s-own adventure tale.

Later, untangling the snares and barbs of this experience, I wondered why this tale had surfaced. An answer winged in – it seems the pattern woven into this event weaves throughout my earthquake story: the practice of helping others to help oneself – an essential characteristic of the wounded/healer and orphan archetypes. My mother yearned to return to London, but perhaps did not feel permitted to act upon this urge for herself alone and so projected this onto another to give herself consent.

Taylor et al., (2000) frame this as the female ‘tend and befriend’ trauma response, while Burt (2012b) grounds her postmodern arts therapy in the sociological construct that women are raised to place others first. Does this tend-and-befriend/others-first tendency, evident in my mother, infuse my earthquake story? Rather than address my own quake-raked mud-and-nettles, did I symbolically rescue-my-little-brother-in-order-to-rescue-myself by tending other’s wounds?

These questions became keen burrs in my being and I harried them, fuelled by deep-seated dis/ease at their attendant ethical issues. My earlier training as HIV/AIDS counsellor and aspects of my arts therapy education implied emotionally engaged therapists may try to salve their own wounds via their clients, causing more hurt than healing. And my professional guidelines are clear about setting and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, emphasising the need to avoid situations that compromise objectivity (ANZATA, n.d).
Numbing/running by contracting, clenching and controlling

On the day my father died, you called. In a thickly controlled tone you simply said: “There’s been an accident”.

No further details.

I was too terrified to ask, contracting away from knowing.

My memories of this day are patch-worked from garish frozen tableaux, my imagination stitching in the gaps. I picture myself sitting at the top of the dark stairway where the plastic phone was plugged. Below me, the ugly brown synthetic-carpeted steps melt suddenly into a vertiginous abyss. Hastily I pull myself back, a steely hand contracted around my heart.

I stagger about packing a bag. You’d said: “Bring a toothbrush”. You’d also said: “Bring ₯”. I decipher: this is serious. We’ll be there for some time.

Later, in your home, I find scribbles next to your phone. You’ve written several misspelled versions of the name of ₯’s work. I realise you tried to call him first – so he could break the news to me in person – but you’d failed. So you battled-on for the hours that ached between the shooting at 1.30 and reaching me after 5.00.

I struggle to breathe, imagining you during this interminable wait. Chemotherapy eating acid through your veins. Nausea churning in your belly. Yearning to be at Derek’s hospital bedside. I ache with unshed tears and my throat is sandpaper-hot as this memory calls into being your simultaneous frailty and strength, my Courageous Dead Mother. How much you must have contracted and clamped down and pulled-in to cope through those ragged hours. And then again through the hour-and-a-half from reaching me to my arrival when you’d have to speak the words aloud. How you must have steeled yourself, told yourself sternly: ‘Don’t fall apart! Keep it together!’

I wouldn’t let ₯ drive. I needed the focus and control of something to do. Knuckles white on the steering wheel. Keeping the car from smashing off the road to become a tangled mass of upended metal and plastic, tires spinning. Once only during this endless trek that took no time at all did I shudder towards fragmenting. I push away thoughts of what I’m travelling towards but they sidle in and I’m saying, ‘What if it’s both of them, both Dad and Derek?’ I feel myself temporarily lose it and begin to flap free, washing shedding pegs in the first gusts of an impending hurricane. My breath goes. My throat clams tight. ₯’s hot hand tightens on my thigh. With a mental wrench I yank washing from the line, retreat inside and batten down hatches, re-clasp hinges and snick padlocks until I’m tight, mouse-still, compressed safely within.

Even now as I write, compression and contraction attempt to take over – I yearn to speed through, stalk quickly round the jagged edges of these key events that shaped and coloured my woundedness and my wisdom. Do I fear that sitting with them will open me to the dispersal I so dread?
... I slide sideways, momentarily reconnecting with an image that arrived during the quakes. A fight with depression and anxiety painted as a contracted bellyful of toxic black spores, clamped tight. Should these escape, they would become a seething pestilent plague of biblical proportions ...

I connect with this fear and contemplate new dimensions. Do these memories I’m tempted to scud past hold hints of emotional work undone and qualms that doing this work will be toxic and fragmenting? Am I frightened of again being in that place of pain? Do I fear my unleashed emotions will lash-out at others? Is this simply the natural reaction of the hand that, once burned, jerks back from the flame?

Like your hands that, after you died, began to haunt me – making me aware that I counter chaos, not with order, but with contraction, clenching and control. You always held each hand protectively clenched when they weren’t busy, often hiding your thumbs in your palms and wrapping your fists about these secretive naked digits. These memories awoke because I’d begun to do the same. ḡ would take my fist and gently open my hand so that he could hold it.

When he died, I felt his absence in how my hands stayed clenched.

I revisit your clenching and match it to my own. Two women struggling, closed to others and to their own emotions, holding tight, hiding, tense, afraid ... but putting on a strong front.

(Conversations with my dead mother, March 2013)

Contraction and control – powerfully reactive forms of avoidance and numbing – were evident in me and many clients. Evans (2013) identified a ‘contraction and dispersal’ response in the women participating in her research exploring arts therapy for earthquake stress. Some presented their stress as a sense of things falling apart, bits falling off and becoming lost, such as clay fragmenting into amoebic shapes. Others spoke, danced and created images of tautness, things pulling in so tight they constricted movement to a breathless minimum.

I’m chatting about contraction and dispersal with my Threshold Orphan (or rather, with the space she’s vacated in her determined avoidance) and feel in my body the paradoxical syzygy of these opposing states.

Enveloped in a threatening situation, I initially feel a rush of dispersal like my glue has melted and the bits that make up me –

  my cells and sinews,
  my thoughts,
  beliefs and hopes,
  my feelings –

are about to spin off into space, tearing me apart, leaving behind little but a vapid, vacuous and spent pelt.
I instinctively counter this by contracting – I seize control and constrict into my Threshold Orphan. What opens, expands, softens, loosens and makes me flexible

– but vulnerable –

tightens in fear, clamping my muscles, shortening my breath and tucking my head turtle-like into the shelter of my hunched shoulders.

Creativity and imagination are crunched and compressed, battering their tattered feathers against the unforgiving airless cell wrapped about with thorns and barbed-wire, narrowing thought and banishing ascendance.

I then continue this control in various forms to maintain this contraction as armour against any further incursions of falling-apartness.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, June 2014)

My contraction and clenching carried an inward focus, but my controlling travels both ways. (I frame this trait in the present-tense intentionally as my predisposition towards control feels furtively alive.) A telling realisation arrived courtesy of Levine’s (2009) words: ‘chaos and order’.

Order rather than control.

Upon contemplation, I realised I distrust order, it feels unreliable and pallid in the face of chaos. Order calls to mind natural processes that, to my imagining, buckle when confronted by the power of chaos. I arrogantly intervene to help this rather sallow order with a little wilful human control! I attempt to exert control over myself, others within my ambit, and the world about us in numerous ways, some blatant and others barely discernible. These all appear aimed at forcing the fractured spinning of my world to slow, settle down ...

s:t:o:p.
Two months before \( \varnothing \)’s death we were struggling and, stress scrambling my bowels and appetite, I began dropping weight. After \( \varnothing \) died, I came to like the lean-feeling, the new slimmer body I inhabited, the contrast between my frail appearance and anxiety-driven increased strength when I climbed and biked. I relished the gnawing knot-of-hunger nestling in my belly.

It resonated with the hot-nothingness I feared lay at the centre of life.

It felt steady, predictable, mine. In the fluctuating maelstrom of feelings and thoughts, it seemed the only thing I could control. And so, I both rewarded and punished myself by holding onto this burning fist-of-hunger by controlling what I ate.

Finally I was only eating popcorn for dinner and would become emotionally distraught if I was obliged to stray from this obsessive monastic practice.

I did this for three years.

I would eat my popcorn slowly, a kernel-by-kernel meditation, often taking more than an hour to consume my dinner. During this time, I felt strangely peaceful.

(\textit{Diary of the Threshold Orphan, June 2013})

\textbf{Re/living/re/stressing}

Holy shit! Mom! I wail inside the cluttered halls of my mind. Why’s this so fucking hard? The section on play bounced out of me. This section on the wounded/healer is staggering, trudging, crawling on bloodied stumps through fog and bog and foetid slime!!

I feel my mother raise an ironic eyebrow: You’re a wounded/healer. Playfulness is a manifestation of your healing. No wonder it bubbled forth. This section sits on the other side of the /slash/ and drops you into the dark bat-cave of your wounding.

I feel tears thicken my breath. My belly’s on fire and flames lick up the back of my throat. Why am I doing this? I ask. Why the fuck will anyone want to read this crap? And it’s unhinging me in the process!

My mother stays with me in silence as I rant.

Deborah Green, 2010, \textit{Conversations with my dead mother} [Oil on canvas 45cmx35cm]. Artist’s collection.
Finally, energy spent, I calm. I breathe and begin the slow process of thinking my way through the rubble. Of course it’ll be difficult to re/visit and re/experience the events that harmed me, to re/member myself and my wounds. It’s predictable that the journey itself will mirror the terrain I’m covering – writing about playfulness will feel light and dancing-kite-alive, while finding words and colours and shapes for wounds/scars/avoidance/terror/abandonment/helplessness will evoke all of these broken-in-the-rubble feelings. And that these resurrected zombie-sensations will congeal about my wheels, lay boulders across my path, pluck and singe my wings, blast through my tracks, and rot holes through my keel.

(Conversations with my dead mother, August 2014)

Survivors often experience unexpected intrusive surfacing of sensory and affective memories of a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Such invasions may occur in dreams and/or during waking flashbacks, and may be triggered by stimuli directly associated with the primary stressor and/or by situations that seem unrelated. These intrusions are often shocking and frightening, leading to re/traumatisation. I fortunately have experienced few moments of overwhelming intrusion. Most of my re/experiencing has been bearable, allowing me to befriend (or at least develop tolerance for) these memories and poetically transform their sharp edges or sludgy undercurrents.

Alongside my choice during this inquiry to re-experience my wounded-self (thereby challenging my tendency to numb and avoid), two further aspects of re-visiting seem relevant. The rhizomatic nature of distress was manifest in how the quakes reopened old wounds, and repeated distressing events have heightened my sense of fragility and wariness, leaving me hyper-vigilant – suggesting over-stimulation and re/living are interactive.

cycles of re/living/re/stressing when past and present collide

I died in March 2001, almost 10 years before the quakes began in September 2010. These intervening years have contained ongoing uncertainty and adjustment rather than trauma. I remarried and then migrated several times – from South Africa to Scotland, England, Australia, and finally to New Zealand, where we lived in Auckland and Cambridge, before settling in Lyttelton, Christchurch, (2008). Repeatedly leaving familiar places and people afforded me opportunities to dismantle some calcified notions of myself. No longer subject to the preconceptions of others who felt they knew me, I could re/imagine myself. In Scotland, I allowed myself an intense period of re/living while writing Unclenching, a rambling missive in response to my mother’s final words to me the night she died.

Figure 49. ‘Journeys’ (Green, May 2013)
You haven’t been awake for days.

I sit with you. I’m clumsy and fat with unshed tears. Words clot in my mouth. You’re a bundle of desiccated twigs beneath the sheet. Your breath rattles. Between each breath I endure long pauses.

Suddenly, something in you brightens and you turn your gaunt face towards me. Your eyes have already crossed over and stay hidden behind their sunken lids. But you’re looking at me nonetheless.

“Tell me about your future,” you say.

(Unclenching, July 2004)

I spent my Scottish year pouring out my distress and anger. The typed page became my sanctuary, as I revisited and committed to words a jumble of experiences. I wrote about my mother’s cancer, my father and brother’s attack, my mother’s death, my rocky relationship with Ŧ, his death, and about my fledgling life with ∆. These ruminations allowed me to express the deep anger and hard-done-by-ness I dared not voice in public least I tarnish my façade as gracious-griever.

While not fully achieving the intentions embedded in this manuscript’s title, I did begin loosening and opening. This green gentleness and flexibility towards myself continued as, in New Zealand, I studied arts therapy. Then, during my final year, Christchurch erupted with earthquakes. Embodied memories of my previous wounds awoke and jostled alongside the very present stress and distress caused by ongoing aftershocks, demolitions, road-works, school and work closures, and suchlike. And a similar re/traumatisation was alive in my clients. Many did not come to work through their quake trauma directly, using the sessions instead to address older wounds and/or pre-existing disorders and conditions re/gouged by the quakes.

I thus became intimate with the cyclical and rhizomatic nature of stress and suffering. During this period, three further distressing events raked at me – within my immediate family depression, cancer and near-death through septicaemia struck. During these harrowing events, we remarked upon our fragility. We wondered if we had been worn down by the seemingly never-ending mishaps that cycled through our family, or if age was sloughing-off some of the resilience youth had gifted us, or if inhabiting countries that required less emotional armouring than South Africa had thinned our skin. And yet, while I was more deeply present to the pain of these travails, I was also better-able to gently and compassionately nurture myself through the desperate moments, emerging larger and kinder.

As I re/search my quake-work, I notice I have drawn on two interacting aspects of my own experiencing and re/experiencing of wounding. My suffering opens me to connect with the despair of others. More crucially, however, just as I re/live hurt, I also relive healing and reaffirm the bright buoyancy of my soul. In this way I continually strive to bless and transform my hurt into tragic wisdom (Levine, 2009) – inviting clients to believe they, too, may recreate themselves as richer and more robust.
Re/living/re/stressing as anticipatory grief

My re/experiencing also manifests as imagined pre/experiencing – a feeling of impending doom akin to the anticipatory grief suffered by terminal patients and those close to them (University of Rochester, 2015). My pre/living has thankfully grown less pronounced over the years, but still insinuates itself unexpectedly: Suddenly I glimpse, masking the faces of those I hold dear, the death-mask they will become and I am awash with tumbling loss. Spiked with a tinge of relief. Grief for the cavity they will leave. But relief also, as I sometimes struggle with close personal relationships, never fully at ease within their intimacy and often finding them draining and indecipherable. So their removal would mean inner quiet – the lonely, contracted quiet of my Threshold Orphan, but quiet none-the-less.

I contemplate my 2013 diary. The Year Planner shows no circled birthdays or other joyous occasions – just crosses marking deaths and woundings:

Dad  Derek  m  Mom  Sebastian

I follow this shadow, allowing thoughts of sessions, of conversations with friends, even of my essay-marking style, to surface. I seem keenly attuned to the darker, difficult and not-so-successful. This weaves thematically through my approach to all. Even when I climb or ride or fly, I’m more alert to possible harm than to success.

A stain woven into the fabric of my everyday breath, Rappaport’s ‘wallpaper feeling’, an always-there lining-to-my-soul.

And how does this shape my practice? The immediate (or most current) answer is this tendency motivates my interest in messiness, in helping people identify/express/befriend the difficult bits-of-self; the orphaned and fractured shards and feelings, situations and events that we often disown, hide, banish, try to destroy or solve-away. My core philosophy seems to suggest if we can invite these parts into a Circle-of-Self to be conversed-with and accepted, our tolerance for their wounding grows, weakening their surreptitious power to govern our thoughts, feelings and reactions as they no longer need to insistently screech and moan from the darkness.

This allows us to feel less fractured and torn, bullied and shamed.

It’s a blessing of the wounds rather than a fictitious cure.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, March 2013)
martyrdom

chilly dark mornings + head-torch + scraping up runny-poos from baby bulldog with IBS = clear pathway for clients from gate to studio (a small client still sings-out in delight how she walks through a ‘wall of flies’…)

chilly dark nights + lying in the bath exhausted after wall-to-wall clients (dreaming daddy will gather me floppy from the water, and carry me – wrapped in a large towel, head bobbing against shoulder – to my warm bed) + making step-by-step-lists from here to bed = 1. Get up 2. Wrap towel 3. Pull plug 4. Step from bath …

(Magpie-musings, January 2015)

Burt (2012b) believes while both sexes initially develop a sense of self-in-relation, socialisation discourages this early in boys while continuing to encourage it in girls. Women thus often suffer guilt when claiming attention for themselves – even from themselves – and lack self-empathy because they are conditioned to address others’ needs first.

I have acknowledged this characteristic by evoking my Orphan and my mother’s War-time rescue story-silver. Yet, gazing into this trait’s shadow, I spy ways I subvert it, illicitly claiming attention for myself by playing the stoic martyr and attaching implicit pricetags to my interactions with others. This thorny strand woven into my psyche was foregrounded by Oriah Mountain Dreamer’s (personal communication, May 2013) suggestion that resentment can arise when giving involves a secret or largely unconscious deal. It is difficult for receivers to reciprocate when we offer them something in the clandestine hope we will be loved, appreciated or rewarded for giving. Pondering how, as a woman potentially socialised (Burt, 2012b) and biologically programmed (Taylor et al., 2000) to put others first, I sometimes used subterfuge to meet my own needs, helped me untangle generous healthy giving from martyrdom with an implicit and therapy-defeating pricetag.

I spend time with my giving-with-an-implicit-pricetag. Owning how I secretly sought admiration and validation from clients, alerts me to the shadow-ingenuity of these ‘I’m-just-a-log’-Crocodilian and Magpie-razor-beaked-dive-bombing elements woven into my quake-work.

I levied low charges – partly fearing my experience/process didn’t warrant higher financial rewards and clients wouldn’t come if I charged too much; partly to garner a reputation for big-hearted generosity.

(With a loud purr, the more light-filled feline and TeddyBear aspects of me propose that I also felt genuine concern for the quake-battered who may not come or bring their children if my fees were higher.)

I made myself overly accessible – I was available most hours, replied voluminously to emails, met with parents when requested and allowed clients to cancel at short notice without charge, and took on clients even when I vowed to cut back.

(And again, my Cat and Bear counter my negative interpretation by pointing out my genuine goodwill in the spirit of communitas)
I gently set aside my TeddyBear-Sage and Creative-Cat with their desire to rescue me from myself and I sink into the boggier side of these practices.

I feel prickly, breathless, comprehending how damaging these submerged elements may have been to my therapeutic alliances. Poisonous grey fog rises through my belly and into my chest. How could I open anger or disgust or hatred in a client, inviting them to work through these toxic feelings, if I feared these would be directed at me as surrogate? How could I nudge clients into difficult places or challenge them, if I worried they might resent me for this? How could I delve into anything that felt ugly and tangled if I dreaded they may blame me for the awfulness this awoke in them as they worked through these troubling areas?

I couldn’t really do any of this if I was exchanging my martyrdom for their admiration and validation.

Suffocating, I call-out to the healthier alters I side-lined so I could drop-into this felt-sense of martyrdom. Weak voices rise from the stagnant swamp within me where the cloying mud of the noxious self/s is bubbling-up to suck them down.

But they’re remarkably buoyant.

I breathe into them as they struggle afloat time-and-again to remind me I shared many moments with clients were I encouraged them to dig deeper, go further, over-turn rocks in their psyche in search of toads and scorpions, to stay with darker emotions, to express despair and rage, when I asked ugly pointy questions and sat with the squirming they evoked in us both.

(Magpie-musings, October 2013)

...picking up the string/s...

Thus far in trying to make useful sens/e of how I embodied the liminal wounded/healer archetype, I referenced some texts, described the events that caused my wounds, and explored how these manifest as fracturing, over-stimulation, numbing/running, re/living/re/stressing and martyrdom. Now I cross the /slash/ between wounding/healing and shimmy up my kite-string, away from the rubble of my wounds, to make sens/e of my healing.

Figure 50. ‘First-kite’ (Green, April 2011)
my healing

When I began identifying with the liminal wounded/healer archetype, I initially paid more attention to the wounded side of this hybrid, feeling my strength was how I carried wounds enabling me to empathise with clients.

As my study progressed, however, I realised I wasn’t honouring the factors that fostered my healing and the evolving ability I have to transform my wounds and their resultant suffering into gold in the cracks or skeins that weave the Indra’s net of my soul together. These are the healer-features I draw-upon in sessions – to ground myself when facing the maelstrom of distressing emotions sometimes tumbling from clients; to embody states-of-being into which I’m attempting to entice clients; to share coping approaches that may work for them too; to open both wounding and healing to the extra-and... of something new that will surprise the both of us; and thus to awake in clients hope – if I’m able to embrace life joyfully and playfully in the midst-of and post-suffering, there is faith they too may find new joy.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, May 2013)

Revisiting my lived-practice via this research encouraged me to value my own ongoing healing as essential to my therapeutic work. Despite experiencing the pain existence can deliver, Levine (2009) and Martin’s (2011) healer still calls out ‘Yes!’ opening to life’s brightness and brilliance. Far from breaking her, this journey through fire has connected her even more powerfully with her own élan vital, chi (McNiff, 2014) and life-forward direction (Rapaport, 2008).

I’m host to an intriguing image which I invite to take form in clay:

A wire cage from which hangs the Threshold Orphan’s nest (as usual she’s avoidant and invisible – only her tattered wings and rooted-stool present); below her sanctuary, crouch my current four animangels; and in the centre ...

(I’m ambivalent about what they’re compelling me to create for them, unsure of their motives.

They want a fire.

Directly beneath the Threshold Orphan’s safe-place.)

As the heat rises, I imagine sneaky expressions of wicked delight on the tiny clay-faces of my Cat and Crocodile, of my Magpie and even on the usually serene face of my TeddyBear-Sage. Is this their way of showing annoyance at their wee sister’s refusal to show-up while they disport themselves for my enlightenment? Have they decided to smoke her out?
Soon after, one chilly night while lighting the fire at home, my sun-kissed and vital Wild-Child—sister to the Threshold Orphan—arrives to join the gaggle.

She ushers in a new interpretation of this formerly-sinister camp-fire scenario. Maybe the others knew all along that someone was missing—not missing in the ‘I won’t participate’ sense of the Threshold Orphan—but missing in ‘I’m playing hide-and-seek with you’ Wild-Childishness. And the others became tired of searching and decided to use bully-tactics to wink her out...

(calling to mind a gentler but resonant memory when, as a child, I hid so effectively up a tree during a similar game that my mother resorted to walking about the dusk-filled garden with a temptingly-open jar of my favourite sawdust-cookies!)
Thus, my ‘Yes!’-Child embodying healing chi, was smoked and ‘cookie-d’ out of hiding to hop on the other side of the teeter-totter/slash/ between wounding/healing, counterbalancing my wounded Threshold Orphan.

(Playtime with my Wild-Child, October 2014)

In my attempt to make sens/e-able use of my healing, here I explore: healing rather than recovery; healing as a slow, uneven process; those who helped me heal; and essential elements of my healer-self. Playfulness was also figural within my healing, but I hold my exploration of this over to the next section which addresses liminal playfulness.

**healing rather than recovery**

I use the term ‘healing’ in preference to ‘recovery’ which, for me carries curative-connotations suggesting one can return “once and for all” to a “fantasy Eden, a time when there were no splits and no conflicts” (Levine, 2009, p. 112). My experience of striving to recover by returning to an illusory wholeness caused bits that I could not incorporate to split off – hence my Threshold Orphan and Crocodile. I also developed an addiction to therapy as the sole place where I experienced this delusional sense of integration (Levine, 2009; Mølbak, 2013). Only when I began viewing myself and clients in a way that resonates with Levine’s (2009) approach, did I begin to heal. Levine’s alternate view presents chaos and order engaged in active ongoing conversations that privilege neither. His Dionysian trauma therapy advocates a *poiesis* that uses creative-making to play with the formlessness and chaos caused by suffering, thus inviting new order to emerge. Rather than attempt to exorcise...
suffering, this intrinsic order is a transformative poiesis facilitating expression of the tragic experience. This releases its negative hold on our lives and moves us away from victimisation into creative action. Suffering, thus reframed, becomes a valuable part of a lived experience that has plumbed great depths of despair and “encompasses the finitude of existence. It is an affirmation of existence that sees suffering and death as intrinsic to it and nevertheless says ‘Yes!’ to life” (Levine, 2009, p. 53).

For me, integration as a therapeutic goal carries troubling connotations of contraction towards homogeny. Rather, I favour a process that allows internal warring factions to remain heterogynous and apart yet acknowledged – an equal-but-different stance that makes space for their co-existence and opens communication between them. I thus prefer the term ‘inclusion’. Likewise, the term ‘healing’ evokes for me the way healed wounds leave scars as reminders of transformation. Healing invites the wounded to embrace their scars and be with fragmentation as a way to create newness (Halprin, 2003; Levine, 2009; Mølbak, 2013) and thereby transition from victim to survivor to thriver (Herman, 2001; Levine, 2009; Steele & Malchiodi, 2012).

**healing as a slow uneven process**

I’m in bed in my locked room in South Africa. It’s been dead a year. I’m alone and lonely and feeling the fraying edges of fear. And again I’m listening to Crumpet snore in her dog-nest at the foot of the bed. Gruffling and snorting and labouring through the night, she’s a small ragged-remnant of several of my previous lives, deaf and smelly but tenaciously alive. I feel irritation followed by rage rise hot and bitter within. I prepare — as I have night-after-night — to throw something at her, shocking her from sleep and rupturing her cacophony if only briefly.

Yet this time, something makes me pause — a small internal shift — a Frankl-esque breath between thought and action — a whiff of empathy with how she embodies some of my own sense of being battered by life.

I stay my angry movement.

Instead, I rise from my warm bed and gently rearrange her sleepy head so her snoring softens into quiet breathing. She sighs and curls into herself. My body yields this change into words:
Rather than lashing out, venting my annoyance on another, what if I took a moment, took a breath, and was kind instead? A tiny cost to me that may make a vast difference to another – to a small ancient dog who from that moment on slept more gently through the nights; and to the many others who have subsequently benefited from this internal shift in me.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, June 2013)

Unlike the sudden events that slashed scars into my soul, my healing is slow and uneven. I observe no formula, no silver-bullet or strategic programme to bring about healing. I can recount few dramatic healing stories that match the shards of woe I expressed above. These experiences – I refer to my own and those I vicariously encountered via clients – suggest traumatic events which are internalised and then become stuck, take time, dedication and patience to transform. This healing is bespoke. While there may be valuable pointers within established models and strategies, each person who suffers does so uniquely and so needs to create her own distinctive healing journey (Mølbek, 2013). Furthermore, this healing does not eradicate wounds, rather it is a blessing of scars (Hillman, 1996; Levine, 2009). This sanctification resonates with Japanese kintsugi – the practice of repairing breakages in precious porcelain using gold, so the cracks become valued elements of the reconfigured vessel’s beauty (Lehman, 2013). After all: “We are the beings who make a world out of the fragments of our brokenness” (Levine, 2009, p. 178).

I find much healing through doing, by being in my body. Post-reement: I sand and restore reclaimed furniture; I garden; I take up running – on early-grey mornings I push through initial chest-burning heavy-legged slog into the slash of happy-hormones as my body and soul warm to the day’s arrival. Post-quake: I walk – trudging head-down until my blood is pumping allowing increasingly fluid ease as I delight in the sunlit Bays, the wind sighing or the softly falling rain on my parka. And my mountain bike and I go for long expeditions on dirt roads and in forests, over rocks and up steep winding hills.

During one such ride, as I battled the choking fog of ‘s suicide, I swoop around a turn in a dirt road and am suddenly boundaried on either side by high walls of sugarcane – thick sweet scent enveloping me under the heavy African sun. A flock of tiny brown birds breaks cover and fills the hot blue air around me. I’m escorted along the track by a dancing and diving shoal of tiny chirping angels with wings and flashing eyes and joyful beaks.

My heart soars and the cracks in my soul fill with gold.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, January 2014)
those who helped me heal

I tend to respond to pain by going underground and isolating myself. I felt relief when reading Cain’s book *Quiet* (2013) in which she validates introversion within the context of a Westernised cultural ethos that values extroversion. Yet I also know that too much seclusion can be a problematic response to trauma (Herman, 2001) and I am thankful that my sequestration has been tempered throughout my healing-history by several powerful presences. These beings – animal, human and imagical/spiritual – reached into my bat-cave, letting me know I am seen, heard, and valued. These wise-ones have not tried to drag me into the light, rescue or change me, solve my problems or erase my suffering. Rather they have been large and stable enough to allow me to fall apart and come back together time-and-again, helping me believe my worst is endurable. I unpack the elements and therapeutic value of this human contact later in this document, but for now I pause to thank key members of this remarkable host:

My first precious-cat Scratchy; treasured friends Inky, Tibs, Megan and Joe; work mentors Rose and John; my lovely animals Bobdog, Sebastian, Lilu, Louis, Malaika, Dexter and Vinnie; my adventuresome husband ∆; irascible brother Derek and his tiger-wife Louise; my brilliant supervisor Tony; and of course my imaginal animangels and lost ones.

I playfully wonder if we embody Campbell’s (1995) philosophy. He believed true adventures, that are appropriate to your deep spiritual need or readiness, will manifest magical guides. Although my adventures began as choice-less tragedies, I have tried to re-imagine them in-situ as ‘heroic journeys’.
I have heeded this invitation to reframe challenging situations, despite their lack of security and rules, into adventures evoking guides and opening doors, in both my private life and therapeutic practice.

Its 2006, we’ve just migrated to New Zealand and I’m in the garden – well, less garden and more untamed wilderness of dancing green – attempting to impose some order on how this lushness encroaches on our weathered cedar-pole house, lurching on stilt-legs over a tumbling drop of verdant abundance into the valley below. I’ve music filling my body through headphones and am shiny in the thick summer sun as I pull weeds, cut back vines and tend to my illicit arum lilies stolen one evening from a neighbour’s verge. I float adrift in a wash of sensation, when suddenly my sea-anchor is snared by a song. The Sound of White by Missy Higgins that feels like it’s directed to someone not present ...

... and I suddenly I’m thinking of ₯ ...

... I’m talking to ₯ ...

Not aloud. Quietly. Internally. And this feels natural, alive, connected. As I open myself to this, I feel something touch me, briefly, warmly, calmly.

Just a simple sense of: ‘I’m here’.

I don’t jerk away. I don’t question. I simply accept and keep talking. I notice my face is wet and I’m sitting in the rich dark soil with my muddy hands limp, open, palms-up in my lap, tears running. The conversation continues and I tell ₯ how sad I am, how angry, how sorry and regretful, how much I miss him, how grateful I am that he’s dead, how confused this makes me, how I wish I could’ve done things so differently. Again I get the fleeting but deep brush of connection without judgment: ‘I know’.

I spend the afternoon in the garden, Sebastian and Lilu swirling about my feet, climbing tree ferns, calling low Siamese-meows to me through the purple haze between the leaves. Sebastian, wise and grey, looks into my eyes as if he knows, as if my inner dialogue is being broadcast on megaphones hung about the wild trees. I taste the bitter edges of cynical-me attempting to infiltrate the warm mix and I ask her to wait, allowing myself to linger within this golden moment for as long as I can. I extend the conversation to include my mother, calling her in and feeling her arrive. Again I well with tears and multifarious feelings. Dad’s presence causes less conflict and more regret as my relationship with him is simpler, more about missed opportunities than warring senses.

When evening begins to haze the acres of trees and vines and ferns in the reserve all around me and the Morepork-owls start to shuffle and hoot from the deepening shadows, I move inside to the yellow-light. As tiredness settles in, my resolve against unpicking this numinous afternoon weakens, and my analytical mind strides in.

Yet something’s shifted. Rather than a pitched battle, the afternoon-sun-séance-softened-me sits down with the intellect-armoured-me for a deep conference.
Unbeknown to me at the time, this moment marks the birth of my quest for both-and-and...

The self that needs reasons-and-evidence puts forward a rush of arguments against the sensations and events that unfolded this day. My sacred-circle-dancing-self offers her insights. Both listen. Other parts of me emerge tentatively from the shadows within and join the discussion, slowly growing in trust that they won’t be shouted down or shamed. The listening is deep. I begin to know a new way of being with myself, with the many bits that make up me. Parts of me truly believe this afternoon I communed with the guiding-spirits of my loved and lost ones. Other parts think I’m succumbing to myth and marketing. Yet other bits decide my imagination calls my mother, father and into being through speaking with them and this honours their memory and my need for these relationships to continue so I may heal. All of these differing views sit with each other.

The jostling, finger-pointing, tongue-pulling, one-upmanship of my previous way-of-being is absent. I experience internal communitas and am allowed to be all of these without having to choose only one stance, self or belief.

I find peace for the first time in a long time. It’s not a permanent state-of-being, but I can find my way there when needed. Hence I walk this path when I’m facing situations that make me feel small and unsteadily. Calling in my ghostly cavalry opens me to many things just when I’m beginning to feel contracted, closed, single-minded, bullish, rigid and breathless. I open to the many-ness of myself and confer this acceptance of multiplicity on both the world around me and the others I meet in it. I appreciate my state of not having the answers, of not knowing for sure if my etheric companions are real separate entities that exist apart from my playful imaginings of them, and I relish holding the balance between the frustration and the acceptance of this not-knowingness. I open to the complexity and deep abundance of imagination. I open to the magnificence of my human brain and simultaneously to its limitations, to appreciating there are places within us all and spaces between us that we may not reach through intellect, spaces-and-places that spirit and soul may be better suited to illuminating through the arts. In talking to those on the other side, I offer myself the suggestion that this isn’t all, there is more, that the small scurryings that make up my life and the lives of many I work with are just that, small scratchings on the face of a larger tale that has a rhythm of its own. These conversations aren’t held in the absence of the selves that deride and scoff – these nay-sayers are called into presence alongside the ghosts of my mother and father and first-husband and beloved grey-cat. This opens me to my Circle-of-Self, to listening intently for all voices and ideas and opinions, to calling into the shadows, to being patient, to loving even the most prickly and poisonous parts of myself and my clients.

But most of all, I think,

as I slow my typing and gently breathe into the impressions currently welling within, inviting into the Circle-of-me those I love in strong, complicated and not-so-pure ways, deepens me.

I feel now, in this moment of writing them onto the page –
a dropping-down-into myself,
into a mystery,

a concurrent descent into and rising up of rich textured thick-feelings,

a knowing that I’m more than any current imagining of myself, I’m not merely floating and buffeted, I’m connected to something.

Maybe it’s something beyond me.

Maybe it’s something created by my imagining.

Maybe it’s both. But there’s no maybe about how crazily delicious this all is, this delicate yet robust paper-chain of me’s and we’s looping across space-and-place. So I thank you, Mom, Dad, ḍ, Bastie – real or imaginary – for this deepening concertina of me.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, May 2013)
essential elements of my healer-self

How am I re/defining myself not by my wounds but by my capacity to respond to suffering in myself and others while still saying ‘Yes!’ to existence (Levine, 2009)? I use present-tense as these re/definitions and response/abilities are emergent and ongoing embodiments of a central answer:

At the very core of my healing lives the creative act (...cat...).

Through proactive creative imagination – enacted in myriad ways – I rise time-and-again out of being the one who is done to (Levine, 2009). I know both the victim’s twisty-shadow feeling and the survivor’s bright clarion-call and the soul-song of the thriver. I spy this in four key ways within myself and my quake-work: I focused on healing the wings of creative imagination; I grounded myself in my own buoyancy; I courted creative soul-magic; and I invited new order to emerge from chaos.

healing the wings of creative imagination

At the heart of my healing and the healing process I opened for others, is my focus on healing imagination and creativity. I did, however, initially fumble to recognise and voice this. Writing in parabolic circles and curlicues, this inquiry helped me weave into words many gut-knowings. My writing surfaced my struggle to implement the cognitively-orientated trauma therapy principles promoted by the texts I read when the quakes began. The schism between these and how I found myself using the arts with clients emerged from the shadows. My reconnection with McNiff’s (2004) advice to trust the arts process found voice. And my eventual embrace of soul-building as favoured by Hillman (1996), McNiff (2004) and Levine (2009) sang out. But it was only when I did the art myself, when I personally alighted into poiesis, that I began to comprehend what I was trying to tell myself.

grounding myself in my own buoyancy

I ponder an imaginal construct I draw upon when I’m with a client in the thick of sticky emotions.

This construct involves turning my gaze inward, into the dark recess of myself as if I’m a deep cave. The shadows in this pit feed on the degree of distress radiating from the client and penetrating my purposefully pared-back protective filters. Sometimes the gloom is still, other times it hints at slowly pulsing forms or chitters loudly in rapidly writhing shapes, a glint of scale, a flash of tooth and claw dimly perceived through the murk.

I breathe deeply into this abyss, opening and loosening my tight viscera and belly-muscles, gently lowering my protectively hunched shoulders. And I bring into being a small spar of rock emerging from the cloying dark fog. This island may jut-out from a turbulent black ocean roiling like angry oil or may be the tip of a mountain breaching the inky clouds enveloping its base.

Upon this rock-steady safe peninsula sits a tiny-me.

She’s bathed in golden light.

Sometimes the light comes from within her, other times it glows from the rock around her, and yet other visions have the beam radiating from an invisible source in the blackness above. This small lit
me is serene. She may be beneath a tree. Sometimes the tree’s bare, hibernating and waiting for spring, other times it’s heavy with golden leaves falling, and yet other times it holds fruit or blooms aloft to the glowing light.

When she’s firmly holding my inner darkness in balance, I reach to her. My hand pushes down through the dark into me – sometimes penetrating easily, but often the black is clinging and substantial. As I reach into the shadow, watching my hand drop down, the wee-me in the light on the solid rock-spar opens herself upwards towards my questing. My hand unfolds gently and then closes around the pinnacle she’s seated on, holding it carefully but firmly, anchoring myself to the part deep within that is steady, that knows the darkness and yet trusts the light and becomes the syzygy between the two.

This meetings of me/s is the seat of my transformation.

Golden-me on the rock is my Wise-self phoenix-wrought in the fire-pits of my suffering and the tempering cool waters of my healing. She sits in the blaze before emerging to dance in dawn dew. She’s my knowing that distress and anguish can be endured and, when borne and recognised and not flinched from or diminished, this suffering can be transformed into wisdom, opening depths and textures within the soul. And Therapist-me reaches through roiling Shadow-me to gently connect with Wise-me to create the alchemical imagic that is tragic wisdom.

So when my client tumbles into her own pit of anguish, I can be present to both her despair and to my own healing – my own process of phoenixing suffering into wisdom – and I can offer this hope to her.

Not verbally.

This offering seldom happens through telling. I don’t describe what I’m doing, or share details of my own journey through suffering. Rather, I trust I communicate this in embodied and soulful ways through my ensouled presence, through the way my body slows, grows steady and quiet, doesn’t withdraw from, or muscle-into, her experience but provides a solid accompaniment to her journey into her own darkness. And, just as my steadiness isn’t a wallowing stuck-ness in distress but rather a patient, trust-filled waiting, a deep knowing that gold awaits in the darkest part of the cave, I’m with my client in quiet anticipation she’ll discover her own inner resources, re/connect with her own natural life-energy and life-forward direction, the juice of her own imaginative soul-healing, which may lead to the metamorphosis of her suffering.

I strive to exude that lovely trusting-steadfastness that sometimes radiates from a mother who values deeply in her marrow the robustness of her child and waits for the child to find a way through. This trusting-patience is magical to witness as a loving mother holds the space, creating the safe container needed by her child to engage his own powers of internal composure or problem-solving and life-forward juice when he is snagged by a tumble or an obstacle or a ragged-edged emotion.
This simultaneous stepping-back yet being-present in trust and belief, this giving of space while holding space, this allowance for rupture-and-repair, is the foundation of good attachment helping a child discover and grow his own abilities to cope and thrive even in troubling circumstances.

I endeavour to be Winnicott’s good-enough mother for my clients, the good-enough therapist who helps create and sustain the safe space where the client may grapple with her own shadow, knowing I hold within me the belief she can do this and emerge triumphant and transformed – that she too, is good-enough.

(Key within many trauma recovery models is developing the capacity for resilience and internal composure. Resilience is the process of adapting effectively during adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress (American Psychological Association, 2014). Internal composure is a state of mindful attunement with the self which facilitates healthy proactive response-ability – often lost through trauma (Halprin, 2003; Kass & Trantham, 2014). These attributes, which may be both inherited and learned, are viewed as protective factors against the impact of trauma, a way through trauma, and as a direct goal of trauma recovery therapy (American Psychological Association, 2014; Kass & Trantham, 2014). Being able to endure both my earlier wounds and our quake liminality required I develop a limber psyche capable of tolerating and bouncing back from chaotic and troubling thoughts, affects and sensations via self-composure.

While this research led me to embrace the term ‘internal composure’, I struggle, however, with ‘resilience’ – a word frequently bandied about during the quakes. A popular catch-phrase, this ignites annoyance within me – and many of my clients. We Christchurchers have been praised for our resilience, an accolade we initially welcomed with pride. Yet we realised that, rather than recognising our complex coping/not-coping/coping-cycles, this label was being used to silence us, shaming us during our not-coping periods so we would not pester for support. Scratching beneath the surface of this gagged feeling, used in this way this term implied an either/or mind-set – either we were resilient or we were broken; strong survivors or flaccid victims. Although all applications do not carry such black/white innuendos (see for example Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda (2014) for a more nuanced interpretation), my quake-experiences rendered it an emotionally-laden and pejorative word. I thus backbench the baggage carried by ‘resilience’, but embrace its core meanings through substituted terms like ‘limber’, ‘flexible’ and ‘buoyant’. 

Deborah Green, 2009, Mini-Madonna and child [Detail].)
courting creative soul-magic

Frankl (2004) describes digging in the frozen grey ground of a concentration camp during WW2. As he communes silently with his dead wife, his spirit pushes through the gloom rebelling against his slow dying. He is rewarded with an answering ‘Yes’ to his query about the ultimate purpose of life, a light appears in a distant farmhouse and a bird alights on the rubble heap and looks steadily at him. Although I cannot claim suffering akin to Frankl’s (2004), his imagery resonates with my vision of healing as a soul-quest. As I struggle to unearth a personalised understanding of soul, I court a wild bird which alights at the strangest and often darkest moments on my heap of newly dug dirt, to fix me steadily with wise, beady eyes and gift me with wisdom. Then, I am with Frankl. But, just as suddenly, my avian soul-messenger takes flight leaving me doubting it was ever present in the first place. Like Frankl, I too, reach for communion with my lost ones when I am in the grey trenches. Sometimes, I find them and we converse ... but not always. The emergence of my arts therapy practice as soul-building is thus a slow jagged hacking at icy ground, as I live through multiple distressing incidents and am visited and abandoned by my lost ones and my belief-in-soul-bird time-and-again.

inviting new order to emerge from chaos

Grappling with my wounded/healing has awoken a personal trust in my own soul-limberness and a belief that my professional role is to use the arts to heal/bless broken imaginations. These emergent healthful aspects nurtured my capacity to not only be present to deep wells of darkness and chaos in myself and others, but also to play within these purgatorial spaces. This playfulness, Levine (2009) and Winnicott (1977) say, opens the door to a new sense of order and agency within the lives of those suffering.
the value of my wounded/healing as neophyte/shaman

I aspire to Campbell’s (1995) embrace of Nietzsche’s *amor fati* – the love of your fate – which transforms disaster into a challenging opportunity (p. 38). I therefore deeply appreciated my clinical supervisor, Tony, referring to my ‘unique ability’ to use my own painful experiences as “a classroom in which to gain greater insight into the human condition in general” (White, personal communication, June 2014). This orientation shaped my quake-work and peppers this document with several challenges and gifts brought to my ever-evolving practice by my own scars/stars. Alongside the I-was-there-too credibility granted by my quake-experiences, the re/enlivening of my past wounding/healing opened new ways of working. Seven deserve further attention as they do not appear to be innate character traits – if I roll them on my tongue, I sense I initially fought against their taste. Only during my work as quake-arts therapist did they ripen into the practices I now describe as: grounded empathy; the capacity to wait; the ability to move betwixt-and-between; alternative ways to express the unspeakable; an embrace of healing as a bespoke creation; the ability to endure and embrace multiplicity; and the desire to heal souls.

**grounded empathy**

In my position as neophyte/shaman I carried embodied insights into aspects of my clients’ stress and this afforded me in-the-lived-moment empathy and credibility. I too, used a hole in my backyard as a toilet. I queued daily for fresh water from the tanker in the port. I felt the cool night air seep through cracks in walls and floorboards. And I too – lying sleepless – would retreat into the warm safety of my imagination where the hills stayed still and the Bay did not rise up to smite us. This intimate knowledge of quake distress, however, challenged my objectivity. I too, become easily overwhelmed, afraid, felt too deeply or became numb. I had to work hard to be present and responsive rather than reactive. And I had to take time for self-care and seek supervision to ensure my own healing journey did not impinge upon my clients’ needs.

**the capacity to wait**

The Gestalt therapy tenet ‘don’t push the river’ (Stevens, 1970) feels especially relevant in situations of enduring liminality. These circumstances, such as cancer (Waller & Sibbett, 2008), war and combat (Harris, 2009), sexual abuse (Haywood, 2012) and our Canterbury earthquake-aftermath, do not present easily discernible exit-points. These chronic contexts call for endurance – the capacity to wait. This waiting is sometimes quiet and patient and, at other times, active. At its best, this waiting is big enough to contain impatience and anger, frustration and fear. This ‘big-waiting’ is a form of presence that makes space for the ‘non-waiting’ feelings to arise, be welcomed and then pass through. My experiences have helped me become better at the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of big-waiting.

*My Threshold Orphan points to a core theme within my wounded/healing: Big-waiting.*

*Perhaps the roots reappearing in my creations hold some of this? And yet this sensation is larger.*
This liminal-hiatus sits deep in my core. It’s betwixt-and-between, this hovering in the interstitial space as if I’m the string connecting kite-and-rubble. In its dark form this paused-ness is clenched – holding its breath as uncertainty prevails, it leaches my sense of agency or rails against the frustration of suspension, of sterile stasis.

But in more positive manifestations, it breathes light and space into the slashed-core of my wounded/healer-self.

It’s a profound knowing of what it means to wait, to be in liminality, in metaxus, to become accepting/large/flexible enough to hold waiting in all its gracefully-patient and not-so-patient forms. Maybe this deep complex relationship I have with big-waiting is, for my work within enduring liminality, a valuable gift given me by my experiences of being with my own wounding and healing.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, October 2013)

Figure 53. ‘Big-Waiting’ (Green, May 2013)

the ability to move betwixt-and-between

This capacity for big-waiting in liminality intersects with my ability to move betwixt-and-between. Levine (2009) views arts therapy as intermediary between the centre and the margin. This mirrors Gendlin’s (1997a) focusing process which zig-zags between the known and the ‘...’ of the ever-open-edge. Within traditional cultures, the shaman is liminal intercessor between the visible, living world and the spirit world (Cumes, 2004; Jackson, 2001; McNiff, 2004; Turner, 1970). For Rappaport and Kalmanowitz (2014), the mindful arts therapist takes flight between the two wings of witnessing and experiencing. Within my wounding/healing, I am seldom wholly-wounded or fully-healed, adult or child, mindful or playful, embodied or spirit, fragmented or unified. Instead, I am the syzygy /slash/ that yokes these states together in the liminal zone.

May I, at the best moments of my practice, lay claim to being one who knows this liminal space intimately, while simultaneously knowing reconnection with the outside world? Is this a core value of my wounded/healing – that I’m within the paused-liminal but can, as shamans do, also move between worlds?

Is this another translation of the enduring presence of wings in my artwork? These imagical wings represent how I use my imagination to fly between the worlds of before-and-after, the concrete-and-etheric, the so-called real and the imagined, of those alive and those dead, the known and the emergent, of the bio-medical and the poietic, of creation-and-destruction and order-and-chaos and fragmentation-and-wholeness.
Have I, through my own wounding/healing converted the /slash/ from the separation of either/or and both/and into the inclusivity of both-and-and...? Is my gift to clients my capacity to both move-between and hold-in-juxtaposition fragmentation/separation, liminality, and thriving/reincorporation and to mediate the way for others to develop similar capacities?

(Magpie-musings, December 2013)

alternative ways to express the unspeakable

I love to talk. Like my writing, words spill from me and I love interactive dialogue. My initial training as HIV/AIDS counsellor favoured this emphasis on words. The trauma recovery models I was taught emphasised voicing the traumatic event as central to re/gaining internal composure and resilience. This aimed to desensitise or inoculate against the unpleasant sensations (Başoğlu, 1992) and/or facilitate mastery by making cognitive meaning of the event (Frankl, 2004; Herman, 2001).

Our brain-response to traumatic events, however, makes this difficult. The brain is the substratum that allows the more-than of soul to interact with the world (Gendlin, 1997a). Any disturbances in this brain-substratum thus affect the soul. When severely distressed, neural activity moves from the left, rational, discursive brain-hemisphere and declarative memory into the right, sensory, imaginal brain-hemisphere and short-term sensory memory (van der Kolk, 2014). The brain and body thus store traumatic memories initially as photographic/symbolic images and bodily sensations with no linguistic components. This inability speak the unspeakable derails recovery models that emphasise the victim’s need to voice what has occurred (Harris, 2009).

Figure 54. ‘Divided’ (Green, December 2014)
Malchiodi’s (2015) trauma-informed art therapy therefore advocates a bottom-up approach beginning with sensorial, body-based self-regulation. This validates my intuitive sensory-grounding as step-one of dropping-in and use of sensual art materials and body-rich processes throughout sessions. Once body-based regulation is possible, arts-based therapies provide alternative languages through embodied, sensory and kinaesthetic use of art materials which favour the right brain and may help express tacit embodied states (Malchiodi, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014). This decreases avoidance and accesses areas where suffering is stored in visual and embodied forms. Once expressed aesthetically, verbally exploring these images may stimulate bilateral integration of information processing between brain hemispheres – proposed as a core component in resolving trauma (Monti et al., 2006; Steele & Malchiodi, 2012).

My quake-experiences as wounded/healer suggested that, like me, some clients accorded with established thinking and found revisiting and imaginally re/exposing themselves to their stressor/s was vital to their healing. Others found this reopened wounds in difficult, unhelpful ways and their healing was better facilitated when they used the sensory pleasure of arts-making to access and nurture positive thoughts, feelings, bodily-states and imaginings that often become lost through suffering (Allen, 2014). In both approaches, however, through bypassing verbalisation in favour of non-linguistic expression using embodied symbols, arts therapy was more effective in expressing, reimagining and transforming deep distress, and recognising and validating hidden strengths (Harris, 2009; Levine, 2009; McNiff, 2004).

This reimagines meaning-making by converting it into sens/e-making – broadened beyond the cognitive to embrace the five physical senses and the French word ‘sens’, meaning direction (Levine, 2009). Arts-based sens/e-making is thus embodied and gifts the client with a sense of purpose and direction. In re/composing the brain and restoring the brain-body link, it also removes blockages to the sixth soul-sense.

**an embrace of healing as a bespoke creation**

Each wounding experience is singular and distinctive and each journey to wellbeing uniquely individual (Mølbek, 2013). My belief that individuals are experts in their own lives (Boal, 1993; Freire, 2014) allowed each journey to bring forth bespoke findings by inviting new order to emerge from chaos (Levine, 2009; Winnicott, 1977). My process-orientated quake-arts therapy thus encouraged each inimitable client to collude with me in the bespoke expressing, blessing and transforming of her unique wounds.

**the ability to endure and embrace multiplicity**

I’m adrift, I whine to my dead mother. Last week I was basking in a warm glow of found-ness, the sense I’d made anchor within the myriad of options and ideas and approaches afloat in the arts therapy ocean. I was buoyant with the notion that soul-making is why I create art with clients, that opening the formlessness of a transitional space through playfulness and providing a safe, mindful container while clients form themselves anew was the underpinning rationale for my practice.
While this still resonates, I feel off-kilter again, on-edge, drifting to the side of myself, not fully present, doubting and rudderless. I trace this sitting-too-far-back inside, this bruising queasiness compressing my gut-softness into olive-greens and mustard-yellows... and beneath these felt-sensations, I find my wounded/healer-self reaching across the Alps to those battered by the recent avalanche-death of fellow-climber, Jamie.

I attune via memories of the days after she died. Different circumstances, but also a widowning, a teeter-totter between forgetful-numbing and fiery-anguish, anger and despair and hollowness all trying to co-exist within the too small container of my flesh.

Although large portions of me now stay buoyant, I still sink into the suffocating loneliness of loss and confusion. In these dank places lurks my grief for my murdered father and you, my ravaged mother, and Derek’s useless legs and her hanging from a blue climbing-sling and Sebastian scruffed and panicking so the vet can administer the lethal dose. These sorrows are gouged deep in my soul, my body arcs to protect my soft white-belly holding such pain.

And so I breathe into this sadness and feel the parts of me still in the sunlight gaze deeply in – curious, loving, non-judging, reminding the me-shards forever carrying these open wounds that within me are ladders and funiculars and hot-air balloons and kites I’ve crafted over the years and gently stowed in nooks and crannies of this dark ossuary so I may again ascend into the fresh air. These looser, lighter bits of me call, echoing into the depths, reminding the tightly-wound barbed-wires of self that just as I’ve found ways to sanctify and honour the truths of my pain, so too may those who loved Jamie.

(Conversations with my dead mother, August 2013)

My MAAT autoethnography (Green, 2010) illuminated a discordant schism between my yearning for wholeness and my intrinsic sense of enduring fragmentation. I began developing lived-beliefs capacious enough to host these contradictory sens/es-of-self and -soul as simultaneously singular/unified and multiple/shattered. My personal/professional quake experiences validated and strengthened this capacity for contradictive-complexity within the construct of self/soul. I now play with polytheistic concepts of soul (Levine, 2009) that imaginally metamorphose between containers and dream-catchers, are vast enough to hold polarities, and weave golden-lace and barbed-wire and the breath of cobwebs between opposing shards of self.

My adult-clients often identify this way-of-being as the transformative and healing factor. As I model noticing, and being welcomingly curious about and present to all aspects of self (both mine and theirs), clients often begin to play with this themselves – creating and populating their own Circle-of-Self. And finally, many are able to be present and accepting towards shadow aspects, allowing them to become larger, more flexible and better able to endure liminality.
the desire to heal souls

By becoming present to clients and my own lived-experiences, I stumbled upon a way of working that emphasised soothing and regulating the distress held in the body – similar to the approaches proposed by Peter Levine (2010), van der Kolk (2014) and Malchiodi (2015). My grounding in the sensual-body was, however, embedded in a larger therapeutic-intent.

Stephen Levine’s (2009) concept of poietic transformation privileges soul within trauma healing. Through this research, Levine (2009) – drawing on Hillman (1983) – helped me distil my purpose as therapist: to build individual souls in order to re-soul the world. Yet, despite strong evidence of soul in the intuitive and imaginative features of my own healing journey and my quake-work, as beginning therapist I took time to openly embrace ensouled-arts therapy. Initially I felt insecure and sought guidance from recognised – but not necessarily arts therapy-based – sources that variously emphasised cognition, emotion and embodiment … but not soul. (I had not discovered Levine; Steele and Malchiodi’s Trauma-Informed Art Therapy was only published in 2012; and Rappaport’s edited collection on Mindfulness in the Arts Therapies in 2014b). Over time, however, I came to celebrate my approach to trauma healing in which ensouled imagination expresses itself through the language of the arts.
hazards I faced as neophyte/shaman of enduring liminality

The interplay of contradictory traits within my wounded/healer neophyte/shaman roles enlivened and troubled my practice. I have sung their praises, now I summarise some challenges all of which feature a blurry transgression of boundaries.

**blurred lines**

As therapeutic relationships are established for a specific purpose, the placement, permeability and crossability of the boundary between therapist and client cannot be left to chance. Boundary issues encapsulate the therapist’s self-disclosure, touch, exchange of gifts, bartering and fees, length and location of sessions and contact outside the office (Zur, 2004). ANZATA’s *Standards of Professional Practice and Code of Ethics* (ANZATA, n.d.) emphasises appropriate professional boundaries – including avoiding dual relationships – to ward against situations which compromise objectivity, and/or create a conflict of interests. Through my previous HIV/AIDS counsellor training and aspects of my arts therapy education, I had absorbed this message that boundary crossings/dual relationships were, at best, unethical and counter-therapeutic and, at worst, downright harmful – leading down a slippery slope to exploitative relationships (Zur, 2004).

Yet, as fellow-sufferer and co-habitant, I faced a post/ongoing-disaster situation in which blurred lines were often unavoidable. As beginning therapist I struggled to reconcile my desire to be useful with the knowledge I was at odds with my professional body. In the absence of relevant information to tackle this conundrum but bolstered by knowing I was not alone – I knew several counsellors, psychotherapists and psychologists working within similar circumstances – I drew upon my previous experiences in community theatre and adult education in which transparency was primary (Boal, 1993; Freire, 2014; Kidd, 1985). I decided it may be harmful to pretend I was not shaken, afraid and struggling with the ongoing uncertainty and, as I initially concentrated on my hometown, Lyttelton, many clients and I experienced dual relationships through informal contact in the village and because I often worked with multiple family members. Practical boundary crossings included my initial offering of free sessions, bartering and exchange of goods/services for sessions, waiving fees if clients could not pay, I was flexible and moved sessions or did not penalise clients for no-shows, and after two venues I was using were declared unsafe, I set up studio in my tiny two-bedroom home.

My unease about these trying circumstances eased as I read more widely during this study. While there appears a dearth of interrogative writing about what happens for local therapists in disaster situations, other voices speaking on aligned topics (such as Zur, 2004) have offered guidance. I now perceive I operated under some value-laden notions based on psychotherapy’s origins in psychoanalysis and contemporary concerns around risk management. Zur (2004) tackles this prickly area by suggesting clients in smaller or marginal communities often choose a therapist because of shared values, increasing trust by normalising “non-exploitative dual relationships and familiarity between therapists and clients” (p.29). He distinguishes between harmful boundary *violations* and helpful boundary *crossings*: A violating therapist transgresses the line of decency and integrity – misusing power to exploit the client; whereas boundary crossings that are part of well-considered
treatment plans can increase therapeutic effectiveness. While traditional analytic models tend to view all boundary crossings as detrimental, more contemporary therapies – such as rational-emotional, humanistic, existential, group, feminist, family systems (Zur, 2004), and in arts therapy, intersubjective companioning (Lett, 2001) and response art (Fish, 2012; McNiff, 2014) – often endorse helpful boundary crossings. When done with a client’s welfare in mind, these are likely to enhance the therapeutic alliance – the best predictor of therapeutic outcome (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999). This reframing allows me to openly voice what I previously hushed, affirming my emphasis on ensouled human relationships.

This validation does not detract from the very real hazards evoked through ill-considered boundary crossings, such as: getting in the way; the vampiric use of others to heal myself; and becoming stuck in woundology.

**getting in the way**

I possess an enthusiastic, richly-textured and imagical sens/e-of-self. This relationship with my own wounding/healing, playfulness/calm, and creativity/disorder can assist my work in helping others heal. If allowed to run rampant, however, it can take over. When a therapist crosses boundaries, emphasising intersubjectivity and using herself within therapy, she risks monopolising the transpersonal space and using the process to meet her own needs (Stechler, 2000). I strove to be continually aware of this, frequently checking with myself and clients as to whether the thought, feeling, image, bodily sensation I was experiencing and introducing into our interpersonal space was connected to them or purely my own.

*In the early grey-blue hours of a rainy night I awake from a dream in which I’m beginning work with a new client – a tiny, pale-skinned girl with floating candyfloss hair. I try to invite her into the creative process but I’ve a mouth full of wire. I pull at it but twisted strands are attached to my teeth and I can only get the prolific mass out just so far. While I tug and gag, the little client seems unperturbed, pottering about fiddling with art materials. I mumble incoherently and bend down to find the snipping-pliers in their usual place on the bottom shelf.*

*I’m concerned – I’ve no mirror to see where to cut the strands so close to my mouth but I wiggle the pliers into the mass and snip at the wire just inside my open lips.*

*A tangle comes free but a substantial amount remains inside my mouth, still wound gratingly around my teeth and I realise I must leave it and get on with the session as best I can.*
One translation of this dream suggests I’m working through the tangled morass of my own stuff that threatens to take over my process with clients – it’s welded to me, blocks and distracts me, and even when I remove as much as I can, it remains in my mouth, shaping my words.

(Magpie-musings, May 2013)

vampiric use of others to heal myself

The potential harm in piggybacking my own healing onto the healing of clients was foregrounded during an early attempt to create my inner-Crocodile in clay. This animangel insisted on a dramatic high collar. (In saying ‘insisted’, I am using creative phrasing. In reality the Crocodile’s head kept dropping off – so I fiddled until I found that a high collar held it firm!) When I used playful active imagination to contemplate potential interpretations, I noticed how vampiric this collar felt. This initially awoke memories of lying terrified in bed as an imagined Dracula, sniffing the delicious scent of my child-blood, used blacked fingernails to pick the putty from my window. From this, I slid sideways to worry at the parasitic miasma tainting my Hall of Wings. These thoughts encouraged me to take responsibility for how the healing process for client and therapist may intermingle, transforming boundaries into liminal thresholds. Earlier I referenced Jung’s (1953) belief that each treatment is a mutually healing process for both client and therapist. My Crocodile’s high Mephistophelean collar symbolises ways in which this interconnection could be abused, swaying the balance in favour of my own process.

Deborah Green, 2014, Vampy-Croc [Paper-clay and ash 5cm]. Artist’s collection.
becoming stuck in woundology

I open a key question by re-creating a form of secure attachment through attuning with the client (Kass & Trantham, 2014) and creating an empathetic relationship that invites client and therapist into reciprocity (Stechler, 2000): What are we tuning into? Not only does the therapist attune to the client’s wounding but she opens the client to attune to her wounding, potentially creating yet another set of harmful patterns (Jung, 1953). Poorly boundaried empathy can cast both adrift in liminal shadows creating dangerous shared ‘woundology’ (I. Daly, personal communication, 1996) in which the communal narrative snags on tales of suffering and woe.

I merge Stechler’s (2000) affective presence with ideas about embodied empathy (Harris, 2013) to create a lens to contemplate how my physical presence influenced clients. When my wounding was forefront and I became agitated/closed/breathless, then reciprocal attunement often carried this into the client’s body. Whereas if I invited my wounding to forge connections with their pain while simultaneously holding onto my luminous internal spar-of-healing, then I could let this wash through my physical-being. I could embody healing and growth by opening my belly and chest, softening my hands and arms, unlocking my shoulders, deepening my breath, loosening my throat and feeling myself spiral down into a stable core within. This seemed to tacitly encourage clients to embody these sensations as well. If the therapist is welcoming of, and has befriended, both her wounding and the transformation of this wounding, she can open to the client’s wounding, containing and transforming this as it enters her own body. She can then model this for the client at visceral, embodied and pre-verbal levels (Harris, 2013).
In this third section of *Phase 2: Liminality* I sought to make useful sens/e of my quake-therapy via a lens crafted from characteristics of the archetypes brought into being by liminality. Key areas of exploration included my simultaneous status as neophyte and shaman and my embodiment of the liminal wounded/healer archetype. (I also resonate with the liminal Trickster/Magpie dyad but investigate these traits in the next section on liminal play). The body of this section was dedicated to re/searching my embodiment of several wounding events and how these manifested within my quake-work.

Dropping-into my own wounding surfaced the often under-acknowledged value of my healing. This highlighted that empathising through woundedness can be damaging if I am not also deeply aware of, connected into, and modelling, my own healing. This theme of wounded/healing is laced into the previous core-kite-string-themes of *enduring liminality* and soul-rich *both-and-and...* And together these begin pointing to a more global insight wrought through this study – that my lived kinaesthetic process has unwittingly brought me to a place congruent with emergent, embodied, trauma theory being pioneered by Malchiodi (2015), Levine (2010) and van der Kolk (2014).

Now, I lean further into my healing and heed the teasing tweaks on my kite-string to gambol into the next section and engage with the role of *liminal playfulness* within my quake-work.
both playful and mindful \textit{and}...

I’m wondering about playfulness, I say to my dead mother as we sit quietly alongside my Threshold Orphan. We’re watching the Orphan – a child and yet the least playful creature I’ve ever observed. She symbolises the deep dark and heavy sadness that dwells at the core of my being. How can I possibly be playful when her bone-crushing icy fog of loss and pain threatens to pull me under so often? How can I endure this anguish and still find the ‘Yes!’ of joy and lightness and laughter? My Orphan is so potent and intractable in her agonisingly sanitised leathery-skinned stasis ...

But my mother shakes her head. Remember she’s only one barbed-shard of you, she suggests ... and her words ignite within me the fizz of my small sun-kissed Wild-Child who, delighting within the naked hot animal of her body, cradles her silky cat in her arms and challenges the darkness with a gap-toothed grin ...
... and tumbling-in with my Wild-Child comes a strong sense of my father. I find myself five-years-old, slippery-wet in the chlorine-thick heat of our African-summer swimming pool struggling to stay afloat as my father uses a boogie-board to stir the chaos of tsunami-sized waves into the once-limpid blue of the imprisoned water. We’ve delighted ourselves with a wild morning of clambering up the foot-scalding steeply-pitched slick-slate roof of the house to fling ourselves squealing with fear-and-elation high in the air across the hard and hungry slasto-tiles below and into the smack of the waiting water.

I’m feral and fierce and tolerated only by my older brother and his tribe of woolly-haired beach grommets because I fight back and don’t whine or cry when upended, or pummelled, or tied-up and tortured, or when I succumb to the dad-made waves and emerge spluttering and pallid.

My father thrives at the centre of this mayhem. Older than our friends’ parents by nearly a generation but with deep affinity for unleashed children. He engineers escapades, builds a trampoline into the ground and a large complex jungle-gym onto the garden, and buys various vehicles that encourage unfettered play. Along with the thrilled barking dogs we hoon about standing up on the back of his building-bakkie as he races from building-site to building-site; we perform death-defying forward-flips over the metal roll-bar on the open-topped beach-buggie as, protesting, you drive us to school; we rough-and-tumble in the back of the combi-van singing The Night Chicago Died at the tops of our voices on the way to the beach.

My memory tugs me back into the swimming pool where we’ve abandoned the waves in favour of Dad launching us one-by-one off his shoulders in welters of sparkling-splashes through the sizzling air to crash back into the water. I recall you telling me how he broke his neck when one of Derek’s larger friends came straight back down onto his head. I was likely present but our family wasn’t one where mishaps that may distress the children were disclosed. And you later told how he came inside dripping water on the tiles and holding his head firmly pulled upwards with both hands, saying, “Um, I think I’ve broken my neck … again” – this being the second time – the first was as a soldier during World War II when he misjudged a handstand ... I think. This image of him holding his head pulls me sideways to when and I collided mid-air with our paragliders and I, plummeting 40-plus metres to smack the ground, worried the extreme pain indicated I, too, had broken my neck. Unwilling to cause a fuss I echoed Dad by holding my head firmly to stabilise my neck-vertebra and achingly trekked for an arduous hour to the road and rescue.

I nudge this slew of memories back towards the issue under scrutiny – my therapeutic practice – and wonder about my propensity for playfulness despite the dour presence of my joyless Threshold Orphan.

A heart-warming partial answer forms: my inheritance of the P-gene. I chuckle. Hand-in-hand with his generosity and playfulness ran a deep streak of buffoonery. This we attributed to his Palooka-gene that made him ever a beginner, gullible and prone to what we children viewed as comical misadventures. He rendered himself crashingly unconscious by closing the hatchback combi-boot on his own head; he devoured a handful of coins mistaken for the
peanuts in his other hand; after four years of marriage he introduced you, Audrey, as Barbara
... I write of these moments wondering at the crass little person I was – some of his mishaps,
from which we drew great merriment, were quite distressing. I recall wetting my pants in
near-hysteria at what Derek quickly named Elephant Knees when we collected my father from
hospital after several weeks of traction for a painful back-injury. The procedure involved thick
mummification of his thighs with sticky bandages to which were attached weights that
dangled off the bottom of the bed while his upper body was held fast with straps. This
elongated his spine. These bandages were removed to reveal swaddles of fishbelly-white,
hairless, severely stretched skin cascading in wrinkles over each knee. Yet, like all the occasions
when his P-gene either impelled him into misadventure or drew calamity to him, he was
simultaneously mortified and delighted at the joy he afforded us.

But again I digress. So what relevance does this Wild-Child P-gene have to my work? Due to
your influence, I tell my dead mother, I’m more self-consciousness and while part of me would
love to dive wholeheartedly into ‘Yes!’-style adventures à-la-Dad, I also appreciate how this
prescience often protects clients and me from harm. This doesn’t render the whimsy and
wildness of the P-gene inaccessible to me. I’ve come to know my own cultivated version of the
P-gene through my Trickster-Maggie and Wild-Child-based work with children and adults
who’ve lost the magic of imagination and play. When I find myself pulling back or becoming
stiff, feeling blank or losing my way, wanting to contain mess or control excess in a session, I
draw on my P-gene to lean just a little further into the unknown, the unexpected, the
experimental and imaginative and impossible and magical ‘what-if...’

And sometimes as I tip forward into this generative but scary chaos I meet the strength of my
father’s arms holding me from falling too far. He lifts my Wild-Child-and-me and tips us
joyously over his back in an Elephant-Slide and we shriek in the mingled fear-and-delight that
stretches a child’s world into trust and newness ... and I open to the hope that expanding into
this I-wonder-what-will-happen-if zone will – for my stuck and afraid and contracted and
fractured clients – awaken new options, add extra juice to enliven the stories sliding around
inside of them, offer succulent ways of seeing and being and coming at things sideways and
backwards to tease out innovative possibilities and solutions and alternatives or expand them
into acceptance and self-orientated playful-gentleness.

(Conversations with my dead mother, February 2014)
In this section I explore how liminal play (Turner, 1970) manifested in my quake-work. This research established my innate playfulness as a potent and poignant counterbalance to my wounding. This playfulness – which is part of my biological ethnology, woven into my nature and nurtured by an upbringing full of madcap escapades, adventure sports and creative careers – emerges as my way of calling ‘Yes!’ to life (Levine, 2009). My sens/e of humour and playfulness became figural within my own healing, and, braided through my quake-arts therapy, contributed to the healing of others. Yet within my quake-work it was initially shrouded in shame as I believed trauma therapy to be a serious business, with no place for risk-taking, spontaneity and laughter. This inquiry thus became the final stage of a quest to comprehend and validate this vital feature of my practice.

In this section, my liminal kite-string laces together:

- **liminal play** which outlines play as a feature of liminal states;
- **my lived-history of playfulness** which maps my embrace of playfulness;
- **the playful-trickster/serious-sage and me** which links into the previous section on liminal beings and lays the foundations for how my embodiment of the liminal Trickster/Sage archetypes shaped my development of imagical play;
- **imagical play** which explores how I used playfulness within my quake-work. I tease out several strands woven into and informing imagical play:
  - **play within imagical play**;
  - **mindfulness and flow within imagical play**;
  - **poiesis within imagical play**;
  - **active imagination within imagical play**;
  - **the therapist within imagical play**;
- **the value of playfulness within enduring liminality** which unpacks what benefits playfulness brought to my work; and
- **the hazards of playfulness within enduring liminality** which warns of several pitfalls of playfulness.

I evoke my description of this research as a room filled with an Indra’s net of interconnected creations. Within the confining linearity of printed text, this section comes after explorations of liminality, soul and my wounding. Within my ideal imagined kinetic research-sculpture, however, each node in this inquiry into playfulness tugs on strands linked to previous discussions. My attempts to make useful sens/e of playfulness are grounded in my quake-context of **enduring liminality** and a frolicsome **both-and-and...** And, as I lean further into the healing energy of my wounded/healer-self, I place my sombre-wounding/playful-healing in dynamic parallax.
Liminal play

Liminal playfulness made itself felt in my poetic practice in multiple ways. And, looking to the literature, I find several thinkers who forge various associations between the chaotic formlessness of liminality and playful expression. Harris (2009) suggests Turner’s notion of liminal space overlaps with Winnicott’s (1977) understanding of play in the transitional ‘as-if’ space. Sibbett (2004) explores play as a liminal art therapy practice through a lens of theories developed by surrealist and anthropologist, Caillois (1962). She believes play can increase our capacity to endure, befriend and develop agency within limbo-like situations such as cancer. Sarder (2010) may well be describing our enduringly liminal quake-context when he construes the ‘post-normal’ as a transitional state involving complexity, chaos and contradiction to which the only reasonable response is the pragmatic imagination of play. Finneran (2013) proposes play characteristics – including risk, experiment, imagination, extension, innovation, and dissension – in response to Sarder’s (2010) liminality-resonant post-normal. And Levine (2009) suggests we seek a trauma therapy that affirms life by enabling us to play in the ruins.

Figure 57. Louis helping in the ruins of a playful session (Green, January 2012)
my lived-history of playfulness

I introduced this section with a taste of my play-filled upbringing. This childhood generative ‘what-if...’ went on to infuse my professional origins in theatre and drama-in-education. I recall the 80s: Wearing leotard and tights within the cavernous Hexagon theatre*, I taste again my delight at discovering Spolin (1979) and Barker’s (1978) playful improvisations and theatre games, the wild imagination of Artaud’s (1958) ‘theatre of cruelty’, Dadaist theatre’s crazy juxtapositions. Alongside these playful improvisers, I also embraced more contained theorist-practitioners – the darkly-comic existential undertow of the so-called Absurdist, Beckett and Ionesco, and Grotowski (1968), whose ‘poor theatre’ profoundly affected me and many South Africans looking for grassroots ways to challenge apartheid. This lively combination of theatre games, thematic improvisation and critical focus became the backbone of my work as HIV/AIDS/lifeskills educator within the Drama Studies Department, DramAidE†, and as Lifeskills coordinator for the AIDS Training, Information and Counselling Centre (ATICC‡). During the quakes, this applied drama-base was evident both in my generally improvisational approach and also through my increasing use of adapted versions of my 1980/90s theatre games with groups and individuals – specifically in the form of interactive playful combinations of drawing and enacted story-telling.

My quake-context of enduring liminality evoked within me and my work both the naïve playful neophyte and the wise earnest shaman, the archetypal playfulness of the Trickster and the gravity of the Sage. Yet I initially favoured the solemn-Sage. For, while this playfulness felt appropriate within theatre/drama contexts, within trauma therapy it felt disrespectful and even potentially harmful. My HIV/AIDS counsellor training in the early 1990s steeped me in then-current cognitive approaches based in the belief that distress needs mature, rational and coherent narrativisation. My arts therapy training had not explored contemporary trauma theory and was framed by a lecturer who shunned playfulness, emphasising that therapy must include analytic talking. And the quakes limited my access to up-to-date trauma texts while my stress-based cognitive compromise reduced my ability to absorb new information. I thus entered this work believing that real trauma therapy is austere, planned, calm, and safely-structured – plus I had internalised the demonisation of play as the lightweight wasteful domain of the child, adulterer or fool (Finneran, 2013).

During most of 2011, I rode an internal seesaw – feeling my inclusion of whimsy was healing while thinking that my practice should be more solemn. I was hesitant to discuss my playfulness during supervision. Yet late in 2011 when I did begin disclosing, my clinical supervisor, Tony, introduced me to Ablon (1996), Poynton (2012) and Winnicott (1977). With relief, I began openly embracing playfulness as, potentially, inherently healing – a stance further strengthened during this study. The intrinsic value of play in psychotherapy is grounded in Winnicott’s (1977) idea that play belongs to

* The theatre of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.
† The Drama-in-AIDS-Education project was established by Professor Dalrymple (University of Zululand) who in 1991 collaborated with the then KwaZulu Health and Education Departments and the Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal to establish teams of actor-teachers and nurses. These teams visited KwaZulu-administered secondary schools and presented an AIDS educational-drama before helping pupils create artworks and theatre-pieces that were presented to the community on AIDS Open Days.
‡ Department of Health, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.
health, facilitating growth and therefore wellbeing. Play and imaginative-creativity are interlinked like flight and wings. If the client cannot play, she needs to be enabled to do so, because it is in the playing she is being creative, and creativity is healing (Poynton, 2012; Winnicott, 1977).

My stance is not, however, one of either/or. I now place playfulness in its rightful place alongside seriousness. And I believe that in our context of enduring liminality being open to both light-heartedness and solemnity evoked the healing extra-and... of something new for clients. And this led to more limber and buoyant souls with the capacity to transform merely enduring liminality into playing in the ruins (Levine, 2009).

The ethnographic strands within this study further strengthened my embrace of this both-and-and... approach to playful-mindfulness by reminding me of my African origins. As I re-imagined my HIV/AIDS work alongside Zulu shamans, I celebrated their embodiment of the liminal Trickster/Sage archetypes. In preparation for a more detailed discussion of mindful-playfulness in my quake-work, I evoke my own embodiment of this archetype as my Magpie-Trickster/TeddyBear-Sage.
the playful-trickster/serious-sage and me

I am a white South African. I grew up during the either/or of apartheid and for the young-me people-of-colour were domestic servants or ‘nannies’, ‘garden-boys’ and labourers on my father’s building sites. That changed when I began university in the mid-1980s. And this tale takes place in the early-1990s. The dismantling of apartheid was yet to come and communities were still geographically/spiritually/culturally/financially divided by race. I was leading a multi-racial group for the drama-in-education programme, DramAidE, addressing HIV/AIDS within Zulu communities. Our team was invited to perform our educational-play at the first-ever gathering aimed at building cooperation between Zulu traditional healers and other healthcare providers as the AIDS struggle escalated. Unbeknown to my team and me, our invitation was controversial. Two factions were vying to control this slippery multifarious group of determined individuals who, we later established, were notoriously unwilling to work together!

After a challenging journey on rutted rural roads through the black-night, dodging sudden goats and skinny dogs, we presented ourselves at the tumbledown school in which the groups were meeting. The participants were eating dinner as we sidled in. Increasingly heated Zulu conversations ensued as our spokesperson, Zamo, became caught between the aspirant leaders of the two blocs: the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) that instigated the meetings and the self-appointed leader of the healers, a powerful sangoma, Patience.

In the hot noisy room, brimming with thick scents of sweat and snuff and poorly-cured animal skins vying with overcooked fatty meat and onions, the healers where scattered about under glaring fluorescent lights, red and white prominent in clothing and accessories. Many wore headbands dripping with beads that chattered when they moved, others sported inflated animal bladders and wristbands made from twists of goat-skin traditionally sliced from a funeral sacrifice and worn in memory until rotted off. Amidst the haze of snuff and marijuana, glazed rolled-back eyes and rocking bodies indicated many were communing with ancestral spirits.

Zamo worriedly fills us in. We’re wedged in the feud’s centre: the NGO invited us without consulting the healers; we inadvertently compounded this slur by entering while they were eating. A battle raged – should we be banished or allowed to perform? A compromise dictated we exit and re-enter the room and greet each healer with appropriately humble respect. I’m bemused, willing to play along with what feels like childish power-mongering, until I notice my Zulu team-members – they’re shaking, eyes darting about, visibly afraid.

I begin to sweat.

We file in and start a circuit of the room, knees bent so our heads are low. Each salutation involves crouching at the healer’s feet, waiting to be addressed, answering any questions and then politely moving on when released. They’re a fascinating, anxiety-provoking mix of regal and ragged in fake leopard-print Y-front underpants and black lace underwire bras adorned
with bones and shrivelled animal-feet. Many hold themselves with great dignity and radiate warmth and compassion – embodying my sense of the Sage’s quiet wisdom. Others laugh and joke, pick their noses, fart, spit, gnaw on bones, scratch in private places – betraying strong evidence of the puckish archetypal Trickster (a far cry from expert-mantled, white-coated and stethoscope-carrying Western doctors).

Two particular characters leap from my memory as clearly embodying these liminal archetypes. I’ve almost circumnavigated the room when I encounter a man seated on the floor with splayed legs. His fulsome headdress and profuse white and red beads nestled amidst a welter of smelly bladders and fragments of poorly-cured animal-hide suggest he holds status. He also reeks of dope and is obviously not completely present. Because he’s on the ground, to get my head below his I’m obliged to crawl. Halting, I raise my face too close to his crotch and am confronted with a large semi-erect black penis that he’s steadily masturbating! In the harsh shadows, amidst sideways glances, I take some time to contextualise this organ. The NGO had presented the healers with the means to accurately demonstrate condom usage to patients. African medicine uses embodied objects and rumours abounded about condoms being placed on broom-handles rather than willies to protect against the spiritual curse of AIDS. Demonstration penises had thus been cast in midnight-black silicone and gifted to the healers in red velvet pouches. These are awe-inspiring in size and graphic detail, shiny and veined with large wrinkled testicles that formed a suction-cup for convenient lick-and-stick to a wall. The Trickster is fully present as I crouch before this frightening yet strangely compelling man gently stroking his fake appendage throughout our conversation.

The second memorable sangoma radiated the opposing Sage-archetype. Patience, regal on a chair, holds herself with grand dignity, long braids draping her shoulders and a fur-covered snuff pot hanging between her breasts. Completely sober, she’s overwhelming in her still sense of power. Gathered at her feet are my anxious team – Dudu is particularly grey and quivery as she gazes up into the mesmeric self-confident gravitas of this commanding shaman.

Patience claims my hand, recognising me as group-leader, and speaks firmly in English. “You’re fortunate you’re children,” she tells me. I nod while silently thinking one team member, Auntie Gugu, must be old enough to be her mother. “As children,” she intones sombly, “you don’t understand what you’ve done. If you were old enough to be rude like this on purpose, I’d be outside right now killing the goat” – this said in deep tones and eliciting an involuntary whole-body jerk from Dudu. “You don’t know what this means,” Patience says looking into my eyes and pointedly ignoring Dudu’s distressed squirming, “But if you did, you’d know your parents would never see you again.” Now it’s Dudu’s turn to nod vigorously. She knows what this means. And she knows she’s been spared.

This was my first of many encounters with these Zulu guardians-of-the-threshold who embodied the divergent characteristics of the liminal. As a child steeped in white cultural constructs which conceived of all medical professionals as objective experts, dignified and cast in the mould of the Sage, these wild healers – who listened to voices, chanted and huffed snuff, danced and spoke in riddles, used embodied objects and symbols, channelled the ancestors and the spirits of the land, were rude and dismissive at times and tender and
empathetic at others, scratched and preened and snorted and blended sacred and profane – were so far outside my worldview as to be completely alien to me.

And yet, now I too have been working within the liminal zone they occupied, I see manifesting within myself and my practice characteristics I connect back to the ongoing work I did alongside and with these extraordinary shamans. While I’m more circumspect about nose-picking and crotch-scratching and (hopefully) avoid donning the mantle of the expert at the extreme ends of the Trickster and Sage archetypes, I see how occupying the in-between of the earthquakes front-staged within my inner-theatre a duet between my own Magpie-Trickster and TeddyBear-Sage, between my status as neophyte and role as shaman, between my own wounding and healing. And through engaging these paradoxes I open to the mysterious something-more, well-trodden by my Zulu mentors, that evokes liminal monsters and soul-magic.

(Journal of the Teddybear-Sage, January 2014)

The neophyte/shaman and wounded/healer are but two liminal hybrids within my psyche. When I began this research, a Magpie quickly inveigled itself into my imagination. This archetypal collector of bright sensual things became a cheeky but apt symbol for my rhizomatic researcher-self. Alongside my Creative-Cat and Wild-Child, this Magpie also highlighted playfulness within my quake-practice. As risk-taking messenger-between-worlds (Ravenari, 2015), my Magpie thrived within the twilit twists and turns of the liminal, laying claim to aspects of the archetypal liminal Trickster (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975; Ellis, 1993; Thomassen, 2009).

This liminal Trickster is one of the better-known, self-proclaimed liminal shamans (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975). Symbolising the shadow and the liminal state itself, this universal figure is woven into most cultures – such as the African healers described above. These tricksters, jesters and fools exhibit excess and, given their propensity for jokes, storytelling, and fantasising, are seldom taken seriously. Jung’s (1981) Jester and Pearson’s (1991) Fool archetypes aim to live in the present-moment with full enjoyment – they dread being bored or boring others and use playful joking to enliven situations. Yet despite this gift of joy, the Trickster’s incessant busyness and tedious-avoiding antics smack of frivolous time-wasting (reminiscent of my avoidant busyness). Echoing my Magpie, the category-defying Native American Coyote presents a bizarre unity of the contradictory and irrational as buffoon and mythic transformer who succeeds by failing and creates by destroying (Ellis, 1993). While these Pucks are problematic – thriving on self-serving ambiguity and paradox – they also represent great potential embodying, as hesitant shamans (Ellis, 1993), the fantastical, bewildering mixture of order and disorder within liminality. I embraced Trickster-Magpie energies in the a/r/tographic flavouring of my rhizomatic, contradictory, eclectic research escapades, riding the possibilities of this magical-mischief while alert to destructive aspects. This enabled me to express how my Trickster-Magpie, Wild-Child and Creative-Cat colluded to bring whimsical playfulness to my quake-arts therapy.

Within some cultures, oppositional liminal characteristics present within one individual – such as Zulu sangomas. In other traditions, archetypal adversaries are separate individuals – for example, the Coyote-Trickster within North American First Nations (Ellis, 1993), and Satan and his demons within the version of Christianity peddled to me. During my teenage Christian-phase I aspired to this
perceived separation of good from evil, hoping to evict my sins and live a blameless life. I discovered, however, that my psyche follows Jung’s (1978) *enantiodromia*. This principle, derived from Heraclites, proposes superabundance of any force inevitably produces its opposite in search of balance – like equilibrium and homeostasis in the natural world and evocation of shadow-opposites in the psyche.

Searching for a counterbalance for the mischievous character of my Trickster-Magpie, I discovered my internal Sage – resonating with Jung’s (1978) Jester/Sage as archetypal within the personality construct. My Sage initially presented himself as Sebastian – my beautiful departed grey cat – but soon transformed into a TeddyBear, evoking echoes of my childhood comforters. And he and the Threshold Orphan offset my frisky playfulness, opening quieter more mindful processes by accessing my empathy-enhancing wounds and shadows.

This Sage archetype embodies wise intelligence as the kind guide whose core desire is to find the truth by using his intellect and capacity for self-reflection to understand the world. He dislikes ignorance, greatly fears being duped, and can become so enamoured with detail that he fails to act (Pearson, 1991). In Jung’s (1981) individuation process, the sage or *senex* archetype arrives only once we have reached an internal balance by working through our inner opposing anthropomorphic archetypes (Hillman, 1983). The opposite of Jung’s *senex* is the young boy or *puer aeternus* (Hillman, 1983) – within my inner worlds my TeddyBear-Sage is balanced by my Magpie as Trickster and aspects of Jung’s youthful boy are re-imagined within my Threshold Orphan and Wild-Child.

*I’m most effective as therapist-shaman companioning clients through liminality when I balance my Sage and Trickster traits, splicing the mischievous Puck’s playful-formlessness together with the wise Elder’s ordered-calm.*

*My animangels embody aspects of these archetypes. My tricolour-three-horned-jester-hatted Magpie dances to the tin-whistle of the liminal Trickster/Fool/Coyote who thieves from others, is bright-eyed and ever-vigilant for opportunities to serve itself. It takes risks and often fails, pulls things apart, is multiplicit and wayward ... yet it brings levity to situations that are drowning in darkness, opens cramped corners and allows light and breath in, invites laughter from within the ruins and rubble, and its irrepressible spirit is a powerful reminder of how resourcefulness and resilience can take many forms and lurk in strange places. It can also bring about creation inadvertently – even when engaged in destruction. As this Magpie is master-of-the-formless-space and the art-of-play as a practice-in-itself, it wiles and tarries and moodles and experiments with no clear goal in mind other than hedonistic pleasure or fascination with the colours and shapes in this moment.*

*And from this intense absorption that isn’t corralled by confining aims and objectives, it often surprises by creating newness, by spontaneously generating the conditions that allow fresh order and useful structure to emerge from chaos.*

*When I called for a totem to counterbalance the steadily-growing strength of this Trickster-self, my beloved grey cat, Sebastian, responded. During a creative session he presented as gentle containing wrap-around-ness holding my other familiars in his Russian-doll-like belly, larger-than, and extending beyond, my other more playful aspects. His manifestation, while*
tangibly present in most dealings with others and myself, is often hazy and gently unformed, evoking a felt-sense of being nestled deeply in the warm softness of his silver-grey belly-fur. I feel he’s so close I cannot touch him. His deep wisdom interlaces with my underground-sense-of-self, thrumming so far beneath the surface that elucidating him is more sensitive, more implicit ... and possibly more nettlesome ... I’m more inclined to own the slices of me that are challenging, puckish, Magpie-motivated, and get squirmy when acknowledging characteristics that express my gravitas and wisdom.

I sit with this knowing. It’s not new. I often feel skin-crawly when praised (while secretly basking). This duality (in many female-clients also) appears in part a product of my genderised upbringing that inducted me into the subterfuge an intelligent and able woman requires to succeed in a world not entirely welcoming of these traits.

My Wise-self thus remains deeply influential yet blurry, offsetting my beady-eyed Magpie. His careful wisdom and connection to deeper knowings, his vulnerability and calm, tenderness, compassion and concern, his loving-kindness and ability to wrap all in his silky fur and soothe with his resonant purr, symbolise the deep love and concern I often bring to my therapeutic work. He represents the mysterious inner-knowing I sometimes have when working with another, embodied imagery that seems to well from a source other than me ...

... maybe my connection with the collective unconscious or World-Soul – an ancient repository of human wisdom containing all we have ever known and that becomes available through archetypes and other non-cognitive sensations if we tune in ...

My Magpie of course disputes this with a snigger ... a sceptical both/and that feels essential as excessive Sage would render my practice too serious, too deep and thus inaccessible to both myself and clients. Just as, while I often play during sessions – in both larger and smaller ways – this is embedded in caring and a deep yearning to help ...

... and to be loved and admired in return – a different and compelling Crocodile-tale that overlaps and echoes Sebastian too, as he was a TeddyBear-Cat with a need to be held and carried about and attended to – all acting as potent reminder that my symbols are slippery and multivocal, possessing the extra-and...

Over-simplification into this-means-that, while a useful explanatory tool, runs the risk of diminishing them ...

... but back to the enveloping soft and protective grey fur that enables the other more roguishly-cheeky aspects-of-self to gambol safely, to roll-and-tumble, and test their own and various imaginal wings borrowed from clients, to let things fall apart and play in the ruins while coaxing new order to emerge kite-like from the chaos. I also now sense these more-frisky alters suffer the most; they’re in greatest danger of being crushed into insignificance when life smacks into me. When I’m embattled my frolicsomeness flees, the breath and trust and flexibility required to take the risks involved in free-play find little space inside my Crocodilian-contracted-self when, during a ravaging life-storm, I’m battening down hatches and boarding up windows. My TeddyBear-Sage/Sebastian-self, however, often remains robustly-roly-poly during these shadow-experiences.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, January 2014)
imagical play

The interwoven playful and mindful characteristics of my Trickster-Magpie and TeddyBear-Sage create the foundations for what I call *imagical play* within my quake-arts therapy. I coined imagical play to express ways that being *playfully imaginative* with symbolic *images* can invite transformatory *magic* into the everyday. This inquiry opened space for me to begin expanding imagical play by teasing-out some core concepts from my innate, embodied practice and then cross-referencing these with published texts.

My Magpie and I are seeking patterns within this jumble of overlapping ideas. When I’m with a client as playobject, play-participant, or play-witness, I’m in the moment. I am pulled out of this embodied nowness by conscious awareness of theoretical constructs and therapeutic models. So I sweep these aside to open a nakedly-authentic, affectively-connecting, here-and-now, responsive-space into which we can clamber. But now as I do the research-thing of digging into the literature, so many resonances and new ideas and exciting possibilities are blossoming that I’m losing contact with the juicy lived-feel of play in my body.

So I call upon my Magpie/Trickster/tumbling-court-Jester-me, to help create an artwork that reawakens the aliveness of play while merging this with theory. We begin with four circles representing concepts I’ve spotted in imagical play, intending to have these overlap. But they’re clumsy, the overlapping is ugly and we’re displeased.

We sit crabily with this for a while.

As we grump, I feel the whisper of another presence. Where the Magpie is quick and spontaneous, fluttering and flitting and clacking its beak, my Sage is gentle and calm. His TeddyBear tummy is softly warm as I lean into his mindful presence. I take a deep slow breath at his instigation and begin toying with the circles. They become roots, four sets of embracing and circular rhizomes all nourishing a central tree. (My Magpie, TeddyBear-Sage and I work together almost reverently as these symbols arrive like angels.)

*Within the Forest of Enduring Liminality, these roots signify the grounding of my Imagical Play-Tree in ideas and practices drawn from*

![Diagram of overlapping circles depicting active imagination, play, poiesis, and mindfulness and flow.](image-url)
But grappling with the Imagical Play-Tree soon grinds our flow to a halt. I’m channelling much-cherished childhood memories of Mom reading to Derek and me from Blighton’s ‘Faraway Tree’ series, and I imagine a tall lush tree full of magical adventures. But my clay refuses to play along. It slumps and sags. If the trunk manages to stay straight, the branches droop despairingly.

I begin growling.

We stop again. What’s this telling you? asks my TeddyBear. In a flash of insight I see how while a few clients may climb such a tree with ease, many come to me because they’ve lost their agility, their limberness, their arms and legs are weak, their hearts beat too fast and their lungs strain for air. What use would a high wild tree be to them? It would feel like the array of strategies many of them tell me they’ve been taught by other well-meaning counsellors – tactics that seem so sensible yet feel impossible when most needed.

So I allow the trunk to fall and nip it off where it bends. I trawl through my memory of the many birds’ nests and tree-houses and lookouts imaginably created by clients during the quakes. These structures held multiple meanings – suggestions of playful spaces and pirate-ships, of safe dens, and vantage- and view-points. And so my Magpie-Trickster, my TeddyBear-Sage and I create a treehouse as a launch-pad for imaginal play.

(Magpie-musings, July 2014)
play within imagical play

This research introduced me to various ideas about play and – inviting imagination to impel me beyond the privileging of normal/real to the detriment of creativity – I follow Finneran’s (2013) call for generous play definitions.

Without betraying confidences, I say to my dead mother, I want to talk about some cool happenings during playful sessions. I feel my mother smile in the ether. As I was there, she replies, maybe I can fictionalise what I witnessed and tell it back to you as a composite-client story, then no confidences will be broken? We contemplate this for a moment. Ok, I say, let’s give it a try.

And we look up simultaneously at the paint-spattered ceiling of the studio and laugh.

This is a story of two children and how the spirit of playfulness helped them, my mother begins, her voice ringing inside my soul. The distressed angry boy comes first. You and he discuss how feelings seem to have two ends – one outside of you where the feeling attaches to the world and the other end inside where the feeling attaches to you. Stuff travels to-and-fro between these two ends. Sometimes you can’t do much about the stuff in the world... but you can usually do something about what happens inside. And you can make choices about what goes outside again, you say. So, something outside in the world sets off your anger inside. Anger is energy that builds up and wants to go somewhere. You can throw that anger back into the world by lashing-out. Or you can choose to do something less harmful with that anger-energy.

You suggest trying this to see how it feels.

He thinks of the current situation that brought him into the session feeling vicious. His body tenses, his eyes narrow, his breathing gets shallow. While he’s doing this, you’ve watching with open curiosity. When he’s well enraged, you get him to stand on a chair and you hand him balls of clay. Throw these at the ground really hard, you say. He doesn’t need much provocation and begins to lob the clay balls.

I think the effect you were going for, says my dead mother, was a satisfying SPLAT. But the blue rubber floor in your makeshift shed-studio was unwilling to play along!

The balls bounced!

So much for anger-diffusing.

He keeps trying and the balls keep landing with poppy little boings. You both begin to giggle, a sense of foolishness replacing the anger. You notice this out loud – how anger dissolves if you start laughing. You both take note of this idea and begin playing along with the arrival of silliness in the studio and wondering about more satisfying hard surfaces for clay-ball anger-splatting.
You both look up suddenly (like we did a moment ago). He glances at you for permission, already knowing you’ll grant it. He’s been working with you for several months and knows you make a point of saying ‘Yes!’ and finding ways to honour even wacky creative requests. These sessions are space and time where anything is possible, where his imagination can fly high on magical what-ifs.

So you again roll the clay balls, this time with added water so they’ll really SPLAT! He begins tentatively, but soon the energy builds and both of you are hooting like crazy loons and flinging squidgy balls of wet clay up onto the once-white ceiling boards. Many stick, some drop and flop back down. You’re both in excited transports of delight.

Finally, the balls are used up and you slow and stand for some time gazing at the messy patterns on the ceiling, the lumps of misshapen clay on the floor and table, in the sandtray. You quietly begin identifying shapes and creatures in the patterns left by the clay. It feels like you’re lying on your backs in the grass and tracing images in the stars. A deep peace settles in the room. You’ve journeyed through and, without judgement, playfully honoured and transformed a whole range of emotions. While you watch, he uses paper and pastels to capture his journey as a rocket travelling from an explosive launch into the calm star-spangled blackness of space.

When he leaves, you smile deeply at each other.

Within the halls of my imagination, my dead mother and I smile deeply at each other. Thank you, I say. But wait, there’s more, says my mother. The clay-splat-loving angel lingered in the studio as she knew other clients may need her.

Her next playmate was a young woman who after fighting a long battle was finally regaining her sense of vitality and hope. She wanted to celebrate. As she was expressing this, her eyes kept straying to the ceiling, to the recently-added splatter-clay constellations. You voiced a guess about how she may like to commemorate her return to a sense of normalcy.

She was delighted.

The following session, she arrives dressed in a painter’s overall, with a hood, a surgical mask and clear goggles. She means business! A new zingy feeling of excited anticipation and playfulness breezes in with her. You both set about rolling clay balls. But this time you pull out the paint pallets and into each hollow place a blob of paint: red, yellow, blue, white, and black. She looks at you quizzically and then begins to laugh as you take a ball, roll it in red paint and ceremoniously hand it to her.

You share a look of breathless anticipation before she strikes an exaggerated stance and flings the messy scarlet clay directly up at the ceiling. That’s for the powerlessness you felt, you say to her. It smacks in with a loud splat, splaying paint in every direction!
The play has begun!

You both fling and toss and lob coloured balls at the increasingly rainbowed ceiling. Some stick and others drop off onto the large sheet of waiting paper you’ve placed below. This happens without words – you work in a shared energetic silence, broken only by the odd laugh and the sound of wet clay hitting and splurting. You mirror each other finding new ways to bedeck the ceiling, dancing in complex but coordinated dyadic communitas.

Finally, a signal seems to pass between you, and you begin poking and scraping the sticky balls off the ceiling with the wooden ends of long paintbrushes. Again, it looks like a strange significant duet danced with small wands and swords. Eventually all the coloured clay-pieces are on the paper below. You both crouch and, as Adele sings of love in her rich wide voice, you begin another more ground-bound dance using the clay blobs to paint swirls and splots and spirals and zigzags. You fetch down the smeary pallets and she empties these onto your canvas and using big sweeping movements – free movements, movements that celebrate her own magnificent movement through pain – together you create a new, colour-filled world.

This metamorphoses into a slower, more contemplative creative journey. Reclaimed clay blobs become small standing-stones in a magical circle on one side of a colourful landscape. You sit back while, inside this archetypal mythical space, she works in silence to create a clay altar, on which she places several ritual artefacts. Finally, she finds a lump that has mystically assumed the shape of a dinosaur-skeleton during its dance to the ceiling and the floor and over the artwork.

This she places on the centre of the altar in the centre of the stone-circle.
You both sit back on your haunches to gaze at this magical creation. You’re both paint and clay bedecked and warmed to the core. Finally, she speaks, spinning tales of the skull as the remnant of her wounds, held in her memory but now dried and unable to harm her further.

*(Conversations with my dead mother, June 2014)*

**forms of play**

Caillois’ (1962) four play forms – used by Sibbett (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) to understand liminal playfulness within the cancer journey – were evident in my quake imagical play.

*Mimicry* is essentially copying or playing a part, and can be like wearing a mask. It may be used to disguise emotions and as protection and/or denial. So it may form part of normal adjustment processes or be maladaptive. Within therapy, I used our innate mirror-neuron-induced tendency towards empathic mimicry (Harris, 2013) by modelling desirable states of being/doing. I then either overtly encouraged or subtly ‘seduced’ (Best, 2009) my client into aping me.

In *alea*, the player negates her own will and surrenders to chance/fate/destiny, feeling she can only passively wait for the cast of the die. Many clients expressed *alea* as they grappled to comprehend the powerful god-like earthquake-forces disrupting our lives. *Alea* may evoke superstitious and magical thinking involving talismans (Caillois, 1962) – auspicious, ritualised art symbols are evident in many cultures and may facilitate a sense of agency in their creation and destruction (Turner, 1966). Schaverien (2000) and McNiff (2004) adopt this power into arts therapy, suggesting artworks can operate positively as totems. Images may act as angels bearing gifts of insight while difficult emotions may be carried by scapegoat-artworks. Many clients created potent images of their pain and fear that, like scapegoats, were sacrificed in various ways: paper, popsicle-stick and pipe-cleaner creations were burnt; balloon emotions or creatures exploded; paintings and drawings shredded; clay creations shattered, placed into the ocean or rivers to dissolve; soft-sewn creatures were beaten and mangled; wire creations bent and twisted; and sandtray worlds were exploded, flattened and buried. Often these scapegoating processes lead to broken pieces being reclaimed and recreated as positive talismans symbolising transformation. Clients also created talismans of positive intentions, outcomes, emotions and hopes imbued with powers to remind them of their own agency, strength, love and buoyancy.

*Agôn*, competitive and combative play, was evident in many child-clients. Almost all boy clients and several girls waged epic sandtray battles, frequently with chaotic outcomes, and sometimes displaying cunning strategic-thinking. As the child was helped to recognise elements of the warfare were coming from within, he began to explore his power to affect any solution he chose (Waller & Sibbett, 2008), often leading to a sense of mastery, intrinsic reordering and personal agency.
"Ilinx is described by Caillois (1962) as “based on pursuit of vertigo ... an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind” (pp. 23, 24). Linked to the whirlpool, ilinx can be an embodied, existential experience of one’s own mortality (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) – on the-edge giddy-playfulness I perceived in clients and myself. My losses led to periods of heightened risk-taking in my adventure sports. My adult-clients presented ilinx through binge-drinking, drug-use, and sexual risk-taking. And child-clients expressed the whirlpool through crazy-play at home and school, and during sessions via creative chaos, wild games with my cats and dog, and rampant sandtray stories.

**types of play**

Caillois (1962) locates the above play forms on a continuum with *ludus* at one end. *Ludus* denotes structured activities bound by conventions and explicit rules that may be co-operative but can also be calculated, contrived, arbitrary and tedious (Caillois, 1962; Waller & Sibbett, 2008). Opposite on the continuum is *paidia*. Derived from ‘child’ in Greek and encapsulating freely-improvised, unstructured and spontaneous playful activities that manifest the human play-instinct, *paidia* may induce freedom and increased creativity but can also be vertiginous and destabilising. In using Caillois’ ideas to review how quake-clients engaged playfully with arts-making, I noticed that healthy play incorporated, not only ordered and spontaneous types, but could also be characterised as *lively* and *calm*. This brings playfulness into the arena of my both-and-*and...* offering a wider range of play-combinations to open options and increase limberness, including: lively-spontaneous play; lively-ordered play; calm-spontaneous play; and calm-ordered play.

**relationships in play**

All manifestations of playfulness were embodied in my quake-work through relationship – between client, myself and the arts-process/product. My focus on relationship was intended to help clients re/develop secure attachment which, in turn, would facilitate regained internal composure leading to an increased sense of personal agency (Kass & Trantham, 2014). When I meld Parten’s (1932) three play categories with art-making, various configurations of the therapeutic relationship become visible. This creates a useful lens to explore inter-relational playfulness in my quake-work.

Parten’s ‘co-operative play’ becomes *co-creation* during which the client and I worked together on projects and I helped her identify, express and compose her responses. ‘Parallel play’ becomes *parallel-creation* as clients and I worked separately on projects – sometimes interlinked by similar themes, or involving response-art from me (Fish, 2012), or remaining totally separate. During this
process, I modelled gaining internal composure and agency as I tackled the creative components of risk-taking, exploring, and sometimes failing. ‘Solitary play’ becomes solo-creation during which clients devised, planned and created artworks alone while I witnessed without involvement. This encouraged clients to explore and demonstrate their ability to problem-solve and self-compose. These differing types of engagement aimed to enable clients to both act alone and identify when they needed support and assistance – hopefully both in and outside the studio.

_a playful soul is a limber soul is a healthy soul_

I see, using these play-forms/types/relationships as lenses, that my quake-play was diverse and paradoxical, imbued with and evoking energies that were variously loud, vigorous, madcap, spontaneous, improvised, quiet, calm, ordered, and mindful. Healthy playfulness often moves organically between these states which, despite their differences, all bring the players into the present moment. This present-ness is viewed by many therapists as central to healing and post-traumatic growth as it fosters self-reflection, flexibility, creative thinking, prosocial behaviour, internal composure and personal agency (for example see Rappaport, 2014b).

While individuals may have a preferred default within these play-forms/types/relationships, my quake-arts experiences suggested that healthy souls can move between play-styles and -states as they respond flexibly to moment-to-moment happenings. Wounded souls seem to struggle with these shifts, imagination is injured and the play-response stutters. Quake-clients exhibited various dysfunctional play reactions. Some were numb, apathetic and unable to play, others were easily aroused but struggled to recompose over-excited and chaotic emotions. Some over-planned, were controlling, paid obsessive attention to detail and lacked spontaneity. And a few showed signs of Gil’s (1998, 2006) trauma play such as being stuck within repetitive stories, rumination, and inability to construct coherent narratives. I now believe soul-wellbeing is indicated by the capacity to move proactively within the here-and-now possibilities of loud/quiet play and spontaneous/ordered play by toning down or revving-up and self-acclimatising the embodied emotional sensations infusing each play-state. The capacity to shift gears during play as the imagination warms to the process demonstrates a buoyant flourishing soul with a healthy imagination that can be present to both joyous and distressing internal states.

_building bridges between mindful-playfulness and playful-mindfulness_

This flexible here-and-nowness, facilitated by inviting and enabling clients to experience all forms, types and relational aspects of play, is central to imagical play. It is my Trickster-Magpie and TeddyBear-Sage hand-in-hand. Yet, just as I carried into my quake-work some outdated, unhelpful ideas about suffering, I also harboured some limiting interpretations of play. I initially struggled to accept that mindful processes can fall within the ambit of play.

This disquiet regarding schisms between seriously-minded versus playfully-oriented practices finds oblique, but fertile, resonances with Rappaport and Kalmanowitz’s (2014) suggestion that twinning arts therapy with mindfulness mirrors the two wings of a bird. One wing represents experiencing and the other witnessing: experience alone may leave us lost in the storm; building a relationship only with the witness-self may detach us from the aliveness of our experiences. They suggest marrying...
mindfulness with arts therapy helps client and therapist become aware of the inner-witness while simultaneously embracing concrete experience — enabling free flight. In indomitable Magpie-style — and as wings repeatedly feature in my artwork regarding soul and imagination — I borrow and tweak this idea. Rappaport and Kalmanowitz’s (2014) experiencing-wing resonates with my leathery batwing, my Trickster-Magpie, my sense of lively playfulness — which also, in this symbolic iteration, connotes darker, chaotic aspects of life. The other witnessing-wing is expressed in my feathery angel-wing, my Sage-bear — symbolic of calmly-centred mindfulness.

Tell me about the winged-heart, says my dead mother as she gazes at the clay artwork I’m creating.

I emerge from the reverie in which the creative process has cocooned me. Again, like most of my current imagery, sitting between an angel-wing and a batwing is my heart — scarred by experience, sometimes embattled, but carrying riches.

This heart has come to represent my soul, I tell my mother.
We’re silent for a moment – I like to think we’re honouring how far my self-assurance has come: I can now say soul with only a small embarrassed wince.

I carry on explaining. Creating and recreating this soul-heart helps me consider what qualities of soul are required for the two wings of my imagination – my Trickster-wing of experiential lively playfulness and my Sage-wing of calm, mindful witnessing – to beat in tandem. Because these wings are made of different stuff – one is leather/the other feathers – they can seem so disparate. Plus, they set into flight such diverse features of my imagination.

So I’m grappling with questions such as: How can playfulness and mindfulness be linked? How can light-imagination and dark-imagination coexist? How can these different things possibly work together, permitting my flight to be smooth and parabolic rather than jagged and choppy? What enables my soul, this bridge linking these wings, to enter free-flowing flight and dance in parabolic halls of air?

(Conversations with my dead mother, June 2014)
I had begun weaving aspects of mindfulness into my practice after the first earthquake in September 2010. This “direct, pre-symbolic experience of the lived moment” (Avstreih, 2014, p. 186) helped clients and me experience the healing state coined as ‘flow’ by Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2004). My early Magpie-style adoptions and adaptations of mindfulness and flow were shaped by interpretations of these states as intrinsically calm, quiet and serious. In “an overly dramatic” and hyper-stimulating world they provided “opportunities to return to a place of stillness, centeredness, peace and awareness” (Gluck, 2014, p. 116) – encapsulated in the felt-sense evoked for me by Neruda’s poem.

During the quakes I was, however, intrigued to notice how the enjoyable, holistic sensation of total involvement that accompanies both mindfulness and flow could also be accessible during play (Waller & Sibbett, 2008). This challenged the clear separation between play and mindful flow that I harboured. My childhood playtime was raucous and energetic creating in my mind an apartheid between playfulness and mindfulness. However, when I applied even the most solemn mindful processes during the quakes, humour, silliness and spontaneous fun would sidle in to join us. My quake-therapy notes contain frequent descriptions of clients and me moving fluidly between the revery of art-making into disordered spontaneous playfulness and back again – dancing to-and-fro between passionate emotion and calm witnessing.
mindfulness

After the devastating February 2011 quake, I discovered Rappaport’s FOAT (2006, 2008). Of the texts I accessed during the early quake-days, Rappaport’s writings on FOAT (2008, 2010) became most influential. While not a pure practice of mindfulness, FOAT offered me an effective merger between art therapy and foundational principles derived from mindfulness. My dropping-in process described several times in this research is grounded in FOAT principles. These begin with the therapist’s sense of presence. This awareness with compassionate acceptance in the present moment is then nurtured in the client so she may attend to herself. The focusing attitude involves adopting a friendly, welcoming orientation towards the inner felt-sense. The therapist models this effective, and often magical, way of befriending oneself and helps the client develop these qualities. Grounding involves centring practices that help client and therapist stay calm in the face of inner upheavals. The therapist demonstrates compassionate understanding through listening and reflection, employing experiential and deep listening, artistic reflection, and nonverbal communication. The final principle of clinical sensitivity encourages the therapist to tune into the client’s specific issues, context and needs. FOAT uses a structured process to implement these principles beginning with an inward gaze to find and be with the felt-sense – the pre-verbal, inner, bodily feeling of an experience, emotion or issue. A symbol/handle is identified – this may be a word, phrase, gesture, image, or sound that matches the felt-sense. This is checked for resonance to ensure the symbol fully expresses the felt-sense. It is then expressed using art (Rappaport, 2014a).

flow

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 2004) began researching the flow phenomenon when he realised artists can become so absorbed they neglect bodily needs to stay in creative processes. He identified various characteristics exhibited by flow. Action and awareness become merged through a task that is challenging, yet achievable. The activity provides an autotelic experience – it is worth doing for its own sake. Self-consciousness is lost, paradoxically resulting in a stronger sense-of-self. Attention is centred and focused, and kinaesthetic awareness is heightened resulting in a loss of ego. The experience of time is transformed, and the activity engenders a feeling of empowerment by providing the possibility rather than the actuality of control (Waller & Sibbett, 2008).

the value of mindfulness and flow within imagical play

My experience accords with Rappaport (2014b) and the other authors’ belief that mindfulness, flow and the arts therapies are mutually enhancing. The inward direction of mindfulness finds outward expression through art. Mindful practices encourage the artist/client/therapist to notice what comes up and let it be, allowing the image to emerge rather than attempting a predetermined outcome (Allen, 2014). In this way, art-making can allow inner states to be externalised and explored. And this provides access to the eye – the part of us that can observe the storm as it is (Rappaport & Kalmanowitz, 2014). This inner space may become known as a secure nourishing home (Avstreih, 2014; Rappaport, 2014a) encouraging the client to trust her capacity to open to life without armouring – to embrace “the utter gift of a human life” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 608). Getting to know this inner-witness facilitates the simultaneous ability to be within and outside the experience – to be in the rubble while seeing through the eyes of the kite.
This concept of a central, knowing, eye-of-the-storm, wise/observer-self is grounded in what Rothaus (2014) calls ‘organicity’ – humans are living systems with an innate knowing of what is needed in order to heal and grow. Rappaport (2014a) calls this a life-forward direction. I explained this to clients by suggesting, just as our physical bodies are orientated towards healing – fighting infection with the immune system, creating scabs to stop bleeding, releasing pain-dampening hormones – so, too, are our souls. And just as bodies sometime struggle, needing help to heal, so, too, do our souls. In addition, mindful flow processes activate the body’s rest and repair system, associated with balancing improvements in psycho-physiological self-regulation, increased attention and memory, decision-making skills, positive emotional states and improved immune functioning (Peterson, 2014).


re/imagining mindful flow within imagical play

With some clients and in some sessions, calm honing-in on a singular essential-self was appropriate. Yet this speaks only to one possible manifestation of being human, at odds with my experience of feeling both singular and multiple – quite possibly, as Levine (2009) and Hillman (1996) proposed, too vast and wayward for confinement within one centralised conception of selfhood. Thus, at other times, and with other clients, this initial interpretation of mindfulness and flow felt restrictive. I thus began exploring ways to stay in the now, strongly connected to the felt-sense, while opening to playful explorations of multiplicity.
In addition, many clients and I found still meditative mindful and flow practices difficult to master. Our bodies were war-zones as we struggled with anxiety, hyper-arousal and agitation. We found it easier to access the benefits of mindfulness and flow through movement.

As I illicitly walk the Stan Helms track in the winter sun and luxuriate in the joyous canine gambolling of Louis and Vinnie on the steep muddy path beneath the yawning sky above the glitter-flecked bays, I free-flow ideas for this inquiry. I encounter many of my best notions on these Port Hills walks along illegally-reclaimed, yet-to-be-cleared-and-declared-safe tracks that sneak beneath teetering buttresses of earthquake-fractured rocks and over fallen razor-edged boulders plunged in the soft earth. I explain this phenomena to myself as part of my kinaesthesia – my personal blend of movement and aesthetic creativity that manifests in this need to have my body in motion in order for my soul to frolic. As my legs pump up the trail and my lungs stretch, both my chittering Magpie-mind and my distracting, always-demanding body are, like my frisking dogs, taken up in the embodied delight of blood-rushing-muscles-bulging doing, freeing my imagical soul to fly free.

(Magpie-musings, July 2013)

Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 2004) flow embraces the dynamic movement of water, air, sap, energy – opening links with various theorist-practitioners who advocate mindfulness via movement. Allen (2014) links mindful-flow with embodied movement and Merleau-Ponty’s (1996) phenomenology of the body highlights our incarnate character as beings that perceive and make meaning of the world through our senses. Irwin (personal communication, September 2013) emphasises the dynamism of living inquiry by shifting mindfulness outside the confines of the mind and into physical action, both as walking meditation and within the a/r/tographic rendering of reverberations.

My lived-experiences of evoking mindful-flow through movement encompass my use of various adventure sports to ground myself within my losses, and my formative careers in drama/theatre. These drama-based experiences harmonised with concepts I encountered in my later training and practice as arts therapist through Developmental Transformations (DVT) dramatherapy workshops with Reed Johnson (2011) and Lania (who travelled to Christchurch and ran a session in 2011). Although constrained by earthquake-induced spatial limitations, I magpie-d threads of DVT into my quake-therapy. I relished DVT’s encouragement to trust the embodied-play as clients will focus on what has traction for them. DVT invites clients to ground themselves in movement, change and flow – ideas reverberating with Levine’s (2009) flow between order and disorder. In DVT, flow depends on embodiment, a tenet drawn from Grotowski’s (1968) emphasis on constant movement, sound and
action. Intimate interactions between therapist and client create various encounters, facilitating transformations by encouraging continually changing roles, scenes, and enactments. The DVT therapist is a playobject who, while participating fully, aims to maintain and deepen the playspace to hold and play with increasingly unstable elements of experience.

At this point I must intervene in my own impassioned flow with a quake-reality-check. If I let the above reification of movement and DVT hurry too far ahead of my lived-practice, I risk implying this is how I worked during the quakes when, in reality, I did not take full-flight with embodied forms of drama and dance/movement therapy. My sense that DVT requires full training and my small studio-shed imposed limits. During the quakes I thus used mixed-modes, interweaving visual art-making with as much working playfully and mindfully with and through the body as possible.

My Magpie has a collection of coloured skeins fluttering like small alert worms in its beak. It’s teased these from the fabric of my client-notes and is now challenging me with cocked head and glimmering eyes to write these into being. We sit in silence and contemplate the threads drawn from the therapy-tales of a tumble of young and enthusiastic child-clients. They seem very alive, like a collection of Lowly Worms wanting to be found.

Maybe if I plait them together, I muse ... Come on, give it a go, says the Magpie, clicking its beak encouragingly. So I begin ...

This is a snippet of (let’s call him/her Sam) of Sam’s therapeutic journey. S/he is 5-6-7-8-9-10-11 and/or 12 years-old. S/he’s carrying an electrified-raw-nerve-cheese-grating fear in his/her body. Bumps, rattles, wheelie-bin trundles, big truck rumbles, door slams – and of course aftershocks – all have him/her paralysed with terror and/or scurrying for cover and/or bursting into floods of tears and/or pummelling his/her siblings. S/he can’t sleep, s/he doesn’t want to be alone, s/he’s picking fights, s/he’s regressed, has tummy upsets, can’t focus at school – all-in-all, life currently sucks.

S/he is ready to do something about this ugly jangling jagged mass inhabiting his/her insides. So we begin our session. We shake like big wet dogs and breathe deeply for a bit. Then we connect with our senses, telling each other what we can see, smell, hear, taste and feel on our skin in this moment right now. I then invite him/her to catch a small elevator down into where the upsets happen inside\(^8\). S/he tells me all about the elevator and about who s/he’s taking with to keep him/her company as s/he goes to this raw internal place. When s/he gets there s/he can stay safely in the elevator if s/he wants. I’m careful to say: DO NOT to go inside the feeling ... sit beside the feeling like a curious friend.

S/he looks carefully at this feeling that happens when s/he gets a fright ...

I wonder out loud if this feeling can show itself to him/her as a picture or an animal or a colour or a sound. S/he nods. Something has arrived. I check. Yip, s/he’s certain, and I feel the determination that comes with the arrival of a symbol to depict a felt-sense.

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\(^8\) (Hooker & Fodor, 2008).
S/he closes the elevator doors and travels back up through her senses, checking in with the here-and-now to come back into this room with the precious cargo of his/her image. S/he uses clay and/or paper and paint/pastels and/or pipe cleaners and/or wire to create this ‘fear-sum’ creature – a symbol that sums up his/her sensation of being afraid.

We contemplate this dinosaur / tiger / peckyparrot / ogre / hairy-monster / vampire. I wonder about the noises and movements it makes and s/he is off about the tiny room showing me. I join him/her and we roar / stomp / hiss / slither / jump / growl / howl / freeze / snicker.

Finally, we slow to a still-point and gravitate back to the art table. (If this isn’t happening organically, I use my physical presence and the empathetic connection we’ve established to slow us down … progressively calming my sounds and movements, gently and non-verbally calling on his/her body to match me as I model how to self-compose through more measured movement and deeper breathing.)

Now, I say, let’s see what you’d like your insides to look like instead! And so we go through our dropping-in process again, but this time s/he calls into being a soul-sense of calm serenity and happiness. The symbolic image for this is created. Without fail, this soothing image contains clear colours and smooth lines, as opposed to the sludgy ugly prickly mess of the fear-sum image.

Now I wonder aloud about ways to get from the fear to the calm …

I break from the flow of the telling. It gets complicated here, I say to the Magpie. Because the children all came up with their own ideas at this point and plaiting these into one narrative will result in a chaotic mess.

We ponder this with a certain yearning as the idea of farraginous creative-chaos has some allure … and then shake our heads. My supervisor gets P.O.ed when we get too densely multiplicit, so I’ll not even try to weave together dances and drawings and wire creations and clay sculptures and sandtray stories that both tell of and demonstrate moving from one state to another using bridges that span raging rivers and helicopters flying high above rampant fires and hot air balloons bobbing serenely through blue skies and bubbles carrying whispers of magic… each of which evoked in their creation-and-telling a range of enactments calling both client and me into dynamic dramatisations and dance/movement sequences with voices and souls abristle with delight.

So I say to my Magpie: Maybe a generic telling of a transformative bridging that worked for a few child-clients will suffice … it’s less riveting than the imagical elephant rides and rockets but …

Let’s go back to the clear colours and smooth lines s/he used to depict his/her soothed-inside space.
With some gentle seduction on my part, together we come up with the idea of breathing these colours into her/his body to see if sucking the feelings off the page and into him/her is relaxing. We decide our aim is to chase out / tame / transform the fear-sum creature. We move into the small open space in the middle of the room again and s/he glares at the fear-sum image, evoking it inside him/her. His/her body responds with sounds and movements. S/he then switches his/her attention to the soothing image and chooses a colour and, saying this out loud, s/he breathes this in. I join him/her voicing how I’m breeeeeeeathing this yellow down down down into my feet. When s/he feels our feet are full of yellow and all the grunge of the fear-sum colours are washed out, s/he selects the next colour or shape from the soothing image. We breathe this into our legs, carrying on until we’re full. Moving up our bodies, slowly but buzzing with focussed and embodied energy, we breathe out the ragged and jagged colours and shapes of the fear-sum feelings and breathe in the buoyant and calm colours of the soothing image.

Finally we’re radiant, grinning at each other, poised in the middle of the room. We do a last check-in to make sure s/he is full of the soothing colours and then we become the soothing image, floating like a colourful butterfly / flowing like a golden sea at sunset / bouncing like a buoyant-ball / stretching like a content calico cat.

(Playtime with my Wild-Child, July 2014)

Re-imagining this tale/s from my lived quake-therapy experiences highlights the dyadic dance, like the shuttle over the loom, of mindful-therapist and client. A mindful-therapist may carry responsibility for order, freeing the client to embrace the spontaneous ‘what-if...’ of free-flowing play. The fully-present therapist can thus act as loom for the process of weaving the weft of ordered flow with the warp of spontaneous play ... creating magic carpets for flights into healing.

As I invited clients to ramble and ruminate, trusting whatever came as thoughts and memories were allowed to emerge in playful and pleasurable ways, we shifted mindfulness “for holding ‘sacred space’” beyond “paying austere attention to only the present moment” (Fox, 2014, p. 132). Instead of floating images/thoughts away to attain a cleared singular mind, I encouraged playful-mindfulness. Interweaving calm, mindful flow and energetic play and helping clients re/develop the capacity to move between and to merge these states in various ways, emerged as a vital feature of my quake-work. In this way, clients and I established a mindful sens/e of internal composure that enabled creative playful forays into chaos. This contributed to helping clients re/develop limber souls capable of enduring liminality. And, rather than imposing control upon this chaos, we used poiesis to play within the ruins as an invitation for new order to materialise (Levine, 2009).
**poiesis** within imagical play

The Greek word *poiesis* means roughly the same as ‘art’ in English, both signifying a medium and a making – but I borrow Levine’s (2009) use of *poiesis* to make-strange, expose hidden assumptions and arouse fresh insights. The primacy of *poiesis* within my work cannot be over-emphasised. And yet during my initial quake period I lost sight of this. Without access to libraries and using only the internet, I sourced what texts on trauma I could find, mostly from disciplines not grounded in arts-making. This confused my process by both emphasising containment and control and by side-lining the arts. Coming to my senses (pun intended) I stopped searching for the right model. Like Levine (2009), I realised that “ultimately the ground of our work is not psychology, the theoretical understanding of the mind, but *poiesis*, the human capacity to respond to and change the world through the act of shaping what is given to us” (p. 25). I thus reinstated *poiesis* – sensual expressive creativity through the arts – taking to heart Asawa’s (2011) admonition “Art First!” and McNiff’s (2004) advice to trust the process. A process that, as I dive into Knill, Levine, and Levine (2005), emerges as a creative caper with chaos as it entails meaning- and soul-making by shaping "ourselves in the same way as we engage in creative work: by letting the new form emerge without controlling it" (Levine, 2009, p. 139):

My Magpie and I share a glittering gaze – the two Levines and Knill evoke my joy as philosophy-major by weaving together Plato, Aristotle and Heidegger! So, I say to my cherry-picking companion, let’s try unravel how their ideas speak to my quake-work – especially their emphasis on form emerging from chaos.

For the Greeks *poiesis* referred to intelligible form emerging out of chaotic matter. The creator doesn’t impose pre-existing form but allows the material to find its own sense in a coming-into-form of the chaos of meaning.

Heidegger’s broader use of *poiesis* – as a way of showing, manifesting, or bringing-forth – expands this foundation. I delight in this embrace of Heidegger as an alternative to traditional Western philosophy’s emphasis on trying to control life by thought. Heidegger deconstructs this Western will-to-power and in his phenomenology truth becomes un-concealment – *poiesis* means surrender to a process rather than a wilful intellectual act. For something to come, the artist must abandon critical intention and become receptive, recognising *poiesis* requires a letting-be – a paradoxical will-to-not-will which, through relinquishing control, often arouses fear and resistance that inhibit full immersion in the creative process.

This complete immersion in which the artist willingly experiences chaotic fragmentation to birth new form echoes the dying that Turner identified as part of liminal transformation.

Heidegger’s *poiesis* as ecstatic threshold-occasion connects with Turner’s liminality in which familiar structures are void and new ones have yet to appear, bringing confusion and powerlessness but also creativity. Thus, braiding these threads together: Poiesis within liminality – especially enduring liminality – involves embracing transitionality, the will-to-not-
will of I-don’t-know, while opening to what-may-come; as this allows chaos to manifest its form in art, facilitating re-organisation of what preceded it ...

... so within this process, work-in-the-making can never be predicted –

only afterwards does it makes sense ...

My Magpie and I fall silent.

This is what’s happening with this research, I finally say.

My quake-work-in-the-making is only really becoming sens/able now as I look back on it.

(Magpie-musings, June 2015)

This chaotic transitionality reverberates with many clients’ and my experiences of the tremors and their aftermath. Yet it was often deeply unsettling to embrace poiesis by staying with this chaos until new order emerged. Especially when, in the face of life-encompassing disaster-induced turmoil, our natural reaction manifested in attempts to restore order through increased control. As neophyte/shaman of this enduring liminality, I was lobbed into the betwixt-and-between and felt called upon to work in ways that acknowledged our fear of stirring-up further mayhem while resisting the will-to-control.

I’m intrigued by a symbol created by several clients beset by quake-reawakened anxiety. These clients didn’t know each other, so their creative congruence – in drawings, paintings, worked into clay, etched into the damp sand of the tray, and built with pipe-cleaners, cardboard and papier-mâché – is compelling.

As part of my research-wonderings, I’ve recreated this shape in clay and now it’s dry: a wedge, a three-dimensional triangle all corners and sharp angles and edges. I drop-into the felt-sense it evokes and feel my dead mother’s presence whisper down my spine. My Magpie alights upon my shoulder and the three of us ponder this anxiety-infused symbolic shape as it sits on my open hand.

It’s so contracted. So compact. My fingers close about it and I find I’m squeezing tight as I tap into my own anxieties. My heart is pounding and my breath shallow.

Suddenly I know this shape.

I know because it bites into my palm and my fingers.

I force myself to open my hand. Bloodless-lines are imprinted into the soft flesh.

Anxiety makes me clench tight. I contort and control. I lose breath. I don’t bend. But this wedge cannot be held so forcefully without harming me. I need to unclench, to let it rest gently on my palm. I need to let the air move around its edges and sharp planes.
I breathe into this idea and my dead mother reminds me I’ve felt this way about the Threshold Orphan. In circling her sleeping-beauty-nest of protective thorns, I’ve wanted to clutch her too tight, to control her.

I ask the wedge, which now seems more self-contained than anxious as it sits in my open hand, for a way forward. I feel drawn to work further with clay. I let my hands lead, giving over to my haptic sense, and find I’m making a nest/bowl to hold the triangle.

This vessel grows wings.

I sit back in pleasure, loose-limbed and open-handed. I’ve created space, a feeling of safety and gentle-holding, with the nest … and I’ve opened this even further with the wings as symbolic invitation to flutter into imaginal play.

(My descriptions of my own creative processes and of quake-client sessions included in this inquiry model my attempts to poetically open conversations with the chaos arriving in our art-making. Key to creating and sustaining this free-flowing and transformative dialogue is playful and poietic active imagination.)
**Active imagination** within imaginal play

Active imagination was central to my process of playing with poietic chaos in productive but contained ways. Jung developed active imagination as a technique to “amplify, interpret, and integrate” the symbolic imagery of dreams and creative works of art (Staples, 2000, para. 1). Fundamental within my both-and-and... orientation is my belief that foreclosing on imagery through premature cognitive interpretation diminishes creative processes and limits their healing potential (Chilton, 2013; Halprin, 2003; Hillman, 1983; Levine, 2009; McNiff, 1998). Using our imaginations actively helped tease out the multifarious and often contradictory meanings held within the images my clients and I created.

Metaphors and symbols within images are powerful because of their multiplicit meanings, which may take time to elucidate (Chilton, 2013). Turner’s (1982) liminality involves ‘multivocal’ symbols, each holding numerous meanings. And many therapists speak of the rich complexity of the images we create. Jung’s (1981) term, ‘shimmering symbol’, implies that metaphoric images are living and dynamic. Levine (2009) quotes Heraclitus’ idea that ‘being loves to hide’ to express how artworks may never be completely understood as something “will always remain hidden and will demand continued uncovering” (p. 32). Simon (1997) believes the essence of art as therapy resides in how symbols carry a sense of “and-and-and”, encouraging the therapist to be cautious about reducing symbols to fixed signs (p. 116). Sibbett (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) places symbols on continua from fixed to open and collective to personal. In my quake-sessions these continua manifested as complex and overlapping. Symbols generated by clients at times contained fixed, socially-agreed meanings and collective archetypes. At other times clients created images expressing highly individualised symbols. Most often, however, the emergent symbols evoked fixed and open and collective and personal meanings, inviting us to play both-and-and.... I thus used a light playful touch and embraced a postmodern wide-open understanding (Burt, 2012a) to avoid cramping the images’ animation (Hillman, 1983).

This being-that-hides within the rich symbology of our images is connected to soul (Hillman, 1996; Levine, 2009). This soul-sens/e seems to host sensations and notions that spill beyond words. Current trauma theory proposes extreme experiences lodge within us in ways that may only be accessed and expressed via embodied, sensory and symbolic processes (Kass & Trantham, 2014; van der Kolk, 2014). Active imagination uses these processes to deeply drop-into imagery – drawing on the belief that creative expression is the way the soul both communicates and heals itself (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). Playing with symbols using active imagination helps develop soul-language which speaks from different/deeper internal places than can be reached through cognitive processes alone (Hillman, 1983; Levine, 2009; McNiff, 2004).
Ah. The ubiquitous scribble-drawing as an example of active imagination. So many excursions into this process and so many stories given life. My Wild-Child perches on my shoulder, wriggling in delight, as I prepare this telling. Inclining my head towards her hot busy little presence, I say: I’ll craft a client and a process by stitching-together snippets from various real-life sessions ...

She enters hesitantly, peering around the door, a sheet of long hair falling across her downcast face. Her mother nudges her forward. It’s chilly outside and barely warmer inside the studio-shed despite my hard-working oil heater. I greet her and her mum. We sit at the table. She’s small and compressed into herself. Head down. Tummy pulled in. Arms protective and knees together, feet not reaching the ground. She responds with monosyllables. I can see Mum wants her to sit-up-and-behave. I let her know this isn’t required. She’s welcome to be what she wants and needs to be in this moment.

I introduce myself and the studio. She turns her small frame to look as I indicate the sandtray, paints and pastels, pipecleaners and glitter, papier-mâché and clay. I notice this spark of interest opens her up a little. But she’s nervous, in a new space with a new person, knowing she’s been brought here because there’s ‘Something Wrong’ with her. Maybe she doesn’t agree there’s ‘Something Wrong’ with her. I know in my belly she’s feeling powerless in this moment. And maybe she feels this lack of agency in other parts of her life too. She is, after all, young and subject to the dictates of the adults in her world. And she’s living in our earthquake-rattled world. A world in which we’re all feeling rather like chaotic and hapless puppets.

I ask her if she wants to tell me why she’s here. Her mum waits tightly as the small shoulders shrug. Mum steps in, launching into a telling that includes outbursts and clinginess, tummy-upsets and nightmares, bed-wetting and unreasonable demands, all within the context of a recent marital separation, EQC woes, a cramped temporary rental and work-stress. I listen but am deeply aware of the increasing hunch enveloping the little form next to me.

When Mum falls silent, I wonder aloud about how it felt to hear this story told to me, a stranger.

Again the self-defending shrug.

I say I think she may’ve some stories of her own perched in her soul.

She shrugs.

I wonder if doing art and drama and telling tales and creating creatures out of clay will help her tell some of her stories.

Another spark of interest ignites as an eye watches me warily from behind the veil of silky hair.
I say, “While grown-ups often tell their stories in words, most kids have much richer ways of telling their stories – they use drawings and paintings and games and dancing and acting and making stuff.”

The second eye is now watching me too.

“I wonder if we should give this a go.”

She gifts me with a sentence in response: “I’m not very good at art.”

I smile in delight. “Then we’ll do just fine.”

She looks at me in surprise.

“Because I think we’ve done some good hard work by talking and listening and so we don’t have to let the art-making be hard work too! We can let ourselves be really bad at that!”

The small brow above the bright eyes crinkles.

“So I recommend a dose of scribbles!”

She giggles and sneaks a look at her mum.

I invite my wee client to decide if Mum can stay or if she should leave us to it. She picks up my mock-posh tone and graciously invites her mother to stay-‘n-play. I lay out large sheets of paper, one for each of us. I give sparse instructions. “Choose a favourite colour from the pastels and chalks. Plop it onto the centre of the wide white page. And ... you can close your eyes if you want ... take a deep breath ...

and make a big SCRIBBLE!”

We laugh and I watch her loosen-up. She draws Mum’s attention to her scribble and inspects her mum’s effort, pronouncing it “Ok.”

“Now,” I say, “look deeply into your wonderful artwork. Hiding in there are shapes or creatures or colours that want you to give them life.” I model this by turning my paper around a few times and squeaking in delight when I see how this curve over here looks like a bird. We’re soon colouring away as we encourage the images to emerge. I slide my eyes sideways and notice a soft brown mouse appearing in her image. When she slows, I say, “Bring what you’re working on to a stopping-place ... because ... your picture’s going on a journey!” I model taking a deep breath and pass my picture to her. She laughs and passes hers to Mum and I receive her mother’s.

“Hello!” I call in delight to the new image before me, “What do you need from me, I wonder?” I turn the page about, looking at the image closely... and we begin work on each other’s images. I stretch my awareness so I’m both in the picture before me,
while simultaneously attuned to this now lively little person next to me who’s up on
her knees on the chair, laughing and commenting, cheekily transforming the image I
gave her.

We stop, breathe deeply in a fun ritual before passing the drawings on, greeting them
and then working with them, until our original scribble arrives back in front of us. We
look at these in wonder. She points out the changes her mom and I made to her
original creations. I ask how it felt to give her picture away. She’s buzzing with
excitement. “I worried Mum would mess it up!” she cries spontaneously, “but she
added this lovely fish!” “And how’d you feel about drawing on our pictures?” She
chuckles with wicked deliciousness, “First I was a bit scared ‘cos I’m not very good at
art so I thought I’d mess them up, but then I saw this rainbow” she points to my
image, “and this frog” she points to Mum’s image, “and I knew it was going to be ok!”
We chatter a little more about the fun and surprise of how the pictures talked to us,
how they seemed to have their own ideas and if we looked and listened carefully, we
could see and feel what they wanted us to do. But that at the end of the day, we had
the power to bring them to life.

I don’t say it out-loud, but I know we’re effectively dancing between chaos-and-order.
We’re inviting disarray onto the page through scribbling and then gently teasing form
from it. And in the process we’re allowing ourselves to embrace—and even play with—
feeling powerless before empowering ourselves by redirecting the randomness of the
images through imagination.

“Now,” I say, “let’s see if there’s a story or two rattling about inside these pictures.”
She looks at me quizzically.

She’s very present now, humming with anticipation and for a fleeting moment my
imagination gifts her with the ghostly outline of butterfly-wings. In my vision they’re
tentative and a little tattered. Timid wings with hesitant colours that yearn to be
bright and bold again. I blink and they’re gone. I imaginally spread my own creative
wings so they wrap gently around all three of us.

I ask her which picture we shall begin the story with. She nominates her own, and I
blu-tac this onto the wall before us, checking it’s the right way up. Mine follows and
then Mum’s. My animated little client nominates me to begin.

“Once upon a time,” I announce portentously, “there was a little mouse.” She giggles
and we regard the mouse in her image. “She was a-fluff and aflutter with soft brown
fur and pink ears and a sleek pink tail and a sniffany, twitchy nose. She lived in a tangle
of wool, in the back of a cupboard in the warm house of a large and jolly lady. She was
a very content little mouse, safe and sound. But then one day, something happened…”
I pause dramatically and look at my little client, indicating the story’s now waiting for
her to continue. “One day,” she says, “the mouse was out sneaking cheese from the
lady’s cupboard and when she got back, her wool nest was gone!” She looks at Mum
who continues: “The little mouse was confused. She could hear clicking noises and so she sneaked over and peered around the couch, and there was the large lady, knitting, knitting, knitting away, using her home for the wool!!” My turn again, “So the little mouse went on a journey to see what could be done about her nest. She slid down a yellow line and dived into a new picture and there she met a frog and the frog said ...” “Hello mouse!” says my wee client, “You look lost. The mouse squeaks sadly, 'My home's gone!' The frog says, ‘So’s mine! We’re both homeless! What are we to do?’” Mum picks the tale up, “So the frog and mouse sit by the edge of the swirly pond in the drizzle and feel sad. What’s happening to this world? They wonder.”

And we sit in silence by the edge of this thought that spans the imaginal world we’ve woven into being through our art and the real quake-broken world outside the shed door.

“But then just as they’re about to dissolve into a puddle of misery,” I say, “the rain stops and the sun bursts out and they look up and a Huge Rainbow stretched across the sky!”

I look at the little human next to me, up on her chair, leaning forward on the table, hair tucked behind her ears. She’s tilting towards the rainbow image. “And the frog and the mouse,” she bursts out, “see the Rainbow’s made of coloured wool, so they make a pact to get up there and drag some down to make new homes for themselves!”

We clap delightedly! She’s saved the day.

I suggest she might like to take the pictures home and see if the story will keep going. After all, the frog and mouse have to figure out how to get all the way up to the woolly-rainbow. Maybe if she decides to come back, I wonder aloud, we can draw or paint or even build whatever contraption they are going to need to get there?
She turns excitedly to her mother.

Her mum and I nod at each other.

*(Journal of the Wild-Child, September 2014)*

Inviting clients to be magically playful within my quake-work involved using arts-making to give physical form to active imagination. We treated our images-as-angels to welcome imagination – this did not mean we abandoned reason, but it stepped aside and invited other participants (McNiff, 2004). The image became a living partner and we dialogued with this soul-messenger through writing, drama, dance/movement, sandtray and further visual arts-making. And when our creativity gave concrete form to our active imaginations, the arts became an adequate response to suffering (Levine, 2009).
the therapist in imagical play

Inviting a client into imagical play required, first and foremost, that I could play (Winnicott, 1977). Above I explored how, within imagical play, this playfulness involved inter-braiding play with mindful flow, active imagination and poiesis. To do this, I was required to assume various roles – such as container, presence, witness, playmate and playobject. And I needed to establish and hold a safe, yet vibrant, playspace in which I was as present and flexible as I wished my client to become. Here, I explore key features, highlighted by this study, of my role as therapist in imagical play: the primacy of relationship; creating safety and granting permission; witnessing play and modelling presence; getting out of the way; and holding the space open.

the primacy of relationship

My belief in relationship-development as central to therapeutic healing runs as a golden strand throughout my quake-work (and is detailed in the section on liminal communitas still to come). Building a non-directive and co-creative therapeutic relationship became the first collaborative creation between each client and me. This relationship functioned as a container to hold “the disturbance”, inviting imagination to play freely because within “the order of the relationship, there can be room for the chaos of art” (Levine, 2009, pp. 111, 116). When our relationship framework offered the promise that new forms of both art- and soul-making may emerge, clients seemed able to cope with high levels of disorder. This inter-relational play emphasised live-experience versus the giving of understandings and explanations (Poynton, 2012; Winnicott, 1977). At the heart of imagical play, I thus placed authentic, in-the-moment, collaborative, embodied and emotionally-responsive relationship.

creating safety and granting permission

Ahem! I hear the voice clearly. Gazing inward, I’m confronted by a ragtag cavalcade of animangels led by my TeddyBear-Sage, looking dapper in the ubiquitous Christchurch orange hazard vest and hardhat. I peer past him and see the rest are also disporting similar safety attire.

“Haven’t you forgotten something,” my Sage intones gravely.

He waits patiently while I rack my brain.

Safety! We both cry simultaneously. Safety is cited as the first and foremost principle within a vast majority of trauma intervention and recovery processes.

So why’ve I skirted it thus far?

Maybe because I’m unsure of what it actually is? I mean, look at you lot! I throw my hands up in exasperation as I take in the details before me:
My Wild-Child has a traffic cone on her head as a roguish dunce’s hat and is slick with orange and white striped body-paint. She rolls on the floor with my Creative-Cat who has on a strange wearable-art creation crafted from hazard-tape interwoven with red stickers**. My Magpie is flying wild loop-the-loops making annoying siren and alarm sounds. And my Crocodile, of course, is proudly wayward, flaunting his complete lack of safety-anything, brazenly taking risks. Even my Threshold Orphan has put in an appearance by erecting a large ‘Do Not Enter’ sign outside her nest of thorns.

You, my Bear, I say, are the only one correctly dressed in regulation safety-gear while all the others speak of the myriad subjective variations the practice of safety can imply within a therapeutic setting. So, my dear Sage, you represent the basic safety practices I deemed common and essential with all clients – such as confidentiality, respect, having a venue that wouldn’t collapse or toss heavy paint-pots onto clients, and talking about practical safety plans if a quake struck while we were working (a solid wooden art-table with space underneath is greatly comforting at such times!).

But when it came to crafting safe therapeutic relationships and transitional spaces, my other familiars with their more creative and subjective readings of safety – and how this intersects with risk – are more compelling than my by-the-book Bear. Their farraginous display calls to mind the resonances I felt with Levine and Mølbak’s embrace of risk-taking as an essential aspect of effective therapy. They contend that simply staying safely within the known and seeking to return to a previous normalcy doesn’t serve someone experiencing the impact and aftermath of gravely distressing events. Trauma is a form of mimesis, an ongoing and agonising repetition of the wounding experience as if it were happening again-and-again in the here-and-now. Breaking free from this cycle and creating novel ways of being with the impact of the suffering requires that something new is invited to enter and transform the stuckness. This process of opening to innovation asks the client and therapist to step away from the known and risk entertaining the unknown.

All of which begs the question: What role does safety play in creating the foundation for this leap into risk-taking?

My motley crew are now still, watching me intently as I grapple with this slipperiness.

My sense of this comes – I begin hesitantly but grow more confident as the words emerge – from twenty-plus years of buggering about in a range of adventure sports – while rock and ice climbing, mountain-biking and paragliding, SCUBA-diving and skiing – I’ve teeter-tottered along my own slackline between safety-and-risk and I’ve seen many friends do the same. We all seem to agree that the place where these two meet and create the most optimum blend of feeling safe-enough-to-take-risks is subjective and personal, as well as changeable from day-to-day.

** Buildings that were deemed structurally unsafe post-quake were marked with a red sticker that prohibited entry.
So what transfers from these private-life experiences into my therapeutic practice? As I contemplate this, I notice my Wild-Child has clambered up on my Magpie’s back and the two are high above me. I watch as she whispers in the Magpie’s ear and the bird suddenly flips upside down! The Child tumbles off, dropping like a stone towards the earth. Why isn’t she spreading her wings!! I dash forward, open my arms and catch her small frame, swinging in a wide circle to absorb the impact of her fall. She looks up at me and grins, taps me on the temple, hops off and is again rolling on the floor with the Cat.

As my adrenalin surge subsides, I shakily realise she’s nudged me towards an answer. Her antics, in playing with my babbling about adventure sports and the present-moment-ness of the safety/risk paradox, suggest that safety within the therapeutic space is rooted in presence and relationship. It isn’t a fixed-point but needs continual awareness, communication and maintenance from both therapist and client to drop, catch and hold. My Wild-Child, Creative-Cat and Magpie grin at me, my Sage salutes me, my Crocodile gnashes his teeth playfully and my Orphan has flipped her sign ...

It now reads ‘Please Be(a)ware’.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, November 2014)

From personal experience, I know how playfulness may wither when the player feels unsafe. This insecurity, whether internal and/or external, arrives via different circumstances for everyone. Through my adventure sports I have met some for whom increased risk is incentive to play with even more relish. For me and my quake-clients, however, our lack of stability, certainty and safety undercut our playfulness.

I thus first emphasised external physical security in my quest to establish safety and, piggybacked on safety, grant permission for playfulness. I introduced clients to the shed, demonstrating how flexible the wooden walls and roof were, reducing the possibility of damage and injury during the shakes. I showed how the room was arranged so, should we have a shake, nothing heavy would fall on them. (I, however, sat with my back to the clay-cupboard – calling on me to push my wheelie-chaired-self vigorously back, blocking the doors and preventing hard clay missiles from plummeting down on me.) I mentioned we were not in a rock-fall zone. During 2011 and the beginning of 2012, we kept our mobile-phones on vibrate so we could reach-out or be reached if needed. Several clients and I did experience large rattles as we sat creating, and I am grateful the rickety shed danced about like a paper-bag in a storm before settling again. I am also enchanted to report the demise of only one clay creation, and my menagerie of sandtray figurines remained resolutely standing throughout!

My intent to build a sense of internal safety intertwined with external safety was fundamental within my therapeutic relationships. For imagical play this involved, firstly, creating trust that playful letting-go would not unduly unravel the psyche. Many of us weaned in cultures preferring cool controlling logic and wary of strong emotional displays feared we would be left, like Humpty-Dumpty, unable to be put back together again.
Now a more difficult conversation, I say to my dead mother.

She’s still, a quiet breath-holding presence hovering over my left shoulder. I notice I also begin to tense and contract – so I breathe deeply, carefully loosening my physical and psychological armouring to counteract this unhelpful patterning. I sense her do the same … well not the physical bit, of course.

I remember, I say, your low firm voice, your tethering voice, telling me so many times:

Don’t use that tone with me, my girl.

You pulled me back, reined me in with clear instructions, modelled emotional restraint, flat-lined in public and then hid in your bathroom to cry. I came to believe that feelings were my enemy and would be my undoing. So much so …

... I swallow against sandpaper in my throat ...

... I couldn’t cross this icy ocean and emotionally reach out to you after dad died and Derek was so gravely maimed and you were withering under the simultaneous assault of the cancer, the chemotherapy and the wounding of everything being wrenched away. Although physically present, I could only stand on the far shore, demonstrating to you and the world how strong I was.

As I watched you slowly drown.

Not waving, but drowning.

Bobbing beneath the ice.

We sit in silence for a long time.

I’m sorry, we both say in unison.

(Conversations with my dead mother, July 2014)

This study foregrounded my gentle, but firm, emphasis on becoming bravely emotionally present. Through nuanced attention to my internal states, I learned to welcome and befriend my avoidance when faced with strong affect both in myself and others. When I first began practising, this avoidance arrived as iciness within my core which I interpreted as fear pulling me back from the heat of emotion. Over time, I revisited my upbringing, forgave myself for my inability to be emotionally available to my dying mother, and reminded myself again-and-again that my affect would not undo me. As I created art and danced and moulded clay and wrote of these sensations and beliefs, I slowly began to trust my soul’s life-forward direction (Rappaport, 2008) … and the iciness receded. Many clients embarked upon similar journeys. Much of our work was a sensorially-embodied and titrated embrace of the emotional, heartfelt-self founded in the belief that she is equally welcome as the
logical, head-self. And yes, emotions and shadows sometimes arose loudly within our relationship and through our art-making. But when held respectfully and often playfully, they did not destroy.

A second aspect of inner security involved permission. Most adult- and a surprising number of child-clients required permission to be playful: Play has become largely vilified as timewasting in our hurry-up-and-get-ahead societies. Permission has largely been withdrawn to tarry, daydream, doodle, and just see what-happens-if... I thus needed to grant overt permission for formless creative play. As spontaneous free-play often strays into taboo zones, consent was also required for risky, Trickster-led, dissent-laden, and destructive play-elements. It was vital I remained alert to approaches toward these individualised no-go areas so I could take appropriate action if the client was moving too hurriedly and thus may awaken shame, aggression or self-loathing. Again, notions of titration (Levine, 2010) and of zigzagging between safe dens and the risky-unknown, were vital. For some clients, I needed simply to establish contact through firm touch. For others an invitation into bubble- or balloon-blowing worked to deepen breath and re-ground. Yet others responded to invitations to change modality or medium from larger/messier to more contained/controllable. Throughout these escapades in and out of forbidden territory, I maintained the stance that all emotion and all play was fascinating and welcome. But I was also clear that sometimes the enactment may require consideration and timing so as not to cause external or internal harm.

I hoped to establish a flexible optimal bespoke-balance between safety and freedom for each client. In this way I intended to help clients experience the feedback-loop in which playful and spontaneous creative risks help them develop “openness to experience, tolerance of ambiguity” and “an internal locus of evaluation” – and vice-versa (Waller & Sibbett, 2008, p. 8).

witnessing play and modelling presence

Within imagical play, simultaneously being in and holding the playspace juxtaposes active experiential participation and mindful witnessing (Rappaport & Kalmanowitz, 2014). In my quake-work I became aware of the interlinked but different qualities of pure-witnessing (objective, disengaged observation)
and full-presence (active holistic involvement). Stringing together witnessing-from-a-distance and in-the-thick-of-it-presence recalls my liminal kite-in-the-rubble image. When I consider the locus of witnessing/presence as internal and/or external, these thoughts become more granulated. A seminal intention of many psychotherapies is to help clients internalise the capacity to witness and be present to themselves (Rappaport, 2014b). I strove to achieve this by modelling witnessing/presence towards my client, our artworks and myself. By providing the client with an external witness/presence and living example, my intention was to help her develop and internalise these capacities.

Central to witness/presence-practices is openness, non-judgement, and no censoring or editing as the symbols and images are conversed with through various arts media and processes. I modelled a way of being creative that invited the arrival of, and then playfully engaged with, images-as-angels. I thereby encouraged the client to summon subject-matter from the formlessness of her own mindful self-awareness. The client experiences greater ownership when material comes from her and is not imposed by the therapist (Gluck, 2014). This enables her to carry an embodied sense of this mindful, playful and transformative experience away with her, making these internal resources and practices available as needed for everyday self-care and well-being (Rappaport, 2014b).

**getting out of the way**

Facilitating therapeutic play involves encouraging each client to create her own play without redirection or interruption (Ablon, 1996). As with wounded/healing, in imaginal play I therefore needed to resist filling the intersubjective space between the client and me. My emphasis on healing-relationship and witnessing/presence, however, challenged me with a paradox. How could I be there and not there, be fully-present without impinging while creating a contained (yet freeing) playspace? Poynton (2012) describes how her questions, reflections and interpretations were experienced by a child-client as intrusive. She concluded she must not rob the client of opportunities to develop self-agency by imposing ‘correct’ interpretations. Alongside intrusive words and interpretations, various projections regularly threatened to sidle from me into the playspace – obstructing or luring astray the relationship and the art. I called for an image to hold how I attempted to address this.

*I create a figurine exploring my own best practice – a lived version of phenomenological bracketing.*

*I gather theory, strategy, what I already think I know about the client, my own assumptions and emotional attachments, and I imagically place them in parenthesis, hovering behind and to the sides of me.*

*Invisible but accessible, like speech bubbles ...*  
*Within reach should I need them.*

*Not in front of me, but floating like little kites connected to me with strings.*
I thus resist gazing at my client or her art-making through a cooling mesh of theories and preconceptions or a hot web of my own emotionality.

Rather, I fly these away and try to open and clear the space between us for what may come in this moment.

(Magpie-musings, March 2014)

**holding the space open**

My client session-notes reveal how, when I was closed or anxious, the emergent imagery and the relationship facilitating its arrival were threatened. I interpret this as fear of my own internal fragmentation leading me to strive for wholeness – I foreclosed the formless playspace as I attempted to find or impose order into my client’s chaotic presentation of self (Winnicott, 1977). Yet, holding this space open often proved difficult. Poynton (2012) describes unbearable countertransference feelings – in-session sensations of heavy unpleasantness followed post-session by the desire to sob uncontrollably. When I began work with quake-effected clients, I frequently teetered on this edge. I doubted my ability to hold open a safe space for the chaotic, controlling, resistant, apathetic, aggressive and/or despairing behaviours to manifest. Behaviours such as these, and their impact upon the therapist, often indicate deep trauma as the client unconsciously seeks validation through the emotional reaction she elicits from the therapist – “if I have an effect on you then I exist” (Poynton, 2012, p. 189). In response, I encouraged clients to direct these feelings and behaviours into their art-making and use their artworks as developmental objects, playobjects and/or scapegoats to facilitate personal-agency, self-regulation and internal composure (Schaverien, 2000; Winnicott, 1977).

Conceiving of troubling behaviour towards me as indicating wounds wanting expression and inviting the art to hold these challenging feelings, helped me stay in the liminal play. I could then accept “without attempting to deflect the affect”, experience the play “as a revelation” and appreciate the “exploratory aspect of the effort” (Ablon, 1996, p. 546). I did, at times, leap too hastily to interpret, rescue, or soothe, or I moved onto another task before the emotional process had been adequately honoured. And in these moments I pulled the kite of exploration in too tightly, yanking the fragile string, mistrusting my ability to hold on as the winds of emotion and imagination tugged the dancing fabric here-and-there. But, in time, I learned ...
In my quest to create useful sense of my quake-experiences, I have teased-out many threads about my playful quake-work. I situated this playfulness within my overarching metaphor of liminality and revisited my lived-history as frolicsome child and drama-practitioner. This opened discussion of liminal Trickster/Sage archetypal characteristics manifest within my practice. Then I wandered through four concepts central to my quake-practice of imagical play. Frisky play hand-in-hand with mindful-flow, danced with active imagination using poiesis to open options, invite new perspectives and create soul-limberness. This is enabled and held by a mindfully-playful therapist. Next I invite contemplation of the value and hazards brought to my quake-therapy by imagical play.
the value of playfulness within enduring liminality

My piebald-winged Fool’s-hat-wearing Magpie-Trickster clicks its fierce beak, reminding me of a key role it plays:

How it unexpectedly re-invents my darkest moments when I’ve dropped into liminal shadow; how – often at my most despairing – some strange happening cracks open the quirky-whimsical or downright dark-side of my humour and I’m hauled back-from-the-brink as my world, spiralling into a tightfrigidclenchedball, is popped opened and spanked back into life-filled breath.

My Magpie flashes a particular memory into my imagination:

My breath snags in my raw chest. When it surges back, the tide has about-faced! I ride this topsy-turvy watery-wave of mirth and thank Almighty Cod that sobbing and laughing produce similar physical-jerks when viewed from behind.

My Magpie and I’ve found this dark-laughter secreted within many clients, lurking in the shadows because they feel it’s inappropriate or disrespectful. And we’ve gently lured it out, allowing them to find delight in the strange, the off, the odd, and to breathe life and originality into their processes of loss and remembrance and transformation.

(Magpie-musings, June 2014)

Playfulness, by changing “passive experiences into active ones” (Ablon, 1996, p. 545) and transforming players from those who are done-to into the doers (Levine, 2009), offered multiple benefits to my quake-arts therapy. I believe the following characteristics, developed through playfulness, helped us endure and grow within our context of enduring liminality: equity through
levity; externalisation; tolerance, endurance, acceptance and transcendence; flexibility/limberness; befriending difficult states; allowing order to emerge from disorder; honouring the non-verbal; humour and magic; and freeing from conditioned patterns.

**equity through levity**

My inner Trickster/Sage dyad dethroned any inclinations I had towards presenting myself as expert – as alluring and self-protective as I-know-better-than-you may have felt. My Magpie’s capering buffoonery soon deflated any pomposity my TeddyBear may have been inclined to, and the soft wisdom of my Sage-Bear challenged Magpie-posturing and self-aggrandisement. This invited clients to collaborate equally in the therapeutic adventure, while conversely permitting me to join Martin (2011) and his research participants in acknowledging the appropriate gratification we get from our encounters with clients.

**externalisation**

Human-play begins with the enactment of imagination using external playobjects or ‘pivots’ which, over time, become internalised facilitating new learning and self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). Externalisation through playful art-making helped clients shift perspective from being-the-rubble to riding-the-kite. Externalisation thus became a crucial step towards developing capacity to endure the inner tumult and/or numbness caused by ongoing liminality. Over-identification with difficulties can become all-consuming – I observed in clients and personally experienced how easily we could ‘become the problem’ (Rappaport, 2008). When you are the rubble, you see and feel only brokenness, pressure, airlessness, and darkness.

*It is three weeks after the devastating February 2011 quake.*

> Without any prior plan, I’m tearing huge sheets of paper and scattering them ...

> I crouch in the broken shattered fragmented ragged overlapping shards of torn paper that

> all around me represent the tumbled-bricks smashed-concrete dust-clouds of my fallen city that

> all around me represent the fallen-bodies smashed-dreams lost-futures of my fallen loved ones.

> I am overwhelmed. I am the rubble.

>(MAAT Journal, 2011)

This deeply in, doing anything about the shattered shards feels impossible. Externalising the rubble generates a degree of separation from the problem, reducing the power it has over me (Burt, 2012b).
I reach from within the paper-rubble, drag close white tissue-paper. With shaking hands I craft a kite.

From within the rubble, I fly my fragile white kite.

This is not surrender.

This is me rescuing me.

(MAAT Journal, 2011)

My kite and treehouse symbols were unplanned, yet it is no wonder these emerged to express imaginal play. Poietic playfulness invites externalisation. Externalisation allows us to metaphorically see and grasp the string and travel up to ride the kite, gaining a different but interconnected perspective and sense-of-self.

My embrace of ensouled-arts therapy resonates with what Nachmanovitch (1990) calls ‘divine play’. During quake-imagical play externalising happened primarily through projecting thoughts, emotions and embodied sensations into symbolic artworks, affording clients and me opportunities to watch our souls at work. By staying within the flow of images through playful active imagination, this expressive externalising expanded beyond step-one of a linear process and weaved throughout our imaginal play.
tolerance, endurance, acceptance and transcendence

I found, like Poynton (2012), when I honoured poietic-play rather than talk, playfulness provided a holding space for my clients’ anxiety. Once safely held, we could engage in a titrated process of discovering/creating appropriate symbols to express difficult felt-senses. For this process of gentle exposure, I drew on Rappaport’s (2008) focusing attitude of non-judgemental befriending and acceptance. And mastering this attitude was in itself a breakthrough for many clients. They learned to sit beside and wonder about even the most distressing sensations and aspects-of-self. This allowed them to externally express and, through the complexity of the acceptance/change paradox, begin transforming these (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). At times and/or with some clients, this process was serious (from her writing-tone, I interpret Rappaport’s focusing attitude as such). I was also aware, however, such intensity may cause obstacles. In these instances, I slid sideways from solemnity to encourage a playful attitude towards inner-forays. Weaving playfulness into focusing seemed to help many clients open more willingly and fully. Just as in this inquiry, using Cats and Crocodiles and Magpies and TeddyBears to symbolise my inner figments, allowed me to tolerate and befriend even the most painful memories and their accompanying sensory-overload.

flexibility/limberness

Imagical play helped foster self-regulation and internal composure by nurturing clients’ ability to shift fluidly between states-of-being. Kass and Trantham (2014) believe this capacity to respond intentionally to strong feelings without seizing reactive control, enables clients to engage and withdraw as required for growth and defence. This capacity for self-composure primarily and initially develops through secure attachment. Those who have not experienced early secure attachment and/or have experienced later trauma may have their ability to self-regulate compromised.
Fortunately earned internal composure/regulation can be cultivated by adults and children in subsequent life stages (Seigel, 1999). I used an imagically playful-relationship-based process to help us learn to ride the various emotional teeter-totters triggered internally by the quakes rumbling through our world. Rather than waging war, fleeing in terror, or rigidly locking-up, this playfulness helped clients and me re/gain self-composure. We developed symbolically soft knees, springy muscles and sinews, and a secure self-belief in our own capacity to balance.

**befriending difficult states**

My own journey through wounding nurtured my belief in playfulness to access, tolerate, befriend and transform inner states of fragmentation. I believe there may never be one centralising self-concept large enough to hold all the parts without some ill-fitting alters being rejected or disowned (Hillman, 1983; Levine, 2009). Yet the excessive sense of fragmentation that may come in the wake of considerable wounding can be intolerable. And while these personality fragments or alters may initially help the survivor cope, over time disjointed internal self-representations can lead to dissociative states (Herman, 2001). During the quakes, I saw clients debilitated by an inner cacophony of competing fragments, or driven by motivations lurking in the shadows, or disconnected from self through dissociation. I also experienced how, through gentle playfulness, clients could develop attitudes/practices of inner tolerance and inclusive befriending. They could learn to listen to these fragments which led to less internal clamouring, manipulation and/or disconnection.

This fragmentation is also felt in the body. Contemporary trauma research has identified that extreme experiences lodge in sensory, image-rich, embodied memory-stores leading to feelings of bodily fragmentation and dissociation (Kass & Trantham, 2014; van der Kolk, 2006, 2014). A fragmented bodily-experience aptly describes how many of us experienced ourselves during the quakes. Common terminology included: I feel shattered, in pieces, like I’m falling apart and can’t pull myself together. This sense of inhabiting a disjointed, yet electrified, body squirting gouts of fiery adrenalin at the slightest provocation, of having no agency within our own flesh, was distressing. Frank-Tantia (2014) describes how individuals beset by ongoing or multiple traumas (like those whose earlier harm was re/energised by the quakes) begin to perceive their own bodies as unsafe. Such complex wounding can result in a mind/body split. To avoid or block feeling embodied distress, clients also avoid, block-out and/or dissociate from their embodied experience. “Under these circumstances, even mindfulness applied as attention to the body can feel overwhelming and possibly retraumatizing” (Frank-Tantia, 2014, p. 96). How then can the body be the medium of arts therapy when suffering contained in bodily fragmentation is what motivates escape from self (Levine, 2009)?

My first considered awareness of this dilemma came when, directly after the February 2011 quake, I joined a gaggle of Lytteltonites sitting on the pavement sewing hearts. As we caressed fabric, chose coloured buttons and stitched, our conversations often avoided descriptions of how we felt and found solace in practicalities and unrelated but distracting topics. Several heart-sewers described their bodies and souls as ragged, itchy and inhospitable places – why would they want to linger in this brokenness? These sentiments echoed my own resistances, through the years, to becoming fully present to my own jangled nerves and spikey-edged imaginings.
This embodied felt-sense encouraged me to explore alternative ways to facilitate present-tense self-awareness. I now recognise I was groping towards Frank-Tantia’s (2014) nuanced balancing of attention-to (mindfulness) and attention-with (embodiment) the body. Initially, attention-to through directly-applied mindfulness felt threatening. We thus paid attention-with our senses to gently nudge ourselves into the present. I was fascinated to observe how frequently I encouraged clients to connect with their senses when I re/explored my client-notes for this research. This sensory-focus did not over-tax our tenuous self-composure, scatter our fragments into hiding, or incite them into increased destructive activity. Rather, this bottom-up process served to self-soothe (Malchiodi, 2015), amplifying our connection with the present moment. And this now responded by opening two types of awareness. We became aware of our current embodiment. We also became aware of our imaginations. We played with sensual art-materials and employed playful active imagination to create images that pleased and calmed our senses. And we allowed our creativity to remember or dream up make-believe places we found sensually restful. We thus began replacing troublesome internal patterns with more positive options.

This embodied and imagined sensual awareness was relatively easy within the safe confines of the therapy-space. Clients, however, often responded with resistance, procrastination, fear and avoidance when I encouraged them to begin practising presence within their everyday quake-fractured lives. Playfulness became the crucible in which we cultivated our willingness and capacity to be present with and transform the unpleasant sensations our context engendered. As clients and I grew confident within our therapeutic relationship, and as I gained experience, this magically playful sensory here-and-now-ness titrated increasingly tolerable quantities of quake-connected inner-tumult. This helped clients access, express, endure, befriend and transform their fragmental body-and-soul experiences of enduring liminality.

**allowing order to emerge from disorder**

I repeatedly voice my interpretation of humanness as ongoing negotiations between chaos-and-order. These parleys are heightened when wounding brings us closer to what Winnicott (1968) describes as the unnameable, unthinkable experience at the core of the psyche. Several clients and I were inclined to control or impose order on the unnameable, unthinkable experiences we encountered through the quakes. Yet this only seemed to increase our stress and sense of powerlessness. Learning to endure and become curious about this formless liminality invited new forms of order to emerge from our quake-chaos. Imagical play helped facilitate this newness by teeming active imagination, mindful flow and playing with creative-making. We playfully asked images “What do you need now?” as clients and I waited, clay or paintbrush in hand, for the soul-muse to
arrive or indicate her next desire. Many clients expressed their frisson of excited-fear before and during sessions as they vacillated between trusting something meaningful would arrive and anxiety they would be abandoned within their chaos. Sometimes we played our way through this waiting period, making patterns in the silky sand of the tray, or opening ourselves with sweeping movements of chalk or paint on paper, or holding and kneading clay, or even rolling on the floor with a small, eager bulldog or a sinuous black cat. Sometimes we waited more mindfully, using breathing and sensory awakening, as the inner and outer creative juices rose. We were seldom disappointed.

The arrival of new order from within this formlessness was key to moving beyond and transforming our quake-wounds (Mølbak, 2013). When mimetic repetition of hurt lies at the core of the wound, then new paths need to be created that travel beyond the eternal recurrence of the same. Imagical play did not imitate the past but opened to the future, believing art “is a gesture that transforms both self and the world” (Levine, 2009, p. 124).

honouring the non-verbal

Sometimes clients and/or their symbolic creations resisted cognitive verbalisation/interpretation. Several child-clients said they did not want to waste creative-time talking. Others repelled my attempts to draw parallels between their creative endeavours and their real-life situations. They became deaf when I yapped on, withdrew, regressed, and/or became agitated and distressed. A tangential but related conundrum arose with several adult-clients. Sometimes we could not find appropriate words and/or interpretations and were obliged to let the images be, trusting they were working even when we could not wrest cognitive meanings from them. These experiences fed my wariness of cognitively-based trauma therapy, and from this research I now know I was unwittingly following Malchiodi’s (2015) trauma-informed process of beginning ‘at the bottom’ with the sensory body. I now embrace play itself as innately valuable. It can powerfully facilitate development within the therapeutic setting, even with minimal verbalisation and interpretation (Ablon, 1996; Levine, 2009; Poynton, 2012; Winnicott, 1977). Play and art-making are inherent capacities offering opportunities for organisation and synthesis and play taps into our pre-existing “faculty for dealing with conflict, trauma, and powerful affect” (Ablon, 1996, p. 546).

humour and magic

Playfulness usually goes hand-in-hand with humour. Frankl (2004) promoted levity as “another of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation” (p. 54). In learning to laugh in the ruins we can harness how play offers “magical control over actual objects” while simultaneously feeling intensely real (Poynton, 2012, p. 191).

freeing from conditioned patterns

As trauma often involves mimetic repetition of distressing experiences (Levine, 2009), healing requires shifting beyond these painful patterns. Like me, many of my quake-clients were beset by conditioned reactive-patterns engrained through past wounding. We needed to experience and re/experience an embodied felt-sense of ourselves as uncontracted, spacious, and limber. In my quake-work, this process was best achieved through predominantly pleasurable activities as many of
us falter if called to repeat disagreeable actions. Clients were more likely to tolerate and even self-initiate the required pattern-altering repetitions if our process was pleasurable and playful. This gradually freed our mind-body complex from conditioned patterns of clinging and aversion and re-patterned our capacity for internal composure (Fritsche, 2014).
hazards of playfulness within enduring liminality

Liminality may offer positive transformation but liminal situations can also be dangerous – especially when unplanned with no readily-evident exit (Turner, 1982). Situations such as our quake enduring liminality may call forth “self-proclaimed ceremony masters” who assume leadership and attempt to perpetuate liminality “by emptying the liminal moment of real creativity” (Thomassen, 2009, p. 22). It was vital I remained ever-vigilant within myself and my work for this shadow of the shaman who conjured the Trickster’s harmful characteristics and confounded the healing features of this archetype. In this final section, I engage with this shadow and summarise some pitfalls I had to negotiate. These were: avoidance and distraction through play; getting in the way (again!); dismissive and critical attitudes to play; and my own hermit-ism.

avoidance and distraction through play

Most clients entered therapy because the quake-trauma kicked up the dust of previous woundings – often evident in their repetition of distressing patterns. This resonated with the ritualised or broken-record-repetitive quality I sometimes noticed in their play (Gil, 2006). I often observed a dual process in action. Clients revealed core wounds through what/how they chose to create while simultaneously becoming stuck in or using this play to avoid direct engagement with these raw areas. Sessions would devolve into play for distraction and avoidance, as the client and I used silliness to sidestep healing work – sometimes repeating the same game session-after-session.

I learned, however, to plumb for value in these moments. I drew on Best’s (2009) three suggestions for the therapist. Sometimes I swam alongside. Sometimes I seduced the client away from or towards. Sometimes I blocked the way, encouraging new ways of doing. Using my own experience, I added a fourth option. For some clients this may be the only madcap, imaginative and creative time afforded them … and this was reason enough for playfulness.

A second challenge emerges when I consider Levine’s (2009) warning against clients becoming addicted to therapy. Unstructured creative play is unusual in our achievement-orientated era, and I risked creating a playful-bubble so divorced from the everyday that nothing crossed over. In my studio, clients and I could feel alive, imaginative, safe and free in ways not possible in the quake-

Figure 73. Crazy-play (ClientX, September 2011)
shattered world outside. These sensations were alluring, potentially breeding addictive dependence. For example, in the early days of my practice, despite several parents reporting their children were now doing well and could terminate therapy, the children resisted. Some even fabricated symptoms. Together we had created such an enjoyable playspace I struggled to convince these wee ones they could carry this away in their souls as their imagination-wings were now healed and strong enough for them to soar solo without the need to come back week-after-week. I learned to watch for signs of dependence and therapy-addiction. I would facilitate bridge-building between our playspace and their everyday by encouraging clients to take creative transitional objects and their creative-selves into their real lives and to bring tangible aspects of their everyday into the sessions.

**getting in the way (again!)**

As I write and read and rewrite this enthusiastic praise of playfulness, I recall a hazard voiced earlier. Evident in both my wounded/healing and my playfulness, my passionate engagement with this quake-work sometimes threatened to sweep me away. I could become so excited by what I felt emerging within our art, I would spring out of my own skin and into my client’s heart, mind, soul and artwork.

While my full-presence was therapeutically essential, when I lost my capacity to twin presence with witnessing I could become bewitched with what the process ignited in me. Then, I metaphorically shouldered clients aside and ranted enthusiastically, over-interpreting and imposing my own symbolic meanings on their creations. It became vital I held awareness of this proclivity ever-close.

*I visualise a temperature-gauge filled with coloured mercury – green at the foot, yellow to orange in the middle, and red at the crown. I periodically flick my eyes to this thermometer during sessions, noting the colour, trying to ensure I don’t punch into the red zone of heated taking-over-ness.*

*(Magpie-musings, December 2014)*

Ablon (1996) voices how difficult it can be to maintain the constraint and permission required for clients to elaborate their own work – yet this is how they will understand what is being communicated. My client notes describe many instances where I struggled to hold open both the wild tumultuous and the stagnant still moments to invite insight and newness. In contemplating my session-memos, I write:

*Some children also curl my toes: sessions drag endlessly as I hang from the ticking clock – I dig deep inside to resist slapping little hands that sand-toss, or pour out copious gouts of paint, or empty whole glitter-pots, or pull faces and call me ‘poo poo’; I squirm when we run dry of things to say or do – sitting mutely with a child is agony – I battle the temptation to become the clown who gobbles-up the silence ...*

*(Magpie-musings, July 2013)*

Difficulty enduring such feelings can lead a therapist to raise her defences and intervene prematurely, intellectualise, manipulate, set limits and impose sense-making using words (Ablon, 1996). I have previously raised concerns with pre-emptive sense-making. Interpretations – whether incorrect or
accurate – may be counter-therapeutic for clients whose earliest experiences were tarnished by significant impingement (Poynton, 2012). In such instances, the client may associate verbalisations with control and coercion. This conception guided Poynton’s (2012) ultimately successful choice to heed her young client’s repeated command: ‘We should be playing, not talking!’ Just as I ultimately successfully heeded her invitation to embrace a Winnicottian respect for playfulness in and of itself.

**dismissive and critical attitudes to play**

Neither of us is child-orientated, are we? I ask my dead mother. She nods. Dad was all about kids, but you were far more reserved, I say. As she listens closely, I continue to ruminate: working with children scares me … but am I scared of the children or their parents? With parents, I feel obliged to justify what I’m doing (or not doing) and this is a struggle because I’m guided by intuition, imagination and playfulness.

So I often feel fraudulent. Sooner or later someone will channel that archetypal fairy-tale, The Emperor’s New Clothes, and yell:

‘She’s naked!!’

Oh Mom, I hate how I squirm, getting all teacher-pleaser when a parent asks about my process … And yet very few are actually asking for justifications as most kids I’ve worked with seem to love coming and to heal, and their parents seem to feel the process is worthwhile …

My mother waits as I slow my wittering. It does seem to work, this playing-thing, even without analytic words. Maybe it’s the rawness of relationship. Perhaps being playful means I can’t do expert-expert with children and my belief in presence-as-healing is fully realised. And possibly it’s how playfulness can ignite souls and free happy-hormones to lay down new patterns of pleasure and power and personal agency and internal composure.

*(Conversations with my dead mother, March 2014)*

**my own hermit-ism**

I ease back from this passionate paean to playfulness. My internal pendulum swings from my Wild-Child’s imaginal play-tree toward the soul-shadows where my Threshold Orphan tacitly embodies withdrawal from the communal playspace. While my father threw his arms wide to the world, my mother hid. After Derek and I left junior school, she discouraged play-dates at our house. There were no dinner parties, weekend braais in the garden, friends to stay, relatives dropping in unexpectedly or extended family Christmases. My wounded/healer self resonates with the space between these introvert/extrovert traits. At times, when I am in communion with my reclusive highly-sensitive mother-imbued Orphan-self and am called upon to embody my gregariously-frisky, sometimes-insensitive, father-influenced Wild-Child, my capacity to be wholly and playfully present to others stutters.
Driving home through misty rain after a long intricate session, I’m awash with survivor-relief... leading me to contemplate my going-in process. Travelling to these clients, I was be-dogged with the yearning to about-face my wee green car and flee in the opposite direction.

Most sessions are preceded by a strong itch to escape as I clock-watch, hoping time will tick away without the client arriving or they’ll text their apologies. I buzz with existentially-melodramatic questioning of my career-choice – or rather, the naked, open, process-orientated way I enact this career.

Over time, I’ve developed some coping-tricks. I may remind myself this feeling is common for me – it helps me avoid complacency or impingement, and often precedes positive and creatively-playful experiences. I may breathe into the sensations, simply letting myself be off and grumpy, or human and shyly-introverted – knowing these are real-life feelings shared by some clients.

Sometimes I consciously shake-off the feelings, ask them to move aside and sit next-to rather than on-top of me. I may read my client-notes, reminding myself how much we’ve already created and progressed. I often open the clay cupboard and invite the art-angels amassed therein to swirl about me. I may also reach outward into my profession, reconnecting with those who carved this path, reaffirming ways my own experience tallies with theirs – that the art will guide the way, this process of opening to creativity can be trusted, the answers don’t reside in me as expert, rather I’m here to hold the space for the magic to arrive. And, most compelling of all, I may call upon my lost ones – sometimes in their entirety, sometimes just one or another who feels appropriate to this client – to companion me ...

This is a familiar feeling.
My TeddyBear-Sage is tap-tapping my shoulder – emerging from my word-flow, I notice two processes at work and feel pulled to capture this. My initial intention for this account was to write-into-being the challenge posed to my practice of imagical play by the two polemic persona housed within my soul: Palooka-gene/Trickster/Playful-me and Hermit/Sage/Serious-me. Yet, as I’ve driven the words in this direction, I’ve written-into-awareness the many strategies I employed to address my innate introversion when faced with being playfully-present with others. When I began nudging words around my going-in reluctance, I almost stated I’ve limited ways to cope with the urge-to-retreat that rises in me …

… and yet I didn’t.

Now I can see why.

As I wrote of my few conscious tactics, I became alert to other ruses I employ, and wording these into awareness, further ideas and actions were revealed. I now look back and know I’ve a rich body of stratagems to challenge my self-conception as neophyte-naked and disempowered when facing this grand reluctance, that my ongoing survival is a thing of magic and happenstance rather than an act of my own empowered-shamanself …

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, May 2013)
In this fourth section of *Phase 2: Liminality*, I sought to make sens/able the ways in which playfulness was useful within my therapeutic quake-work. I brought into being play-tales from my childhood and formative careers. I highlighted my embodiment of the liminal Trickster/Sage archetypes. And I engaged with my initial struggles to validate the playful features of my work. I then coined the term ‘imagical play’ to describe the imaginative, image-rich and magical ways my clients and I found to play among our quake-ruins. I delved into four core concepts informing imagical play – play, mindful flow, *poiesis* and active imagination. Finally, I contemplated the benefits and troubles brought to my quake-arts therapy by liminal play.

Imagical play is an enactment of my healing. It enlivens my embodiment of the wounded/healer archetype and the vitality and newness brought to my practice by playfulness augments the empathy brought by my wounding. Imagical play thus joins and interweaves with my other core themes. Within our context of *enduring liminality*, my soul-rich both-and-ans... marries both wounding/healing and mindful-playfulness to invite newness. This newness is central to soul-healing as it helps clients call ‘Yes!’ to life and move beyond troublesome memetic patterns laid down by their suffering.

In addition, several zephyrs breathed life through this section. Like sustaining breezes, these established ideas drawn from my profession of arts therapy buoy-up my emergent core themes. These secondary-zephyr-themes include: multiplicity and fragmentation; soul-limberness; the primacy of relationship; trusting the process; not interpreting too hastily; the power of embodiment; bespoke-healing; being aware of blurred lines; and the psyche’s interweave of light and shadow.

Pivotal within imagical play was how playfulness enabled us to relinquish control and allow new order to emerge from the chaos of our enduring liminality. This thread of attempting to seize control as a response to disempowerment now tugs us into the next section where I critique my responses to the influence of the liminal *power/powerlessness* paradox.
both powerful and powerless and...

The Age of Enlightenment has lots to answer for! My dead mother nods as I rant. Our Western cultures have, in poo-pooing religious and mythological explanations, systematically laid siege to the mystery at the heart of existence. We’ve developed scientific-method – deluding ourselves into thinking by applying rational/logical thought to ourselves, the world, and ourselves-within-the-world, we reduce our powerlessness and gain control over ourselves and the world. Oh I’m not discounting the plethora of advances scientific-method has ushered in... BUT!!

I stop-to---take-----a----------breath-----------------

But, I say sternly to my blatantly-science-defying mother, this hyper-extension of the will-to-power, of control over ourselves and our world, is disturbing.

Levine talks about chaos and order. Order, to me, speaks of the natural world. Applied to humans, this idea of order feels too sanitised. When I gaze about, I see chaos being countered with control.

Since we first oozed from the swamp, we’ve been trying to make sense of the vast complexities around/within us. We’ve used myths and legends, religion, philosophy and most recently, science.

This making-sense in some cases and cultures carries the tang of living-in-harmony, of embracing the duet of chaos-and-order. In other cases/cultures, and here I’m pointing very directly at my own multi-continental-capitalist-consumerist-corporate Westernised culture, this reeks of attempts to seize control of the chaos, to manage it, beat it into submission and have it behave itself.

This is the Western-being’s finger-flip to powerlessness.

Panting, I pause my impassioned rant.

I feel my mother radiating an ironical eyebrow-raised ‘yeeees?’ back at me.

----------------------------------\ulture-------------------

We both know at the heart of this hissy-fit sits my own control-freakishness.
So she holds the space for me as I wind my neck slowly in and sit with this knowing:

No matter who or what I want to blame, ultimately I have wriggle-room. I can enact some agency over my own responses. But sometimes it’s difficult to do this, to push back against the weight of a culture that wills me to take control of my life. I gently allow myself to own that in situations where I feel powerless, my innate inclination is to contract away from my African roots and don the armour of Westernised controlling thoughts and behaviour in an attempt to regain power both over my internal turmoil and the external world I inhabit.

(Conversations with my dead mother, September 2014)

Liminality is associated with a simultaneity of power and powerlessness (Turner, 1969). And those pinned beneath the Sword of Damocles within situations of enduring liminality can find this exhausting and vertiginous (Waller & Sibbett, 2008). I respond to my own encounters with this liminal power paradox by wrangling with chaos and control – tussles that weave like barbed-wire throughout this research. I am not alone. Control, loss-of-control, and chaos have emerged as core experiences connected to suffering (Herman, 1992; Levine, 2010; Murphy, 2014). These are explicitly addressed in trauma literature and they have been expressed to me in many ways by most clients. During the quakes, this jagged interplay of chaos/control and power/powerlessness was felt in our bodies, thoughts, feelings and our existential sense of soul. And it ran as a core theme within my quake-work.
...a string that jerks tight-and-slack, tight-and-slack...

In this section, I attempt to make useful sense of how, as quake-arts neophyte/shaman, I engaged with liminal power/powerlessness. I ‘create and critique’ (Sullivan, 2007) the thorny interweaving of chaos and control within my quake-work. Then I take permission from a/r/tographic living inquiry (Springgay et al., 2005) and allow myself to be jolted from exploring my professional practice into telling a tale of personal pain. These personal events, that occurred while I was crafting this section, highlight core features of the cyclical nature of the power/powerlessness paradox.

In this section, my liminal kite-string interlinks:

- *power/powerlessness within quake enduring liminality* situates this discussion within my quake-context by evoking my twin roles of neophyte/shaman;

- *playing neophyte/shaman within liminal power/powerlessness* explores my grapples with power as shaman of enduring liminality before focusing on how I attempted to address clients’ and my experiences of neophyte-powerlessness; and

- *tumbling backwards – the power of acceptance* describes how, while embroiled in this research, two events wrenched me back into liminal powerlessness.

This inquiry is interlaced with strings drawn from previous sections. This chaos/control dynamic is grounded in my quake-context of *enduring liminality* in which as wounded/healer I used *imaginically playful* letting-go to open the *both-and-and...* of new possibilities.
power/powerlessness within quake enduring liminality

One...

The quake thunders up the road and clutches our small wooden house in its hot fist, shaking, shaking. I’m flung from the couch onto the floor as all round tortured wood and glass shriek and roar. Staggering to my feet, I run from the house in terror. The narrow entrance-way traps me and I’m slammed from side-to-side. I wail in panic. Finally I burst outside. I’m on the street beneath swaying power poles and the ragged bounding boulders from the hills above. I know I shouldn’t be here, I should’ve stayed inside, but I’m powerless against my own body, against the mighty surge of adrenalin that activated my need to flee in order to survive, against the world broken free from expectation and order.

Two...

I sit lumpen as my client weeps again about her situation, distress radiating from her in cloying waves. My hands are heavy and empty on my lap, my heart heavy and tight in my chest. Thoughts of my uselessness begin to poke at me, penetrating past her tremulous voice, filling my head with orange-edged panic. How on earth can I help? I can’t have any impact upon her external world – on the insurance company or council or EQC or her workplace or her child’s school or the broken roads festooned with orange cones she negotiates daily. And, as she comes here week-after-week and sobs out the same woeful story, I’m obviously not having any positive impact upon her inner world either. I find myself stumbling towards cutting her off, silencing her with false words of comfort, telling her about the neurobiology of trauma before making her lie down so I can teach her breathing and relaxation techniques to counter the rush of stress hormones ... and then I remind myself how my own feelings of powerlessness drove me in this direction before and she complied ... and afterwards reported feeling even more disempowered when she struggled to implement the slick strategies I’d taught and obviously expected her to do as healing-homework ...

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, September 2014)

My dual roles as neophyte and shaman heightened my experience of this liminal power paradox. I was powerless liminal initiate. I was prey to the distressing disruption of the quakes, their ongoing aftermath and how this dredged up previous wounds. I was also trained therapist. I was the shaman who, through specialised education and previous personal/professional experience, could journey within the liminal and, using the arts, guide others. This role conferred upon me a certain power, the alluring mantle of the expert. Yet, the shaman is not all-powerful. By opening to the vagaries of the liminal, the shaman may fall prey to shadows within liminality that can awaken the unsavoury, agonistic and harmful-Trickster/dark-mirror side of humanity (Girard, 1988). My boundary-blurring position as neophyte/shaman was thus a central and controversial feature of my quake-work because it disrupted the objectivity traditionally viewed as vital to ethical therapy (ANZATA, n.d.).
playing neophyte/shaman within liminal power/powerlessness
grappling with (false) empowerment as therapist/shaman

Turner (1970) describes the shaman as powerful and controlling within ritual liminality. In contrast, I seldom felt powerful and in control within my lived-practice – and when I did, I suspect I was not being very therapeutic! Mølbak’s (2013) comparison of two polemic psychotherapeutic approaches to treat distress created a frame in which I could better understand this. The rational/planning approach exemplifies the bio-medical and cognitive-behavioural models of therapy in assuming therapy can be applied as a rational solution to a clearly defined problem. Despite enabling the therapist to feel in control, this approach is misguided as the problem addressed in psychotherapy is “not a task to be solved but an initial ‘mystery’” to be curiously pursued (Mølbak, 2013, p. 463). The process-orientated approach embraces this mystery. This approach cannot be planned as it seeks to help the client discover and understand the problem and work out what she really desires from life. In process-orientated work, the therapist does not seize control but remains in dialogue with the therapeutic situation, continuously revising understandings and interventions based on ongoing feedback and responsiveness to what emerges in the now.

Mølbak’s descriptions of the rational/planning approach articulate the initial old-school, limiting conceptions of trauma therapy I harboured when I began my quake-work. This approach demands the problem is defined at the outset, goals are set, and an appropriate recognised course-of-action is planned, implemented, and evaluated. The outcome remains defined in relation to what is already known and confined by doctrines already in place. The client’s own discourse is silenced by this assumption that a person’s difficulties can be objectified as concrete problem behaviours that are discrete instances of universal problems. Both therapist and client become closed to the mystery. This type of process domesticates a client through a tamed experience that can merely be integrated into a pre-existing worldview and this allows the problem to resurface later. Mølbak believes good therapy, in contrast, “unleashes an unpredictable future” (p. 473). Something new, which cannot be known in advance, needs to happen to open this other future. A therapy seeking this is not defined by a fixed starting point and projected end-state. Rather, it attends to the middle, liminal or transitional space (Winnicott, 1977) from which a new past and new future are encouraged to emerge.

My ensouled quake-therapy resonated with Mølbak’s belief that, at the heart of every human being’s core beliefs, values and motivations, “lies something obscure... We live in partial darkness about who we are” (p. 467). The starting-point for my quake-work was often obscurity, complexity and not-knowing – mirroring the uncertain world into which the earthquakes tumbled us. My process-orientated approach did not pre-define problems. Rather, I invited problems and goals to transform as the journey unfolded and this allowed me to respond in a contextual and timely manner to what was emerging in the moment. As beginning therapist, this dialectical approach was challenging. It exploded the appealing fantasy that the therapist is able to produce desired outcomes by selecting and controlling the right means (Levine, 2009; Mølbak, 2013).
I tap into the quickened beating of my heart. Something’s stirring. I attend to it.

I find Mølbak’s arguments deeply resonant, igniting my heart and soul (echoing how I succumbed delightedly to Levine’s ideas).

Yet my head is tugging at my heart-sleeves. I let the tugging speak and hear a cautionary voice.

This voice belongs to my inner-Sage. ‘Remember your both-and-and…’ he says. ‘Attend to the liminal slash lying between these two stances presented by Mølbak as starkly opposing.’

These wise words reach my perch on the lofty heights of ideals, and I shinny back down my kite-string and into the rubble of my tangible practice.

Here in the real, the awkward and scary, the uncertain, are my lived-stories.

These tell of how in reality I seesawed jaggedly between planning and openness, between controlling and letting-be ... to finally become a little more adept at embracing holding open the space for newness (by embodying and inviting my client to join me on a co-creative/process-orientated journey) ... while simultaneously welcoming the knowledge informing the rational/planning approach (but holding this metaphorically at arm’s-length, out-of-the-way yet within reach should recognised ideas and established knowings become relevant to our adventures).

I nod thanks to my TeddyBear for this reminder. And yes, when I revisit how I’ve structured and restructured my thinking and theorising I see this:

I’m fumbling towards a post-postmodern way of practising that interlaces:

both- openness, a beginner’s mind, a sense of curiosity and mutual discovery;

-and- draws on the wisdom and knowledge generated by the great thinker-practitioners that’ve gone before;

-and... opens to soul’s mysterious something-more.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, September 2014)
When I began work as quake-therapist, I thought a clear trauma-recovery-practice-model would help me feel in control by allowing me to plan, implement and evaluate sessions. This, I thought, would counter potential negative impacts of my concurrent position as disempowered, fellow wounded-neophyte. I was, however, bedevilled by clients’ and my own waywardness. Clients and I often resisted my structured attempts at verbally-recounting their distressing events or teaching pre-planned relaxation/breathing, visualisation and distraction skills and strategies. They (and I) wanted to dive into creation. As a beginner, I struggled to reconcile this desire for mutual creative-discovery with my felt-obligation to remain objective and draw from accepted practice.

As I wrestled to marry creative processes with the trauma-recovery strategies I thought I should be implementing, the vitality and transformatory magic leaked from our sessions. I over-reacted and elbowed aside the wisdom embedded in accepted theory and practice. Several sessions unravelled out of control – an opposite extreme equally as un-therapeutic as my rigidly directive sessions.

I’m hiding, I say to my dead mother. I know, comes the reply.

Nope, I don’t think I’ve the courage to go there, I say.

We sit in silence. I know she’s willing me to counter my urge to sanitise ugly or unsafe or impulsive or awkward moments that show me and my abilities in a less-than-flattering light.

Like the fire-lighting.

Ok, so there – I’ve begun. And thus the story will out ... it’ll come in shards glued together and re-imagined because, to my great shame, in one wild week I allowed this to happen more than once and with more than one client.

He’s young and downcast. Being different weighs heavily, bullying is a daily feature of his school life. He struggles to talk, the words fat and failing. I offer him clay and paper and paint and pipecleaners and he begins to vomit the feelings out, into the clay, onto the paper, wound tight in coloured pipecleaners and wire. His fear and shame and distress and rage pour out. Then he creates the bullies that induce these coagulated feelings. They’re grotesque and penile. I stay with him, sitting in the messy stuff alongside him, letting him know he’s not alone.

Finally he emerges, as if from a trance, and together we look at what he’s made. We honour his journey and his courage in silence. His breathing is shallow and choppy. I silently allow my body to connect with his, mirror it, and then I gradually self-soothe, inviting his body to follow. This is done without words, but his body and mine are in dyadic conversation and he slows and calms.

Then I ask, “What does this difficult creation need from you now?”
He turns his head eagerly – for the first time his movements are light and fluid. He hops up and from the shelving snatches up a box of matches.

I go cold. I’d forgotten them.

I offer this option very guardedly to adult clients – as a release we enact a ritual-burning of difficult artworks in a metal pail in my small garden.

But never for the children. From them, the matches remain hidden.

**Until now.**

But he’s so lit-up, so alive in a way I’ve never seen before, so ready to deflate into grey defeat again if I say no.

And so I give in.

We carry the troubling creation outside. It’s too large for the pail so we lay it on the mossy garden paving. And while I fumblingly stutter out clumsy phrases about the dangers of fire and how this should only be done here and NOT AT HOME yadda yadda yadda... he excitedly strikes matches and begins to set the pipe cleaners and lollysticks and paper on fire.

I fall silent.

While my brain is squealing out loud about how dangerous this is...

*(ohgodohgodohgod! ... he-could-do-this-unsupervised-at-home-at-school-under-his-sister’s-bed ...)*

*my heart is fascinated*

fire fizzes through pipe cleaners, splutters along wooden sticks, gobbles up paper... we hold our breath as orange and blue flames struggle against gloopy dark paint, bubbles simmer and pop... and we both whoop in delight as the fire wins and the final pieces crumple into black and grey ashes and smoke.
He’s loud and upright and joyous as I’ve never seen him before. It seems the fire leaped from the artwork and into his soul, igniting him.

I, on the other hand, am suddenly deeply ashamed, a swirling nausea in my belly, and in my head the monkeys are pointing fingers, screeching, and flinging pooh.

In my attempts to follow the energy, I lost control of the session completely.

(Conversations with my dead mother, September 2014)

This slippage from being all-controlling into powerless within my sessions caused me to re-visit my need for a guiding-something in my quake-work. This entire study could be construed as my latest attempt to articulate this guiding-something. It voices my commitment to a dynamic approach crafted from interacting philosophies/principles that produce a limber and alive balance between power/powerless and chaos/containment. This guiding-something takes its form from my Indra’s net description-of-soul. It is the kinetic-sculpture-cat’s-cradle room full of interlinked treasures that I imagined as the ideal way to present this research. It interweaves my past, my present and my imagined future to create a bespoke both-and-and...way of working within enduring liminality. And it is deeply influenced by my wrangles to make useful therapeutic sens/e of my own wounding/healing and power/powerlessness.
grappling with loss-of-control/chaos/powerlessness as neophytes

I described my personal tussles with chaos/control when I investigated my wounded/healing. This intimate knowledge of powerlessness informed my practice. Here I shift my gaze to explore how this quake-practice helped clients address their powerlessness as quake-neophytes. I traverse the following topics: containment; sens/e-making; acclimatisation; and success.

containment

Provision of a safe container by the therapist features in most approaches to therapy (Levine, 2009; McNiff, 2004; Stechler, 2000, Rappaport, 2008; Winnicott, 1977). Murphy’s (2014) research with art therapist disaster-responders honed in on the key theme of chaos and containment. She concludes art therapy can provide containment during the often chaotically-uncontrolled experience of ongoing disaster, transforming disempowered victims into empowered survivors. I prefer ‘containment’ to ‘order’ or ‘control’. A creative-container can be whatever shape, size, porosity and flexibility is required. The therapeutic relationship, the arts-process and -products, and the imagination can all be containers. This containment differs from suppression and the therapist ideally provides a container in which clients may safely evoke distressing emotions (Harris, 2009). My capacity to provide containment stemmed from the relationship I developed with my own wounding/healing. My ongoing intimacy with, and containment of, my own responses allowed me to create and hold a safe yet flexible space. Within this containment, spontaneous art-making allowed clients and me, as neophytes, to experience moments of both control and loss-of-control. This helped us experience power and powerlessness in unexpected ways and thereby accept our tenuous relationship with control.

containment through arts-processes and -products

I used my quake-arts therapy to provide contained ways to be with powerlessness via the process of art-making and the symbolic content of the art product. Arts processes and materials can provide containment: Pages have edges and borders to contain drawings and paintings, clay has surface-tension and holds its shape, sand is held by the tray’s sides, creative writing is shaped by words beginning and ending on the page ...

The Expressive Therapies Continuum (Hinz, 2009) maps what is likely to be evoked in clients through use of different arts materials, media and processes. While not rigidly adhering to this matrix, I did weave elements into my basic Head, Heart, Hands, Holy-Bit framework and found that paying heed to choice and use of materials was vital to effectively expressing and transforming difficult experiences.
She sits with her head bowed. Her shoulders are tight about her ears and she’s sucked herself into herself. Her art, even after several sessions, reflects this contraction. I’ve watched her choose small pages, pencils and pens, and create sharply-defined, carefully thought-out images.

And yet she tells me time-and-again how this tightness is killing her, she can’t breathe, her ears whine with tinnitus in the dark early hours – she yearns to loosen up, to bend, to cry and laugh.

I take a deep breath and plunge in. “Remember how I’ve said repeatedly that one of my roles is to open options for you?” She nods. “What if we play with that idea today by experimenting with some new materials?”

Her eyes slide sideways to the paint-shelf.

I smile. “Yip, my thoughts exactly.”

Her body retreats even further.

“Can you drop inside yourself and get a sense of how these ideas feel as I say them?” A nod. “How would it feel to trust you’re safe here and that the art doesn’t come to harm you?” We pause and she concentrates, her eyes glazed and inward gazing. She says slowly, “I can try that.”

I continue, “How would it feel to invite your thinky head-lead bits to step aside and allow your hands and your heart and your holy-bit to lead the process?” I notice she’s softening a little. I’m surprised but delighted. She nods again. “Can you stay with that okayness? I’ll slide some paper in front of you and get some paint.”

She sits quietly while I pull out two large sheets of white paper and swivel in my chair to pour paint into the palette, again thanking my foresight in placing all my materials within easy reach so I won’t disrupt her reverie. I increase the volume on some loosely flowing piano music.

I begin with a brush and wonder aloud, “What’ll it feel like to choose a colour and just make big marks on the page?” I try this and she, tentatively at first and then with increasing assurance, follows suit, blue swirls and strokes dancing across her page.

Already she’s opening her body and breathing more deeply.

“Mmmm, I wonder how it feels to use the other hand?” I offer this a little cheekily, with a challenging smile. We catch eyes and swap hands simultaneously and, using a new colour, we swirl and splotch with our non-dominant hands. She giggles at our clumsiness. We continue swapping the paintbrushes from hand-to-hand and adding new colours as the music sweeps about us.

Seeing her relax and enjoy this, I decide to nudge further.
I take an audible breath.

I stop.

I place my paintbrush into the water jar.

“Nope,” I say, “That’s not doing it for me anymore. I need to get into that paint!”

I place the tips of my fingers into the wet paint in the palette.

She pulls back in surprise and then laughs openly, her head up and her eyes alive.

Down goes her brush and in go her hands.

(Playtime with my Wild-Child, November 2014)

I experimented in collusion with clients. We played with contradictions and discovered that progressively mastering art-making materials/processes and/or surrendering to those which refused to be controlled helped us tolerate and explore our feelings of power/powerlessness. I thus unwittingly arrived at a similar destination to Malchiodi’s (2015) emphasis on a bottom-up approach focusing on the sensory/tactile nature of art-making to provide regulation.

Attending to symbolic images within artwork also aided our explorations of chaos and control. Spontaneous art-making that invites the controlling mind to step aside may produce an ‘embodied image’ which engages the client in its making “as if the picture seems to lead, becoming something rather different than originally intended” (Schaverien, 2000, p. 59). This echoes McNiff’s (2004) images-as-angels invitation to use active imagination to explore symbols, trusting they hold insight from beyond the confines of conscious cognition. The rational mind may wish to claim control by imposing interpretations, but it is vital to stay with uncertainty/multiplicity – even when this feels disempowering – as hasty translations diminish the image’s fruitfulness (Halprin, 2003; Hillman 1983).
The recurring barbed-wire in my images is an evocative example. It predates this study by first appearing wrapped about my heart-shaped soul in 2010. Its reappearance as a boundary erected by my Threshold Orphan opened this symbol for further contemplation, leading to a soul-sense of my knee-jerk response to distress as both wounding contraction/constriction and protective laagering and...

containment to facilitate play

In the previous section I explored playfulness within my quake-work. As chaos is not to be mastered, playfulness within quake-arts therapy helped clients live with the consequent complexity, multiplicity, finitude and incompletion (Martin, 2011) by building tolerance of “ambiguity, paradox and loss of control” and even enabling clients to “play with the chaos they find in the world” (Levine, 2009, p. 116). Winnicott (1977) suggests another name for formlessness is play and therapy itself is a form of playing: When therapist and client are willing to playfully enter the chaos of the psyche, a creative sense-of-self can be developed and thus formlessness and play – and how they open and enliven imagination – become ways to comprehend chaos.

I identified how clients and my capacity to follow this creative ‘what-if...’ was compromised by too much control or chaotic powerlessness. Appropriate containment was vital to facilitate playful reflexive transformation. I made decisions about the tightness/looseness of the session structure, my level of directivity/permissiveness, and the fluidity/controllability of the media by assessing my client’s strengths and vulnerabilities. And these decisions helped facilitate the titration of exposure (Levine, 2010). Clients who were overwhelmed and rendered chaotic and/or numb by a sense of dispersal, uncertainty and fragmentation initially required greater containment, so they felt held as I invited them into imaginal play.

I’m re/searching my client-notes. I see how, with some fractured child-clients, I was initially very hands-on in the creative process...

... suddenly I’m sliding sideways ...

Noticing this, my Magpie and I stay with the feeling, waiting curiously for a clearer sens/e of this reactive sensation to arrive.

Ah! There it is – a squirt of shame, of feeling this was wrong and unethical.

I’m doing the art for these children.
Stepping bodily into the space they should be occupying.
Robbing them of their creative agency ...
... and surely disempowering them even further ...

Or maybe there’s another way of framing this?

They all exhibited a sense of anxiety, of inability, of uselessness when it came to the creative arts (and other aspects of life ...). They resisted and shut-down when encouraged to turn their hands to painting or drawing or modelling in clay. I felt the panic rise in them at the risk. Life felt so precarious already that any further failure was terrifying. I witnessed the agitated bodies or limp bodies or tight breathless bodies they donned when faced with this sense of being powerless to control the art materials and bring into concrete-being the visions in their hearts and souls ...

I imagine this disempowerment snaked its way through other aspects of their quake-disrupted lives.

So I invited them into the creative process by being a bit sly. “How about you be Minister of Creative Ideas?” I’d declare. “And I’ll be Minister of Creative Acts?” We’d negotiate a deal in which they’d dream-up the projects and, taking the lead, direct me in the hands-on creation of their imaginings. I’ve built steam-trains out of loo-roll holders and cardboard-scraps, made puppets from newspaper and wallpaper-glue, painted and glittered canvases, modelled clay creatures, and drawn countless cartoons.

Thus slowly, gently, I’ve – to use Best’s terminology – ‘seduced’ my wee clients into drawing a line or two, colouring a few sections, making some ears out of clay, cutting the card into this shape, etcetera, etcetera and so-forth. Nudging them deeper and deeper into the hands-on, wings-fluttering, body-and-soul-engaged process of not only dreaming up the creative projects but taking the playful tangible risks involved in bringing them to life as well.

My Magpie and I conclude that enticing someone who feels deeply unsure and powerless towards believing they too can take creative risks and draw, paint, write, dance and laugh, may require some careful containment and uneven co-creation to begin with.

(Magpie-musings, September 2014)

sens/e-making

Various cognitive therapies resonate with Frankl’s (2004) belief that if we can find meaning in suffering, we can endure and heal. They propose that applying the fundamental human meaning-making tendency to traumatic situations can create logical narratives that reclaim control and personal empowerment (Mølbak, 2013). My quake-work challenged this seemingly innate cognitive meaning-making antidote to tragic events. While it may be a vital survival mechanism within some
genuinely threatening environments, imposing meaning on chaos may prove problematic and even increase the sense of powerlessness. The multiplicit complexity of our quake-context resisted clear-cut rational explanation and predictability. In addition, human neurological responses suggest traumatic experiences rupture our capacity to render this overwhelm in words (van der Kolk, 2014).

While I host a meaning-loving Magpie-mind, this inquiry unearthed within my historical wounds and quake-practice an interesting insight. Thinking-through was successful and reassuring for my lessor distresses – an orientation I shared with some clients. The darker events in my history and those expressed by clients, however, resisted logical meaning-construction. These woundings did not mean anything – as Levine (2009) states: “Trauma ... just is” (p. 17). Rappaport (2008) agrees that extreme human experiences may not be amenable to cognitive meaning-making and emphasises instead befriending the pre-verbal felt-sense. This tacit felt-sense is the foundation from which I re-imagined meaning-making into making-sens/e. And in my quake-work this sens/e-making embraced a holistic appreciation of human experience as multi-layered and multi-levelled. In broadening my perspective, I resisted the influence of approaches that privilege attention to the part over attending to the whole (Adamson, 2015) and embraced valid meaning as embodied, emotional and soul-felt without necessarily being rational/cognitive.

**acclimatisation**

In my initial interactions with children, I became rudely aware of how the February 2011 quake produced uncontrolled emotional reactivity. During the *My Favourite Place* workshops several child-participants became chaotically over-excited. My sessions began with fun drama-games before moving onto a re-imagined FOAT activity (Rappaport, 2006). In my drama-in-education work (1989-2004) these warm-ups were effective: lively external games invited loosening and laughter, before moving inwards towards quieter reflective work. With children in the grips of a natural disaster, however, this process was challenged. Several children in my early groups revved-up during the physical games and just kept going – one boy became so hyped he lay on the floor and spun like a Dervish! As my experience with five to 12-year-olds was limited, I was rocked to my core.

I had also failed to consider essential differences between the tighter control of school-teaching and my permissive arts therapy process. My fear of imposing on the already over-stretched teachers meant I briefed them inadequately. Consequently, during early sessions teachers intervened, chastising or removing boisterous children. This was shaming – for me and the children. Yet I maintained my belief that progressively moving through fun-chaos using movement/drama and into the soothing focus of visual art-making could help address this loss-of-control. I consulted therapists supporting me via the Facebook CHART ANZATA group. They affirmed my sense that a mixed-modal arts-journey may help these particular children experience, in their own beings, the transition from over-stimulation to soothed-calmness. I thus continued my quest to create a permissive environment in which, rather than being regulated through external dictates imposed by adults, these children could experience and build their own ability to calm their internal turmoil (Gil, 1998).

**Self-regulation** thus became my buzz-phrase. Stosny (2011) describes behavioural self-regulation as the ability to act in your own long-term best interest, consistent with your deepest values, while emotional self-regulation is the ability to calm yourself when upset and cheer yourself when down. I began presenting self-regulation to teachers and parents as the central intention of my processes.
Mastering self-regulation was core work for these age groups even without the interference of a natural disaster, and I sought to offer an embodied experience and simple tools to self-soothe and manage their internal states of arousal and resultant external behaviour.

I began to experiment. I created new activities that followed the group energy and I stayed with different stages of the process according to the children’s levels of stimulation. I observed several children become over-stimulated. But I also experienced how, often with gentle side-coaching, many of these kids found themselves again, becoming intensely involved in the art-making before exhibiting their artworks with chest-swelling pride.

When I shifted from group to more intimate individual work, I continued addressing the feedback loop between feelings of powerlessness, chaotic self-regulation and problematic behaviour. I focused on building attuned containing alliances and invited clients to experiment with multiple creative experiences. Our ongoing non-directive co-creation of relationship and art helped empower clients by offering opportunities to explore, develop and then repeatedly practise new, embodied forms of self-regulation – again inadvertently mirroring Malchiodi (2015), van der Kolk (2014) and Kass and Trantham’s (2014) emphasis on bodily-regulation paving the way for emotional-regulation.

Whoa! Stop Already! Feathers fly as my Magpie squawks. I halt and tap-into this agitation …

My Magpie points a piebald wing at two goads:

Firstly, my expert-mantle-donning self-aggrandisement. I reread what I’ve just written and I sound very –


What a load of hindsight-sanitised bollocks! Well, not entirely bollocks … but I’ve omitted how I struggled and doubted and agonised and failed a lot more than this narrative suggests!

The second cause of the Magpie-ruckus is my repeated use of that barbed-wire word:

![Figure 80. 'Attenshn' (Green, June 2009)](image)

**REGULATION**

*My Magpie reminds me this research-endeavour has repeatedly foregrounded my innate inclination towards countering my feelings of powerlessness through clamping-down, contracting, controlling ... and regulating. While these may be protective as initial responses, when allowed to fuse into habitual coping-strategies, they become worrying. So my repetitive emphasis on regulation evokes this sense of armouring and rigidity. Surely, my*
Magpie chatters with cocked-head and beady-eye, other words could invite more flexibility and suppleness while evoking the same essence of positive personal empowerment and agency?

So, my Magpie, Cat, Wild-Child and I spend time with this regulation-word.

When we bat it around, it doesn’t bounce.
When we roll it about in our mouths, it tastes of scales and tin.
When we toss it up, it doesn’t float or flutter.
It falls to the earth with a thud.

Yip, we conclude, it feels too militaristic/controlling/rule-driven for the limber, befriending process I encourage in myself and clients.

We search for alternatives. There’s ‘internal composure’ used by Kass and Trantham... but while this captures a desired inward-focus, we feel it lacks the also-outward/enacted-focus of behavioural/emotional self-regulation. Alternative terms (self-reconcile, -mediate, -compose, -orchestrate, -harmonize, -attune) fall short of the sense of being able to creatively befriend, be with, accept and yet balance, and therefore act-upon, potentially chaotic, antagonistic and/or oppositional emotions/thoughts-parts-of-self.

Finally I uneasily settle on the word acclimatise

which creeps closest to the poise between the inwardly-alive/outwardly-enacted personal agency/personal-acceptance I seek to build in myself and others.

(Magpie-musings, October 2013)

success

I encouraged a state of beginner’s mind and helped avoid pathologising reactions to suffering (Hooker & Fodor, 2008) by starting each new therapy-journey with simple success-orientated creative processes. Collaborative scribble-drawing and story-finding was a favourite. Another much-loved process happened outdoors where we collected natural materials and created/storied nature-connected art-installations (Evans, 2013). These activities wooed success as they were concrete, attainable by all age-groups and skill-levels, and had realistic goals that validated various creative strengths (Baldwin, 2011; Naimi, 2009). Clients thus unconsciously began reclaiming empowerment and agency within their lives and futures.
...suddenly the string yanks me back...

Just as I taste success and begin to feel empowered by my progress as artist/researcher/therapist, out of nowhere, shit happens. Life smacks me back into my wounding, foregrounding how my reaction to powerlessness is characterised by a barbed-wire tendency to grasp too tightly. Along with my controlling contraction-and-compression, I clutch-and-cling. This was bludgeoned into focus by two distressing happenings. My reactions to these events challenge any fantasy-Eden-notions I may illicitly have harboured that, in deconstructing my quake-story, I may heal once and for all (Levine, 2009). And my embrace of ABR as living inquiry invites me to use these events in my quest to make useful sens/e of myself and my practice as quake-arts therapist.
tumbling backwards – the power of acceptance

Be careful what you wish for!

My dead mother sighs. She knows my acid-dripping sarcasm is a shield against pain.

In the thick of researching my wounded/healer self, I wondered if I was telling the truth. Would these sensations emerge in the same way through my writing and creating if I were in the grips of pain? Is remembered anguish, even when it reactivates embodied distress and sorrow, accurate or mere re-invention?

Then, I move onto exploring power/powerlessness and (as if to answer my rash queries):

Louis chokes to death on a bone.

My wee, two-and-a-half year-old French Bulldog – vibrant friend and co-therapist

staunch companion on many ruminatory hill-explorations, stumpy legs churning, square post-box mouth pink and panting

snuggle and wuffle-before-the-fire lurk-buddy

creative/destructive co-experimenter and muse to many harried child-clients who’d create toys for Louis to destroy, or roll about on the studio-floor as he lumbered his stout little body about in wild games, or practise their self-acclimatisation through calmly requesting he sit for a treat, or use his sleeping and snorting form as inspiration for drawings and stories and clay creations.

I’m plunged into echoing halls of emotional wooziness. I’m lost and loose and flapping-free. I snap and twang as I contract tight and then spin apart once more. I feel all-over-again the rawness, the sharp rending teeth of this treacherous world ...
... yet within this wet-rending an image slides to the fore. Just a glimpse, but I’m shaken to my core with grief and gratitude. My Threshold Orphan reappears. She’s cloaked herself with invisibility for so long now I’ve forgotten the possibility of her substance. She’s on her chair, thin, head down, roots deep and wings torn and tattered.

But now, in her lap, she cradles Louis.

I thank her.

A few weeks later, just as I’m finding some stillness within this maelstrom, Δ heads to the US to add another tick to his bucket list ...

... he’s to BASE-jump for the first time ...

I’m in the welter of this now, as I write, the piling-up of Louis’ loss and knowing that within 24-hours Δ will fling himself off a bridge with a small bundle of cloth attached to his back.
I’m undone by the fear that I’ll lose yet another loved one.

I try to lean into your arms, my dead mother, but this doesn’t work. I’m only reminded more fully you’re not really here, that you’re a figment of my wishful-imagination along with the shades of my father and of and Sebastian … and now Louis …

(and soon maybe ∆ …

… my hands shake and are damp as I type. Anxiety is fire-and-ice in my belly. I’ve vertigo. When I turn my head quickly black spots dance and I lose any knowing of up and down. I open my mouth wide in sighing gasps-for-air, like a fish on dry land. The tears hover close, pushing up beneath my lids, pinching the bridge of my nose. My heartbeat has taken up residence throughout my being. I thunder and thrum.)

I’ve lied to clients this week, cancelling sessions because I’m unsure of my capacity to carve a safe space for anyone while I’m suffocated by these sensations. My integrity as wounded/healer feels tattered.

But now I resolve to take my courage gently in both hands and drop-into these feelings … Although as I write this, these words are the wrong shape. I cannot drop into these feelings because

I am these feelings.

I tentatively test this knowing. Yip. There’s very little of me sitting outside the grief, the anguish, the churning anxiety, the twisting anticipation of worse-to-come. I am all these. So this is what Rappaport means when she speaks of over-identification. How do I get to know this nothing-but-the-wounds-self fully? For here lies the essence of vulnerability, a distillation of my powerlessness as I’m trapped inside the liminal in-between.
I go walking. The sun’s out, Spring declaring her intentions in the clarion-calls of rich vanilla and lanolin-scented gorse-blossom and the dancing glitter she’s sprinkled over the Bays. But I carry with me the deep beating of hot damp tattered leathery wings blasted through with buckshot. The angels have fled, feathers scattered, and I’m in the batcave standing on the bloody and broken corpses of my internal familiars, panting the hot triumphant stink of reptilian breath.

The walking opens me to a slew of thoughts ...

I yearn to be gracious with powerlessness, to flow, to let go with gentle dignity.

But this is fucking difficult.

Feeling disempowered pulls me into dangerous fragmentation, a falling-apart vulnerability I swiftly counter by contracting into control and will-to-power ...

... not only within myself and on my own body but tentacling out to entrap those about me too.

Was this what led $\mathcal{M}$ to run from me as far as a being can run? And is this what I wrangle with now as I stutter through my sharp-edged responses to $\Delta$’s escapade? Am I less concerned about losing him and more concerned about losing control over him? How toxic, how Kamodo-dragon-toothed, boa-constrictor, T-rex voracious this admission reveals me to be! How much in this moment I loathe both him and my bunny-boiler self.

And yet, I know this is my inner protective-Crocodile blasting fury as he attempts to shield me from further wounding.

The walking and thinking and my willingness to become enveloped by this soul-sense allows images to arise, and, in the midst of these chaotic and destructive feelings, I turn to creating.

I tear apart and fling about clay. I squeeze out oil-paints and stir turpentine and linseed oil and begin to make marks on my canvas. And I’m able for brief moments to lose myself in flow, to tease open my clenched-self.
Slowly the acid-bite of terror dims. I gently unearth the helium-balloons and ladders and cable-cars my journey to healing has stowed in this dark soul-ossuary to help me reclaim the healing within my wounded/healer-self.

And I again become more than just my darkness.

*(Crocodile chronicles, October 2014)*

Deborah Green, 2014, *Louis takes flight* [Oil on canvas 45cmx35cm]. Artist’s collection.
In this fifth section of *Phase 2: Liminality*, I re-engaged with a theme that has surfaced several times in this study. Feelings of disempowerment and desperate, often destructive, attempts to regain control lie at the centre of wounding for many. I explored how this power paradox influenced my quake-work as neophyte/shaman. I critiqued my shift, as quake-shaman, from controlling/planning to containing/being-present. In sliding ‘control’ aside, I embraced ‘containment’ and highlighted how containment allowed neophyte-clients and -me to interact with this chaos/control dynamic. To close, I dropped-into my current felt-sense of powerlessness and exploded any illusory notions of healing as cure. Noticing how my scars re-open re-affirmed the need for an approach to healing that recognises life itself is liminal and chaos/containment are thus cyclical and rhizomatic.

This inquiry into liminal power/powerlessness adds the interplay of chaos and control to my kite-string. My quake-therapy was grounded in a both-and-and... approach that invited new order to emerge from within the chaos of our endurantly liminal quake-context. The imaginal playfulness required for this to happen was threatened when my clients or I tried to seize control and forcibly banish our feelings of chaotic powerlessness. When I was able to lean into my own healing as wounded/healer and accept the power paradox, I was able to provide flexible containment rather than rigid control.

My ability to provide this containment was connected to my capacity to build strong, flexible healing relationships with clients. And this helped them build healing relationships within their own souls. In the next, and final, section of *Phase 2* I use the lens of liminal communitas to investigate these relationships.
both singular and connected and...

I jerk between avoidance and acceptance of the seething feelings evoked by Louis’ loss and Δ’s kite-flight-with-life/death. My old-familiar urge to hide hermit-like pulls at me. I honour this Threshold-Orphan-ness while also now knowing trauma is both disempowering and disconnective ... so to heal, I need both internal and external reconnection ...

... I shift my research focus from liminal power/powerlessness onto communitas, the sense of heightened connection that sometimes happens during liminality ...

... and find, as I begin exploring, a pinching builds in my chest. Yet another betwixt feeling of being strung-out between the kite-and-the-rubble. It contains my awe and wonder at the magical mystery of communitas ...

... while simultaneously clawing me back from this deeper connection with others, evoking fears of rejection and abandonment ...

I nod to my inner Pushmi-Pullyu* and ask my Threshold Orphan to relinquish her strangle-hold so I may drop into the joyous healthful soul-building that can arise from re/connection.

The pinch eases and I’m called back into the weeks directly after the BIG QUAKE...
Warmth infuses me and I relive my sense of belonging as I sat with others making hearts. I dig out writing I did at the time:

* A favourite childhood character, the two-headed gazelle-unicorn from Lofting’s Dr Dolittle series, locates my affinity with the betwixt-and-between way back in my childhood...
I intend to celebrate this healing value of communitas. I’ve already taken a scalpel to my own Threshold Orphan-infused disquiet which at times obstructs my way.

When I explored myself as wounded/healer, I confessed –

I host aspects that shy away from contact, that sit on the edges of sessions begging the universe to mount a rescue so I don’t have to open myself to intimate connection with another.

I sense this folding-in-on-myself, this cringing away from contact, doesn’t diminish my capacity for or love of communitas when it comes. In fact, I feel it makes it all the more valuable and rich and wondrous.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, October 2014)
...a string that jerks tight-and-sack, tight-and-sack...

Herman (2001) identifies disconnection, alongside disempowerment, as a key impact of trauma. Healing requires we address both empowerment and interconnection. In the previous section I discussed quake power/powerlessness. Here, in this final section of *Phase 2: Liminality*, I use liminal communitas as a lens to make sense of my innate emphasis on relationship-focussed reconnection within my quake-work. I lace together:

- **liminal communitas** offers a brief outline of core features of communitas as they relate to my quake-work;
- **communitas and ubuntu** contextualises my understanding by dropping-into my African origins;
- **earthquake communitas** describes how we instinctively pulled together post quake/s;
- **communitas within quake-arts therapy** unpacks the primacy of relationship within my quake-work from three perspectives:
  - **communitas within group relationships** reviews my group-work – the most obvious location of therapeutic communitas;
  - **communitas within one-on-one relationships** explores my processes with individual clients. In these intimate experiences my emphasis on relationship becomes a quest for what I call **dyadic communitas**; and
  - **communitas within my own intrapersonal many-in-one relationship** considers my relationship-with-self as a site for possible **internal communitas**. This healing connection-with-self is personally significant as it honours my both-and-... orientation by encouraging my postmodern multiple fragments-of-self/s to co-habit with my yearning for modernistic essentialist wholeness.

This investigation of communitas is threaded into the previous themes of **enduring liminality, both-and-and...**, wounded/healing, **imagical play** and my containment of **chaos and control**. It adds the ideal therapeutic outcome of **internal communitas** to this collection of inter-braided themes. My discussions were buoyed aloft on several sustaining-zephyr-themes including: multiplicity and fragmentation; soul-limberness; trusting the process; not interpreting too hastily; the power of embodiment; bespoke-healing; being aware of blurred lines; and the psyche’s interweave of light and shadow.
liminal communitas

Edith Turner’s (2004) descriptions of liminal communitas helped make sense of my quake-arts therapeutic relationships. She expands upon this unique quality of full, unmediated communion that can arise between liminal neophytes that was observed and named ‘communitas’ by Victor Turner (1969) while studying Ndembu tribal ritual in Zambia.

Communitas resonates with my both-and-and... as it is both singular and multiple and evokes something-more. Liminality releases individuals from conformity to general norms and everyday structural role-playing. Neophytes thus form bonds that are “undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential” (Turner, 2004, p. 98). These bonds matter greatly to the participants, leading to feelings of oneness. Yet while this unity eliminates divisiveness it simultaneously maintains multiplicity – identities are not merged and each person’s gifts are fully alive, along with those of every other person (Turner, 2004).

Communitas resonates with my practice of imaginal play. Sibbett (Waller & Sibbett, 2008) views communitas as a collective form of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004). When people engage in a communal task with full attention, they may enter the flow-state as action and awareness merge, the self becomes irrelevant and “what is sought and what happens is unity, seamless unity” (Turner, 2004, p. 99). This flow-inducing togetherness is richly charged with feeling, mainly pleasurable. Communitas “has something magical about it” and is full of delight, joy and laughter (pp. 98, 99).

Communitas resonates with my ensouled quake-arts therapy. Manifestation of something-more is viewed as central to liminal communitas (Willis, Chisanga, Sikazwe, Sikazwe, & Nnayangwe, 1999). Communitas evokes “a certain kind of medium in which we all live that is permeable from person to person and which nourishes what is ‘spiritual’” (Turner, 2004, p. 99). This porosity enables souls in communitas to cross thresholds and connect with the dead and with other non-human beings in “a vast interchange of spirit personality” (Turner, 2004, p. 99).
communitas and ubuntu

My earliest immersions in communitas happened, like Turner’s, in Africa. I experienced tame, planned communitas during rehearsals as a drama student/lecturer. But heightened Ubuntu introduced me to wild spontaneous communitas. Ubuntu is an African term roughly translated as ‘a person is a person because of other people’ (Z. Hlela, personal communication, 1990). Four years preceding the 1994 scrapping of apartheid, I began engaging Zulu-speaking South Africans in drama-infused HIV/AIDS and community education/development. We met on factory-floors and in rural townships where collectivity and tribal ritual still shaped relationships. The labourers, school students, teachers and other community members my colleagues and I encountered were quick to join us in song and dance. Often as we improvised and harmonised with each other, we experienced the general communion of ubuntu inviting a more elevated experience of transcendent togetherness. As a white woman – and thus a member of the then-oppressors – I felt privileged to be included in these experiences when skin-colour, cultural background and power-structures fell away as we became permeable to each other. In these numinous moments, I glimpsed why Zulu people weave awareness of the mythical ancestral and other spirits into their everyday culture.

My sense of this porosity between worlds flavoured how I workshoped an HIV/AIDS educational musical theatre-piece, iSipoki, with 17 black students in 1991. We played with the possibility of those dying from AIDS being banned from joining the ancestors – these ghosts gained access to the after-life by educating the living about HIV.

Figure 83. ‘iSipoki’ (Natal University Focus Magazine, July 1991)
This offered opportunities for tears and laughter within recognisable and valued cultural constructs – and our audiences, often standing about in sweaty overalls on concrete factory-floors, sang and danced with us. A dusty heat-haze hovered as we harmonised and toi-toi’ed to traditional Zulu work, praise and struggle songs cheekily reworked to admonish LoverBoy and encourage his use of condoms. Deep male voices of the labourers calling, singing, interweaving with our younger voices, feet and boots slapping the cement, we made and remade our connections with each other and with our world/s.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, January 2015)
earthquake communitas

Communitas ‘breaks into society’ via the edges of structures during marginality, from beneath structures during inferiority, and through crevices opened in structures during liminality – including times of major disaster which can place people in liminal ‘midtransition’ (Turner, 2004). My clients and I, as earthquake-disaster neophytes, experienced enduring liminality. We were also prey to marginality and inferiority as the rest of the nation lost interest in our plight and we began to feel economically and emotionally burdensome. I encountered a different form of marginality and inferiority as shaman/therapist using an approach still to be recognised by New Zealand’s mainstream health providers. We thus had many opportunities for communitas. Yet, my twin roles as neophyte/shaman meant I straddled a paradox. Communitas relies upon the levelling of hierarchy, and so proves elusive when structural differences are still evident (Harris, 2014). My duality thus troubled my capacity for communitas. Like my kite-in-the-rubble, my attempts, successes and failures to negotiate this tricky ‘intersubjective objectivity’ (Willis et al., 1999) emerge throughout this research and feature prominently in this section.

My clients’ and my earliest post-quake experiences of relational reconnection were concrete, instinctive and spontaneous. People gathered to share their common plight and assist each other. The words ‘community spirit’ were on our lips and many spoke of feeling connected to each other in new, meaningful ways. As depression and trauma are ‘disconnective disorders’ that do not improve in isolation, we needed connection to heal (McGrath, 2001). Relationships with others enduring similar experiences helped contribute to more adequate functioning (van der Veer, 1998), providing witness to our collective grief (Chilcote, 2007) and our determination to heal. We modelled Harris’ (2009) belief that “profound relational bonds invest the human species with the talents to survive even the most unthinkable of ruptures” (p. 103). My 2011 journal contains comments from heART therapy participants describing how our open group setting as we sat and sewed created ‘a little space in time where you can be alone and together with others’ so ‘you don’t have to feel isolated in a broken home.’ Alongside building connections between those creating hearts, giving hearts to passers-by was an excuse to talk to people, allowing us to ‘spread the joy and love’.
These spontaneous acts of communitas-inviting-togetherness could be viewed as one way we moved from initial acute adrenal fight/flight/freeze reactions into more mediated, tend-and-befriend responses to our stress-inducing circumstances. The biobehavioral mechanism underlying this tend-and-befriend pattern is the attachment-caregiving system (Bowlby, 1988; Taylor, et al., 2000; Winnicott, 1977). Kass and Trantham (2014) suggest internal composure also has formative roots in this infant-caregiver relationship. Infants lack regulatory self-structure and need an attuned caregiver to help them modulate their responses. This gradually shapes the child’s capacity for self-acclimatisation. Poor attachment and/or traumatic experiences, such as our quakes, can interfere with the ability to self-compose. I thus view our spontaneous, post-quake group-making as instinctual use of these attachment-based tend-and-befriend patterns to help us regain our shattered self-acclimatisation. I also embraced this within my quake-therapy by developing communitas-enriched therapeutic relationships. My intention was to provide clients with an experience of earned secure attachment which nurtured both our person-to-person and their internal tend-and-befriend patterns. And this, in turn, would foster internal composure and self-acclimatisation as the launch-pad for healed and limber souls.

...a string between thee and we and me...

I now move from this generalised kite-view of liminal communitas and slide down my kite-string to pick through my lived-relationship-focused-practice with groups, individuals and with myself.
communitas within quake-arts therapy

communitas within group relationships

I began my quake-practice with groups, believing that group-art therapy can create a sense of community and foster personal and communal empowerment (Moon, 2010). These group-sessions included processes I facilitated and those in which I participated† and all instigated varying degrees of communitas. I experienced and witnessed moments of deep communion between participants during which the space hummed with magic and from which we all emerged seemingly better-able to cope with the ongoing stress. My soul-sense of these quake-related experiences was re-enlivened during a recent workshop.

Personal circumstances have reopened old wounds and I’m in the thick of septic-anger and abandonment-agony.

My Crocodile’s run rampant.

Carnage and torn carcasses litter my inner batcave.

I take this shadow-laden-self to a peer-support meeting. The sun’s shining. It’s a Spring Sunday afternoon. I’m no longer flying solo as lone arts therapy voice-in-the-rubble. Now, in late 2014, several other locals, some already experienced counsellors and psychologists, are currently completing their studies in arts therapy. And we’ve formed a gaggle that meets periodically to be creative together.

But today I feel very alone.

Our facilitator is a brave wounded/healer grappling with her own compelling quake-tales. She too, is personally fractured and fragile. Many in the group voice similar fragmentation and transition as we check-in. We all hold deep relationships with the earthquakes and their shattering aftermath. Our therapist-facilitator offers us several questions to explore using the Halprin life/art process of expressive free-writing, dance/movement, and visual arts creation.

† Those I facilitated are listed in Phase 1 and mention sessions facilitated by others at appropriate points in this text.
I choose to contemplate:

What needs renewing?

I begin writing about Joy and Safety and my text becomes a hurried scrawl on the yellow page. The table I’m using perches on precarious little wheels above a spongy red carpet and as words scurry to escape, they judder over each other. Much like my experience of myself at the moment. I recognise in my writing my struggle to find Joy when I’m feeling uncertain, unsafe and abandoned.

In dance/movement I’m clumsy, stumbling, feeling compelled to stand on one foot and finding this perilous and impossible, the harmonic soaring music at odds with my off-kilter-ness.

So I crouch and stabilise.

I become aware of others in the room. Bodies moving, each finding her own place. I feel our bravery as arms and legs and torsos move through space. And I begin to find movements that soothe. I hold myself. My hands stroke and cup each other. I imagine myself as a rural Zulu woman, hugging close to the earth, giving and receiving with both hands. Culturally, one hand alone is snatching, rude. Two hands show respect.

I show respect to myself.

I show respect to my fellow dancers.

We move to visual art-making. The hall becomes quiet as we spiral in. I follow alea, allowing fate to dictate, playing with the idea that what I find will form what I need. Randomly I collect several collage images, a handful of felt-tips and some glue. I tear paper and scribble words as an image of my batcave-entrapment quickly emerges, my Threshold Orphan hiding behind layer-upon-layer of enclosures.

I contemplate this in a final round of writing, opening myself to realise: this batcave is of my making; and it’s both a place of safety and a prison. I wonder: is there space for Joy in my batcave? Do I have to leave the batcave to find this Joy?

Suddenly I’m awash with the desire for rescue.

It’s an old familiar feeling, this helplessness. Hot on its heels comes rebellion that helps interpret my hand-stroking giving/receiving movement-sequence:

I’m not Rapunzel - I’m not Snow White - I’m not Sleeping Beauty.

There’ll be no Prince coming to save me.

It falls to me to use my hands to save myself – whether by making space for a splinter of Joy in the batcave or by venturing out, I know not yet.
We gather in a circle. There’s a slow thrum of connection. Several of us were strangers when we began. Now we’ve engaged with liminality together. We’re in communitas. We slowly share our creations, our artwork, our discoveries and wonderings. The process is slow and limber. There’s no pushing or hurrying. We wait in silence. We’re raw and open, tenuous, unfinished, luminous and afraid. Tears and laughter flow. We gift each other with physical and verbal support.

I arrived feeling alone. I leave feeling reconnected.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, September 2014)
Attachment and relationship development are core to therapeutic healing (Bowlby, 1988; Rogers, 1961, 1980) as we thrive most effectively when socially connected (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Stack & Eshleman, 1998).

This emergent awareness of how I privileged living-relationships ahead of pre-planned models is interlaced with my quest to better understand my simultaneous embrace and loathing of this aspect of my work. I tentatively identify myself as playfully-introverted (leaning into the alive merger of my mother’s dedicated introversion and my father’s gregarious extroversion) while acknowledging that most interactions with others feel anxiety-provoking and draining.

But I seek this out in my work ...

... and not only do I seek it out, I enter the therapeutic relationship naked – stripped bare of armouring formulas and models, opening myself to a process of ensouled-presence bringing me into raw contact with the wounding and potential for healing within each client.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, April 2013)

When quakes began striking, I did not have a coherent trauma recovery model and set of arts therapy strategies. So I used what I did have. I had life experience spanning four-plus decades of being in relationships with others. I had 15-plus years of experience in various congruent relationship-rich professions. I had wonderful, alive supervisors and sounding-boards². And I had a big heart for my fellow quake-sufferers. These assets suggested that my clients and I could co-create bespoke paths through these unstable times if I focused on building open, warm and honest relationships.

This drew me (after I scrapped my initial attempts to find the ‘right’ model) to therapeutic work in which two people are engaged in a mutual task of discovery (Martin, 2011). Gablik (1991) describes this “art in the partnership mode” where “relationship is given greater priority” as embodying “more aliveness and collaboration” (p. 106). My belief that ‘being-with-others’ in the therapeutic relationship is how we are ‘restored to ourselves and thereby transformed’ (Levine, 2009, p. 45) correlates with Hubble et al.’s (1999) meta-review. They found four features common to successful therapies with relationship factors coming second only to the extratherapeutic factors over which the therapist has little direct control. They describe an effective therapeutic relationship as caring, empathetic, warm, accepting, mutually affirming and encouraging risk-taking and mastery (Hubble et al., 1999).

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² Thank you: Tony White, Amanda Levey, Jean Parkinson, Michael Herman and Anton Green.
I emerge sweaty and spent from a deep difficult session with a troubled client. I write my session notes, attempting to describe and make sense of our delicate intricate interplay of poetic action and soulful emotion. Very little and a huge amount happened simultaneously – she spoke and I listened, I was moved by what she said and I reflected this to her. I encouraged art-making and witnessed her creation, was deeply moved again and so responded with my own art-making. We shared our art and sat some time in quietness, seemingly both feeling a special communion, like something mysterious and new was being breathed into life through our combined efforts. We didn’t try to analyse or find solutions, rather we honoured the deep hurt and paid respect to the strength in her to hold this pain and still engage in the act of living.

While this communitas, this intimacy, may struggle to happen without the art, I also know it certainly couldn’t happen without the relationship my clients and I forge to wrap around and enable our imaginal art-making.

The communion we build and rebuild is a healing thing in and of itself.

This fluid and flexible yet consistent connection pays homage to the vital primary-bond shared between infant and caregiver – what Bowlby coined as secure attachment. Sometimes my relationship with a client is shaped to address ways this initial attachment went awry through ignorance or illness or inability or premature separation or neglect or abuse. Clients whose life-stories include inner insecurities resulting from poor attachment tend to be the most fragile and make the slowest progress. In other client relationships, I strive to invite those who did benefit from secure attachment back into this felt-sense, allowing them to remember and draw strength from this forgotten foundation to help them with their present troubles.

So what does a therapeutic relationship modelled on secure attachment consist of? In my work this seems to take the form of intersubjectivity. Stechler and Levine emphasise the primacy of being moved, about the importance of affective feedback. Damasio identified how vitally important emotional reciprocity is to our mental health – we feel our concrete reality, our meaningfulness and value, when we have an affective effect on others. As Bakhtin says, we bring ourselves into being in relation to others – much like African ubuntu in which our personhood is derived from connections with other people.

I think of how often a young child calls ‘Mommy, Mommy, watch me! Watch me!’ We yearn to be seen, really seen and really heard and really felt and really accepted by another. And my sense is when we’re granted these valuable gifts, we grow limber and empathetic – becoming willing and able to pass these on.

So, as I work with clients, I hear echoing in the ether: ‘Mommy, Mommy, watch me! Watch me!’ No matter whether they’re 5 or 75, my first and foremost relationship-role is to emulate Winnicott’s good-enough-mother, a mother who’s well attuned but not to the point of suffocation, who knows response-ability is grown through rupture-and-repair, through trial-and-error, that living involves risk-and-reward, grunt-and-grit-and-glory, and that pain-and-joy are all part of the journey.
This soul-sense of a healthy nurturing relationship that moves ultimately towards a courageous and trustful separation-and-individuation, calls to mind the beautiful black-and-white photograph Tony shared with me. This grainy image shows Winnicott as an old man working with a small boy. The boy is absorbed in drawing and Winnicott is leaning forward slightly, gazing at this child and his artwork with open admiration – compassion and connection radiating from his being. I feel the velvet of this safe space, the magical connection, the spreading imagical wings of containment – this image is dyadic communitas made visible.

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, October, 2014)

**relationship characteristics that encourage dyadic communitas**

Holy crap, I grumble to my Magpie-mind. Do you have to deliver up so many bibs and bobs and baubles for this section! The idea of dyadic communitas seemed so clear-cut when you first arrived, all aflutter, with it sparkling in your bi-coloured beak. But now as I try to write it – which of course requires I regiment: one: word: after: another: and: one: sentence: after: another: and: one: paragraph: after: another in rational and logical order

– you keep pulling out threads and darting off and coming back with new jewels, all of which want to be stitched into the tapestry atthesametime! My mind’s like a swarm of squirming-kittens swimming within the multi-coloured mess of an upended embroidery basket, enmeshed rainbow threads interwoven with coloured buttons and bright beads ensnaring flailing paws and tails! Where do I begin to write something that happens allatonce ...

So let’s try again, Magpie, to flap less, to perch calmly on our twig and invite order to emerge from this chaos? Pleeeeease? Can we strive for less tom-foolery and puck-rollicking and more dyadic communitas between you and me... and see if form will materialise from this formlessness?

–squawk–
So.

What am I trying to do? *I’m trying to create a therapeutic relationship that invites dyadic communitas.*

Why am I trying to do it? *Because, aside from enriching in itself, a communitas-inducing relationship gives us courage to stay with chaos until order emerges, transforming distress into poietic wisdom.*

How am I trying to do it? *I attempt this in several ways: Through creating a containing relationship that forms a safe transitional and interpersonal space; through being non-directive and co-creative; and through being fully present to my client, the artwork and myself.*

*My Magpie and I smile at each other ... That feels better!*

(Magpie-musings, October 2014)

In preceding sections I described how clients and I transformed our wounding by learning to endure – and even play with – chaotic brokenness until new order and life emerged. Yet staying with brokenness during the quakes was daunting. At the beginning of my quake-work I tried to create models that mapped a series of self-evident steps leading from the dis-order of distress to re-ordered coping. They did not work. Many clients (both large and small) voiced a craving to return to order. Yet their art and their actions unconsciously communicated a different message. When I tried to impose order with strategies and solutions, or rescue clients, or minimise their emotional experiences by skipping through too hastily, clients shut-down, regressed, resisted and/or ‘yes, but’ed. I interpreted this as the need for a safe holding-space where they could stay with fragmentation, uncertainty, and over- and/or under-arousal for as long as required. They did not need me intervening or becoming anxious and foreclosing the formlessness by prematurely imposing order (Levine, 2009; Winnicott, 1977). The creators (and their images) did not ask to be fixed or eliminated (Levine, 2009): They desired my witnessing-presence as they used arts materials and processes to imaginally embody their states-of-soul. They needed to grapple and make mess and create and pull-apart again-and-again, dig into the sand in the tray and stir things up, concoct smelly potions from broken pastels, spit and dirt, mix colours until they turned sludgy-brown, add water to clay until it slid apart. Within our quake liminality, each client’s route to developing her own capacity to endure and create a sens/e of direction was often circuitous, personalised, contradictory and mystical.

*Figure 87. *‘Staying in the shit’ (Green, May 2014)*
Staying with formless brokenness gave our work an initial impetus. Yet this alone was unlikely to be healing as it tended to emulate the mimesis at the core of the wounding experience/s (Gil, 1998; Levine, 2009). To shift this stuckness, I needed to establish a containing, but inviting, space that enabled clients to befriend, work mindfully/playfully with – and thus transform – their suffering. In other words, I needed to create a space that invited dyadic communitas. This involved: creating a containing transitional space through consistent relationship; crafting a co-creative relationship that invited chaos to transform; and engaging the power of presence to evoke communitas.

creating a containing transitional space through consistent relationship

He looks down at me, checking I’m watching closely, his face tight with concentration, lips slightly parted, teeth clenched. The overhanging rock rises above and he’s shaking, his body and mind tiring and beginning to doubt he can on-sight this new climbing route. He twists, dropping a knee and opposing this with a high heel-hook, knuckles translucent as he over-grips the sloping rock. One hand comes free and reaches up to the next hold, white chalk against the orange oxidised sandstone marking where other climbers have gone before.

I feed rope to him through my belay device, making sure the line between us is slack enough to allow his fluid movement, but ever-present so he can concentrate on the route and the moves rather than worry about what’ll happen if he falls. With a grunt he pulls through the move, sets his feet in a tenuous heel/toe-lock and with one set of fingertips on a knife-edge crimper, he reaches down for the rope, tied into his harness, to pull up enough slack to clip the welcome quickdraw hanging from the bolt above his head.

This is a breathless moment for me – he’s now completely in-the-moment and wholly focussed on the clip, but I’m calculating his trajectory should he fall with this much extra rope out. As I feed him slack, I move so I’m poised at the lip of a large boulder – if he does tumble off, I’ll jump from the edge to pull tight the extra rope, hoping to ensure he won’t hit the hungry ledge beneath him. I fleetingly notice my knees are bent, feet apart and braced, my heartbeat speeding as I prepare for action.

He clips. We both visibly let some tension drain away.

I move back from the edge as he steps up into a tenuous smear, pressing the rubber on the ball of his climbing shoe against the rock to gain as much friction as possible. As he frees his hand and reaches up, his foot skates free.

The jerk wrenches him from the rock and he’s airborne, plummeting!

The rope between us twangs tight and I roll into the fall, rocking off my feet to soften his drop but simultaneously locking my hand firmly about the rope as it bites into the belay device.

Cat-like, he drops into space, his recent clip and the steepness of the rock ensuring he falls free, while I hang below him a metre above the ground underneath the first bolt.
We both dangle for a moment, then he lets out a rueful laugh. “What doesn’t kill you ...” he says as I lower him to the ground.

I emerge from fictionalising this life-saving communion between climber and belayer that I’ve embodied many times on both ends of the rope in my twenty-plus years of climbing, and feel my dead mother tight and thin-lipped next to me. She fears these activities and stories. But, mirroring how she creates a containing etheric space for me to mull-and-ponder, when I’m climbing, my partner and I create a safe space for each other to extend beyond, take risks and know if we fall we’ll be caught and held. Just as, when I was tiny my mother provided an ever-ready pair of open arms into which I could hurry for solace and safety after riskily venturing into the unpredictable world, I know while climbing what it feels like to give and receive safety.

And in revisiting this dyadic interconnection shared by my climbing partner and me, I discern that this essence-of-good-belaying, grounded in my formative experiences of secure attachment, is what I channel to create a safe-and-containing, yet freeing-and-flexible, therapeutic relationship – a relationship that invites my client to climb above the known into newness while trusting that I, too, am a climber, and so I know in my own body the rigours of her journey and am present holding her rope should she fall.

(Conversations with my dead mother, October 2014)

Creating a containing relationship to hold the disturbance was the client’s and my first step towards establishing a therapeutic space in which transformative dyadic communitas became possible.

crafting a co-creative relationship that invited chaos to transform

My choice to invite order to emerge from chaos in both art-making and therapy meant I relinquished fore-knowledge of the direction we would take. Art and relationship-creation became an exploratory “participation in not-knowing” (Levine, 2009, p. 111). It was challenging to simultaneously hold a safe space and give up to exploration. Like my metaphoric kite-in-the-rubble: I was in the creative/destructive mess with clients; I was also maintaining a contained space in which we could play with this brokenness; and I was using my kite-eye vantage-point to help us perceive patterns as they materialised. I quickly learned this multiplicity resisted control, inviting me to discover ways of working that trusted the value of being permissive and non-directive (Gil, 2006), intersubjective (Lett, 2001) and co-creative.
I drew on my community theatre history to help me befriend my fretful yearning for control. This negotiation towards non-directive/co-creation was not new to me. In my previous applied theatre careers, my insecurity initially impelled me to be controlling. As I grew to value the rich stories dwelling within my cast members and participants, however, I shifted towards a co-creative approach. This involved establishing a rehearsal-for-life space grounded in robust trusting relationships with and between cast members (Boal, 1993). I sought to create a rehearsal environment that invited (what I now call) communitas, by opening our co-generated ideas to expressive play and aesthetic embodiment. We carried this connectivity into performances, regularly dismantling the fourth-wall to involve audiences in discussions, problem-solving, role-plays, singing and dancing. These interactive practices meant we relinquished control over the final direction of the theatre-piece, allowing audiences to propose and observe/participate as their ideas were enacted (Boal, 1993; Kidd, 1985).

This research helped me see how, during the Canterbury quakes, I followed a similar trajectory to my participatory theatre days. I began with directive plans for sessions and then, as my experience grew, I nudged these aside in favour of non-directive/co-creative offers and invitations. My supervisor, Tony, supported this way of being-in-session. He introduced me to authors from psychology and psychiatry who validated this playful, open and process-oriented approach as key to successful therapy (Ablon, 1996; Gil, 2006; Mølbak, 2013; Poynton, 2012; Winnicott, 1977).

Recognising communitas is not a cognitive or analytic process is essential to this co-creative approach. I initially assumed that, to produce transferrable changes, all forms of psychotherapy ultimately progress towards cognitive analysis. Yet I struggled to implement this assumption within my own practice. Firstly, moving hastily into interpretive analysis of art-making processes and products was desiccating, and left us with simplistic and unrealistic conceptions and solutions (Halprin, 2003; Hillman, 1983; McNiff, 1998). Secondly, in giving our analytic minds the final say, we tumbled back into the Cartesian hierarchy, elevating cognition and demoting the affective, imaginative and embodied work being done through the arts by our hearts, souls and bodies. And thirdly, as liminal communitas requires disintegration of status structures, reintroducing hierarchy foregrounded my role as shaman, the one-who-knows-more. This rational pulling-apart into this-means-that (Hillman, 1983) replaced the mysterious magic of communitas with often unsatisfying lessons. And this diminished possibilities for transformation of suffering into tragic wisdom. Happily, this study validated my belief that cognitive analysis is not the only way gains made within therapy may be internalised, owned and transferred into everyday implementation. Meaningful transformations of suffering often occur within intrinsic affective, embodied and soul domains. As there are no cognitive equivalents for these (Chilton, 2013), they need to be honoured appropriately and often aesthetically.

In my quake-work, this embodied, soul- and heart-full approach to staying with formless chaos in non-directive/co-creative ways depended upon presence. Presence became my crucible for the transformative power of dyadic communitas.
engaging the power of presence to evoke communitas

My TeddyBear-Sage and I are again contemplating my vulnerable-making practice of trying to be nakedly-present during sessions by nudging aside old-school trauma theories, strategies and models.

He intimates this may stem from my gut-feel for dyadic communitas.

I let this permeate and tendrils rhizome out into various aspects of my world:

I was the tadpole-murdering child impelled to learn kinaesthetically, needing to be physically-active and concretely-present so my body and mind may touch and taste and feel their way into knowing. I get prickly owning this as it’s been alternately labelled as arrogant (because I obviously thought I knew better than the experienced book-writers or those trying to get me to Sit Still & Listen!) or as backward (because smart people learn from teachers and books while those with lesser-wits make things with their hands and do practical stuff). This contrariness infiltrated my early theatre careers with a love of improvised, play-based and participant-shaped drama. (Blend ritual theatre [Grotowski, Artaud and Brook] with drama-play [commedia dell’arte, Barker, Spolin, and the tradition of the clown] and add a community participatory focus [Kidd and Boal]). When I sidestepped into adult education, I deepened my commitment to transparency and indigenous ways-of-knowing through the participation of those who are experts in their own lives [Freire].

All these hands-on, being-fully-present-to-the-moment strands in my personal and professional lives crafted an ontology in which I consciously try to heave theory and strategy into the background and open myself, naked-and-vulnerable, to what may come.

This way of being-in-relationship with others even shaped how I sought connections after my parents and first-husband died. I tried and rejected several therapists because they seemed to view me as a theoretical construct – tick-boxing Kubler-Ross’ stages, bandying the label ‘complicated grief’, or vetting me for signs of PTSD – rather than entering messy confusing formlessness with me, this chaotic now-space in which everything I’d known about myself and the world was a bubbling gumbo. I yearned for someone who’d grapple alongside me, who’d bring their own full and human-self into this space so I may see it’s possible to be present to the disorganisation of distress and still remain cat-limber and sane and alive … for I greatly feared my grief and confusion and contradiction and shame – if fully expressed – would both compress and undo me completely … that far more than just a shard of me would be banished into the dogged vacuumous absence of my Threshold Orphan.

(Dyadic communitas goes hand-in-hand with full presence. It seems to manifest when both therapist and client can be fully present to themselves, each other and what the art may bring. Such presence usually begins with the therapist and Levine’s (2009) statement resonates with me that presence is the most important gift a therapist may give a client:

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, July 2013)
All that is necessary is to be present to the suffering of others, to witness the face of that suffering in the images that arrive. This perspective does not take away the power of the therapeutic art, but rather restores it to its rightful place: its capacity to be fully present. (p. 153)

I explore this practice of ‘bare attention and compassionate presence’ (Fox, 2014) by describing core elements of therapeutic presence. Then, I wonder how being present to client, art-process/work, and myself as neophyte/shaman, all played crucial roles in establishing a holding and healing relationship that invited the client to come present, thereby unlocking the restorative power of dyadic (and internal) communitas.

**describing presence**

I wrote earlier of the witnessing-presence continuum I created to nuance my use of ‘witnessing’ and ‘presence’ during sessions. Within communitas, the therapist may, at times, move towards the witnessing-end of the scale but is more likely to be closer to interactive, full-presence. This full-presence involves nowness, inclusivity, flexibility, reciprocity and affective/imaginative here-ness – or what I call ensouled presence.

The essence of presence is the quality of nowness. I found that, by staying present in the moment-to-moment interactions, I was able to be more empathetic and compassionately attuned to clients. I could communicate non-judgement and acceptance, and help clients learn and internalise these qualities. Gaining the capacity to notice, accept, befriend, and then allow for the transformation of current feeling-states is seen as a core contributor to trauma healing (Levine, 2009; McNiff, 2004; Rappaport, 2014a).

‘Good therapy’ addresses the repetitiveness of suffering by opening possibilities for the extra-and... of ‘a new unpredictable future’ (Mølbak, 2013). It is not defined by a fixed starting-point and projected end-state but by attentiveness to the middle or transitional space (Winnicott, 1977). By being present here-and-now in both the quake-induced and therapeutic liminal space, clients and I welcomed spontaneity, improvisation, experimentation, risk-taking, surprise, aliveness and mystery into our sessions. This nurtured clients’ and my capacity to be limber, present and ‘response-able’ to, and for, all manifestations of self – encouraging the emergence of a new past and a new future.

For some clients, our relationship may have been the first time they encountered the possibility that another could extend consistent acceptance and curiosity towards them. Maybe this was why, several sessions in, some clients tested this.

They were afraid to trust, rejection and disappointment haunted them.

And so they brought their worst version-of-self to the session.

They slapped this self down on the art-table between us and taunted me with it, watching beadily to see how I would react. Would I pull back in distaste, would I sneer, or become angry or cold? Would I ignore this difficult, hopeless, provocative or foul-mouthed self? Would I reveal that only the good and nice selves are loveable and the ugly selves are not?
This was a crucial hurdle and needed to be negotiated differently for every individual. But core to this moment was, firstly, making my practice of presence inclusive – I needed to carve a space big enough to accommodate this darker-self – and secondly, not ignoring or minimising this self. Closing down or rushing past the problematic was as damaging to our formative therapeutic alliance as outright rejection. These clients seemed to be saying: ‘Ok, let’s roll our sleeves up on this one. You’re telling me that I’m acceptable, that you value me. Let’s see if you really mean that!’

(Journal of the TeddyBear-Sage, October 2014)

Presence is a holistic and inclusive practice, carrying a non-judgemental attitude of acceptance and unconditional positive regard (Harris, 2014). Being present within sessions meant I was called to open and hold the space for all emotions and all stories. Several theorist-practitioners speak of this – Frankl’s (2004) sense of presence came from leaning into suffering, not from tensing against it, and several participants in Martin’s (2011) wounded/healer research believe staying “however bad it gets”, is what is important (p. 15).

I have sought therapy at times and have come to know various therapists, and I – like 80% of psychotherapists (Norcross, 1999) – discovered particular presence-rich qualities I preferred in my therapist. Those presenting a neutral façade, a blank reflective screen in which I was to view only myself, I quickly dismissed. I returned to those who shared their own humanness – pulling their feet up onto the couch, leaning into my pain, laughing and choking-up with me. This inquiry revealed how, when I became quake-therapist to others in distress, these experiences suggested I needed my humanness to be mutually and reciprocally present in sessions (Stechler, 2000). I was, however, simultaneously aware that my own story and emotionality should not claim centre stage. From within my paradoxical position as neophyte/shaman and wounded/healer, I had to negotiate this tricky terrain of self-disclosure. Revisiting my session-notes for this study, I saw how my in-situ experiments steadily helped reframe let-me-tell-you-my-story self-disclosure into ensouled presence. Ensouled presence invited my affect and imagination into sessions without details of my life-story being necessary.

**ensouled presence encourages dyadic communitas**

Ensouled presence happened when I brought my full-but-considered embodied/affective/imaginative attention to my client, the emergent arts-process/product and myself. My attempts to be present as warm-blooded, emotively-effected, imaginatively-alive co-quester brought me to the ethical coal-face. In dismantling the supposedly neutral screen between clients and me, I was potentially exposing them to my own dysfunction. Yet ensouled presence did not mean I paraded the content of my life-stories before clients. Rather it was my capacity to be affectively and imaginatively present as a result of having lived through, befriended and transformed these stories that was valuable: My full scars-and-stars/kite-in-the-rubble presence as ensouled being. I found support for this instinctive stance in Stechler (2000) and Levine (2009). And it tallies with the vulnerability and accessibility Brown (2010) places at the heart of effective affective human connection.
I’m pondering my heart with wings, resolutely ever-present in my imagery – a symbol both rich and twee.

I straddle love and annoyance ... wondering about the heart ... wondering about the wings ...

Deborah Green, 2013, Heart-Shaped Soul [Paper-clay and paint 2cm x 2cm]. Artist’s collection.

e. e. cummings’ poetic description of things which enclose me that i cannot touch because they are too near\(^6\) catches my attention and I metaphorically step back, thinking: maybe the if-it-sounds-like-a-horse-and-looks-like-a-horse-it’s-unlikely-to-be-a-zebra rule applies.

This is an imaginal tap on my shoulder about the core elements of ensouled presence.

Hubble and crew were blatantly obvious with the name they chose for their study into what works in therapy: ‘The Heart and Soul of Change’. They knew these are primal and interwoven.

And though I may present them as separate in my head, heart, hands and holy-bit rendering of the multiplicit-self, I’m reminded via this tenacious image that these labels create separation for convenience. In the blurry-edged embodiment of living, my feeling-heart and imagical winged-soul are entwined – and embodied in my practice of arts therapy as ensouled presence.

(Journal of the Teddybear-Sage, January 2014)

\(^6\) 1997
My quake-therapy experiences challenged the belief that efficient therapy requires the frustrations of our normal desires for reciprocity. Instead of opening neutral space, presenting a client with a blank screen powerfully communicates non-presence. Stechler (2000) proposes models of intersubjectivity are replacing transference models because remaining neutral is distorting, as well as theoretically and practically impossible. Effective practice of intersubjective approaches entails the therapist becoming emotionally present to the client. Rather than ‘self-disclosure’, a term whose pejorative and erotic connotations compromise fertile discussion, Stechler (2000) suggests affective presence. This phrasing suggests we reveal our inner-self as much with our emotional states as with any collection of narrative facts. Damasio (1994) describes ‘affect’ as referring to our inner regulators and motives. These sustained and fluid internal emotional systems are modified by, and shape, the messages we receive. They arise in all degrees of colour and intensity, and in perplexing blends, reversals and sequences. We do not understand their systems, sometimes feeling possessed rather than in charge of them and thus tend to favour Descartes, believing they hinder and degrade higher mental functioning. But we are lost and aimless without our affects to evaluate our experiences.

Unremitting full affective presence from the therapist, however, can be as unproductive as a blank screen (Stechler, 2000). I thus married affective presence with my conception of witnessing-presence as ‘good-enough’ partial attunement was preferable to attempts at perfect attunement (Winnicott, 1977). I thus determined my degree of (objective)witnessing-presence(subjective) based on the client’s affective state. This allowed healthy opportunities for rupture and repair that encouraged the client to be assertive within our interactions and develop initiative and flexibly limber, robust self-acclimatisation.

A key way I expressed my affective presence was poietically (Levine, 2009; McNiff, 2014). I was thus present to/with my client and to the artwork. As art aims to effect the viewer, for an arts therapist to be fully present she must open to the arts’ impact and heed the call to respond in a manner that is itself effectively affective, possibly also aesthetic (Levine, 2009; McNiff, 2014). Using active imagination (Jung & Chowdorow, 1997) I regarded the artworks clients and I created as ensouled beings and I encouraged these angels to speak (McNiff, 2004, 2014). This brought the circle of meaning into being through the exchange of poietic gifts – the very essence of soul-building (Levine, 2009). And when client and I were able to embody affective and imaginative presence – to be soulfully present – the healing transformation of dyadic communitas manifested. And this dyadic communitas laid the foundation for intimate presence-to-self.
communitas within my own intrapersonal many-in-one relationship

Within my therapeutic practice, relationship travelled in many directions – between myself and client, between us and the arts, and internally within ourselves. And this presence-to-self opened possibilities for internal communitas. This research helped me construe how, through modelling presence-to-self and creating opportunities for dyadic communitas, I attempted to make internal communitas accessible to clients. This deeply healing relationship-with-self has thus emerged as the ultimate intention of my quake-therapy. And my ability to establish and sustain these multi-directional communitas-evoking relationships was grounded in my relationship with myself.

My dead mother and I are pondering attunement-with-self. The imposed separations of mind/body/heart/soul I’ve internalised from my culture and that trouble my relationships are history for her. I envy her freedom from our head-led and body/heart/soul-following socialisation. I feel her smile in delight that there’s at least one-thing about being dead that trumps life ...

Weariness washes over me. This inculcated hierarchy resists my scrutiny and a fog-like tiredness is obscuring the deeper levels of me that dwell below the analytic reach of my rational and verbal self. I wonder about the role these play in the connective kinaesthetic empathy I share with clients.

I ask the shade of my mother to assume the role of imaginary client as I tentatively speak these ideas into being:

‘I sense large tracts of me are communing with large tracts of you in ways I’m not yet conscious of. I direct awareness to the kaleidoscope of me and become more mindful of some of these. But other parts operate to a different set of rules, thrum at lower or higher frequencies than cognition. They slide sideways and away if I attempt to look too directly at them with my mind’s eye. But these mysterious bits colour my thoughts, feelings, actions when I’m with you. I see evidence in a slight withdrawal or a tingling in the back of my neck, a willingness to move closer or a desire to believe whatever you say.

‘If relationship is subject to these sustained fluid intersubjective connections governed from mostly below the eyebrows, how do I become fully present-to-self and therapeutically harness this? How can I open and nurture this within me so it’ll connect with you in ways that open you, that create trust and belief in my readiness to walk this path, hold this space, roll up my sleeves and work alongside you?

‘I’m a genetic/experiential composite of all I’ve lived through and endured and transformed. Some of this has interacted in different ways with my conscious knowing, but much remains murky and messy and below the waterline. Should I be doing established meditation or mind/body/spirit practices to get all of multiple-me on board? Or maybe things are already happening in my everyday-life
that move me in this direction? Maybe there are ideas and sensations within my personal philosophies and how experience is transformed and held in my being-and-becoming that’re already doing this work?’

My mother breaks out of role. Yes, she says, Yes! It’s already happening. Remember the many clients who said what worked for them was your authentic humanness and the way you modelled being present to all thoughts and feelings? And this was why, when you were at your best, you were able to come present to their pain during the quakes. Despite your self-doubt and misinterpretations of trauma theory and lack of formal trauma training, your history of living-through and transforming your own wounds created a bedrock within you. When you accessed this, it presented a steadiness for others experiencing suffering. This allowed you to be still within their chaos, to create the container in which their dis-order could be held and transformed into art and the beginnings of tragic wisdom.

My dead mother and I lock eyes. She nods. I smile, ‘Thank you!’ ‘You’re welcome.’

(Conversations with my dead mother, December 2013)

This inquiry both revealed and forged being present-to-self as a foundational tenet of my therapeutic practice. This detailed, dynamic and compassionate relationship with one’s own inner-life is a core theme within the psychotherapies. Jung (1953) believed knowing and enriching one’s inner-life is vital for both therapist and client. Frankl’s (2004) ‘intensification of inner-life’ helped him and fellow concentration camp prisoners survive World War II. Gendlin (1997b) and Rappaport (2008) developed focusing/FOAT to enliven this inner-life aimed at healing and nurturing a life-forward direction in both therapist and client. As a reciprocal therapeutic relationship creates a “profound intimacy in witnessing and being witnessed” (Avstreih, 2014, p. 185), it was crucial I was experienced in being present to my inner-self so that displays of my humanness in sessions were genuine but not uncontrolled (Stechler, 2000).

I am an active relaxer employing bodily movement to bring myself into myself. I used walking, biking, yoga, climbing, paragliding and art-making to channel excess anxious energy and find the calm from which I could deeply drop-into and get to know my own inner states. And I found, even when experiencing my own inner hurricane, some part of me was (almost always) standing on a steady rock as waves lashed and winds howled. I learned to seek her out during sessions, to place next to her a large chest and to tie a lifeline to her rock or mountain or tree or fairground carousel. I could thus venture into the formless fracturing being brought present by my client while still remaining connected to composure. I would feel this warm steadying thrumming down the lifeline, allowing me to notice what was coming up in me, to sort out what was solely mine (and thus had no place in the session) and send it back down the line to be stowed in the chest for later. This shaped a witnessing-present containment akin to Martin’s (2011) dual space where I was both fully present but also not impinging.
As with all lived-artistic/research/therapeutic-practices founded in now-ness, however, being in-the-moment opened me not only to positive but also to difficult and troubling states-of-being. As I said earlier, this ABR research challenged me to thin my skin and risk boiling myself. In my quest to use my quake-experiences to come present to myself in a way that juxtaposed my wholeness and fragmentation, I inadvertently modelled a journey to *internal communitas*.

I make a mockery of my own espoused beliefs, I say to my Threshold Orphan, as I use the scratching tip of a 4B pencil to hang her amidst ghosts in the lonely centre of a thick white page.

I’ve waxed loud and long about embracing multiplicity, about developing endurance and tolerance for the fractured-self, about a farraginous view of self/s that is inclusive enough to host simultaneous possibilities for integration and fragmentation. This view is, my lovely, I whisper to her as I trace her limp hands and dangling feet, a fallacy, a fancy, a fevered kite skittering sky-high borne on hope and hot-air.

Louis’ choking and ∆’s aerial dance-with-death have yanked me from the blue sunlit halls among the clouds and cuckoos. I’m in the rubble with my Crocodile rampant.

Again.

Unleashed, he’s murdered all. My Round Table is split down the centre, candles snuffed, echoes hiding afraid in the shadows.

So, my Orphan, this is what happens when I go all postmodern. I was warned by Burt of the perils of embracing a worldview that flattened hierarchies and construed all as equally valuable/less. Internalising this as a menagerie of animangels gave my Crocodile, Magpie, Threshold Orphan and their darker traits as much heft as my Cat, TeddyBear and Wild-Child.

Framed by Western individualistic separatist postmodernism with no pre-emptive value-system to hold him in check, my Crocodile, when provoked into fear-fuelled rage, went on a deadly rampage.

Now I’m bathed in the carnage of his (un)doing.

And I’m rueing the fallacious concept that encouraging an embrace of the postmodern multiplicit self/s is a desirable and healthy goal for any therapeutic process.

So where does this leave me?

Where does this leave my years of work as therapist?

Where does this leave the core tenets of this research inquiry?

I sit with ghosts and corpses in the shadows of these thoughts.

A spark of rebellion stirs.
I’ve trusted this process with many clients and seen transformations.

Why do I struggle to trust when it comes to myself?

The answer is swift: I fear honouring my Crocodile-feelings will overpower me, that I’ll be dragged back into the past when I armoured against pain with numbness, when to survive I froze my small dark hard heart. When I tore the wings from my soul and slashed the cat’s-cradle-threads it weaves through my being.

The spark flares again.

But now I’ve pulled my heart from the cold dungeon. I’ve allowed it to break into a million pieces. I’ve mosaicked it together again-and-again with gold and silver. I’ve given my soul back its wings. And inside this heart-shaped and imagically-alive soul, I’ve unleashed a gaggle of interwoven feelings. They romp in fur and feathers and dance about on skinny naked legs. They’ve their own wings and their own beating-hearts. They’re halos and jester-hats and jingle-bells and bugles and roots and rawness.

And they are robust.

I gaze intently into their vacant dead eyes, entombed in grey pencil. And suddenly I know they’re only dead momentarily. They’ve a pact with the Crocodile. He needed to ride roughshod because I needed to shed my historic numbing and feel my distress and fury and pain to the very core. To do this, the others offered themselves in sacrifice. They embody Levine’s ‘Dionysian poiesis’ by accepting the dying of old forms and the loss of soul as prerequisites for renewal.

Yet they’re cartoons …

... for a moment, I think I see my Magpie’s blankly-sketched eye wink at me!

Cartoons die to make the story chug along. But no sooner are they smeared on the pavement or hacked messily through the middle or fed through the wood-chipper, than they’re up and about again.
And I can trust that in allowing each of them to take form, have a face+voice+pair of wings, I’ve gifted them with a powerful will-to-live. In not forcing them into the pruning and taming that integration may mean, I’ve nurtured and honoured their resilience and they’ll honour me in turn by bouncing back.

**Ok. But ...**

My sense-making bits are all ajangle ... I snag on a word: They made a ‘pact’ with the Crocodile? What does this mean? How can this pact-idea be spelled out as a viable alternative to integration?

So I sit in the mist of my hovering ghosts and cast my thoughts adrift.

> And there it is.

> And there it’s been all along.

>(Just as clients will often, during their first session, create the soul-image that tells the full story, the image we keep coming back to and slowly grow to understand more clearly ... I’ve always speculated this is the soul yelling ‘Hooray! finally someone’s going to give me the tools I need to speak!’)

And so I’m drawn back into the macramé, the cat’s-cradle, the hammock-net, the dreamcatcher, the woven-nest, the threats-and-threads of Indra’s-net that were my beginning images of how my kite-string may come to weave its way into a fulsome research narrative and simultaneously into a metaphor for the healed-self and soul. My inner familiars are a community, an extended family, and indigenous and archetypal tribe. These threads are the umbilicus and communitas travelling between

Cat↔Crocodile↔Magpie↔TeddyBear↔Orphan↔Wild-Child↔wings↔roots

They’re all jewels in the net, all interlinked but apart, all resonating and sharing the same soul-blood, while also independent.

This, for me, is soul.

A communitas of bits-of-self, a spaciousness, a gestalt, a more-than, a flexible porous tangle of shivering threads as strong and elegant as a spider’s-web. It’s an internal embodiment of Edith Turner’s communitas: a divisiveness-eliminating wellspring of pure possibility that seeks oneness without a withdrawal from multiplicity; that doesn’t merge identities, allowing the gifts of each to be alive to the full, along with those of every other; that invites all into something magical, the presence of spiritual power.
I ride a tide of thoughts about the many communal rituals which enact a killing, a sacrifice symbolising a death of the old to make way for the birth of the new — just as the earthquake-death of our city makes way for the new …

My animangels nod. ‘You’ve got it’, they seem to be saying.

My holy-bit in my bits-of-self model thus takes new shape — a re-membering that’s a bit tricksy and self-conscious but fun and apt.

It’s a w/hol(e)y-bit as it holds possibilities:

for wholeness:

for holiness and transcendence; and

is multiplicit and therefore full of openings and breathable holes!

I smile with delight and for a moment feel the many (temporarily) dead eyes in my image light up along with me.

(Diary of the Threshold Orphan, October 2014)
...the string tugs on the kite...

In this final section of *Phase 2: Liminality*, I used the concept of liminal communitas to unpack useful elements of my therapeutic relationships. After revisiting group work as the more obvious location for healing communitas, I developed the idea of *dyadic communitas* within one-on-one arts therapy sessions. This transformatory interpersonal connection was dependent on my capacity to be fully-present and create appropriate containment. My explorations of presence reconnected me with the re/wounding tale I crafted as the previous section ended. I used the felt-sense of this lived-experience to articulate my emergent ideas about the healing value of intrapersonal *internal communitas*. I present internal communitas as the highest embodiment of soul-healing. A soul in internal communitas with the fragments of itself is limber and buoyant, can endure and self-acclimatise, and can call ‘Yes!’ to life.

This concept of therapeutic communitas begs further exploration. My inquiry places the emergent ideas of in-session *dyadic communitas* as a way to facilitate individual *internal communitas* at the heart of my quake-therapy. Nurturing this capacity for *internal communitas* emerges as figural to my work within *enduring liminality*. It is an embodiment of my wounded/healing and represents acceptance and vital engagement with *chaos and control* and a *both-and-and...* multiplicit view of soul that are fostered through *magical play*. 

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PHASE 3: Reincorporation

some inferences

Drop-back-into your earthquake soul-sense. This tacit-knowing gifted you with a way to depict it. Make sure this expression resonates with the whole of this sense the way a small handle brings the whole suitcase. Keep company a little longer with this word or phrase, image, sound, movement or gesture, shape or story ...

Holding this expression gently, reach for the cadence of your heartbeat. Follow this rhythm back to your breath. Connect into your breath and follow it outside your body to an awareness of the sounds in the room. Shift your attention to what you can taste. Notice the aromas and scents surrounding you. Focus on shapes and colours, textures and tones you can see at this moment. Bring your awareness to your skin, feel the brush of your clothes and where your skin is bare to the air’s caress. Pay attention to the weight of your body in the chair, your feet upon the ground.

Push down with your feet, and stretch and yawn widely.

When you’re ready and fully present in your body and in this moment, focus on the way your quake-sense wants to be expressed. You may wish to gather arts materials and bring this creation into being so you may commune with it, you may open conversations with it and come to know it better by creating more art, writing, dancing, singing ...

... give yourself time ...

... when you’re ready, bring your creation to a stopping-point (it mightn’t be finished as artwork is often an open door). Keep company with your created-piece now that it’s outside of you, in the same way you welcomed and befriended it non-judgementally when it was a felt-sense within your body.

Open in curiosity.

Wonder about the umbilical-thread that links it back into your body. Trace this connection checking your creation resonates with your inner-sensations.
Now imagine this artwork is a messenger, an angel or sprite, seeking to tell you something. Open conversations with this emissary. You may wish to use creative writing to track the dialogue, maybe even with your non-dominant hand to invite innovation by making-strange. You may find yourself wanting to create further art in response – and these dances, sounds, paintings, sculptural forms may invite new conversations.

And you may, if you wish, do as I’ve done with this research-journey.

Search out literature that opens even wider interactions with your felt/soul-sens/e-based artworks and cycle these through this creative dropping-in process;

Then open this to intersubjective sens/e-making by sharing your me/search with others.
flying my kite/s from within the rubble

This inquiry sought to make useful sens/e of my experiences as beginning arts therapist between 2010 and 2014 during the Canterbury earthquakes. Through arts-based research, I embodied my emergent lived-practice of both-and-and... to apply multiple meanings of the term sens/e. I used my five physical senses to know things more fully in embodied ways. I befriended my implicit felt-sense (Gendlin, 1997b; Rappaport, 2008) and evoked my sixth soul-sense. Drawing on the French sens for direction (Levine, 2009) – I embraced therapy and research as creating ‘life-forward direction’ (Rappaport, 2008). And I used these sens/ual processes to make-meaning and render new knowledge.

In this final section, I summarise ways these arts-based processes addressed my research wonderings:

• As artist, I used active imagination (McNiff, 2004) and mindfulness/focusing (Rappaport, 2008, 2014) to create and present various art-processes/products that open insightful conversations with my quake experiences and select texts. In a myriad of ways these express the creation of who I perceived I was, who I currently am, and who I am becoming as artist, researcher and therapist.

• As researcher, by following McNiff’s (1998) suggestion to craft a close correspondence between my research process and practice of therapy, I emerge personally transformed. And I hope my creative hybrid research/therapy invites the reader-viewer on a similar journey. In addition, the arts therapy processes I crafted during my quake-work, when combined with autoethnographic and a/r/tographic elements, proved to be effective and practical ABR ways to generate, gather and analyse research material.

• As therapist, I have deepened my own practice. This detailed re/imagining of my quake-arts therapy has also birthed some potentially-new and some old-but-re-imagined ideas and/or practices. These, outlined below, may be useful to other applied arts practitioners engaging with the impact of natural disaster and/or human suffering.
both established and re-imagined and...

Much of what this study conjured and created felt new to me as beginning therapist, and the intersubjectivity of ABR invites reader-viewers to find personally-significant moments of freshness. The majority of my un/dis/re/coveries, however, resonate with, and/or re-imagine, knowings already voiced within published literature. I had encountered some of these texts during my training as arts therapist and these informed my quake-practice. I met other texts for the first time during this research (and thus after my quake-work). Some were published during and after my quake-period – such as Steele and Malchiodi (2012) and Rappaport (2014b). Others, such as Levine (2009), I had simply not stumbled across. I called the already-known and published secondary-themes I drew from these, zephyrs, as they acted like sustaining-breath holding aloft the more innovative kite-string themes I laced-together from threads of my lived-quake-experiences.

Imagine if I’d had Levine as company during the quakes, I ruminate. Holy crap it’d have made things so much clearer! My dead mother snorts. You know can only make-sens/e of him now because you have the lived-understanding in your bones. If you’d found him earlier he would have been gobble-de-gook to you.

(Conversations with my dead mother, October 2015)

Nearing the end of this study, I noticed how my quake-work had inadvertently echoed established thoughts regarding chaos/suffering as intrinsic to the human condition thus requiring a therapy grounded in presence and intersubjective relationship that invites newness and builds soul. I realise to my distress that, had I been able to identify, secure and absorb the appropriate literature during the quakes, I would have arrived at this place-of-knowing more speedily and with fewer bumps. I also simultaneously conclude to my delight that – via personal experience of wounding, healing and hands-on implementation of therapy for others suffering – I fumbled my way to several notions congruent with current intersubjective and embodied arts- and trauma-therapy. But I have lived these in my bones and they come from a deep place of personal engagement.

Under the umbrella of this meta-finding, seven key concepts and practices do feel as if they ascend from the rubble to offer tentative, new kite-like insights. They pull existing notions together in novel ways and/or trip into innovation – potentially offering other applied arts-based practitioners new, fruitful terrain for play.
We’ve teased many useful threads from my experiences of living/working as quake-arts therapist.

- wounded/healing
- internal communitas
- both-and-and...
- enduring liminality
- imaginal play
- chaos and control

Figure 91. ‘My animangels and our research journey... now’ (Green, October 2015)
We – (my newly-resurrected imagical animangels, the shade of my dead mother, and I) – gather to ponder the value of this escapade. It’s been personally harrowing, illuminating, frustrating, and ultimately deeply enriching. As artist/researcher/therapist I’ve come to my senses and made sense of my quake experiences.

But do I have anything new to offer others?

We contemplate this …

... and each figment of me seated about my Circle-of-Self speaks-up …

... except of course my Threshold Orphan whose absence prompted me to frame post-disaster as enduring liminality. Within this frame, the therapist invites clients to creatively and playfully craft bespoke ways for their souls to unclench, to move through and past the instinct to tense against the random swaying, to breathe deeply and soften their knees, becoming flexible and limber enough to ride the liminal seesaw of ongoing disaster-induced instability.

This way-of-being/working encourages the therapist to:

- slide aside armouring formulas/models and open to a process of ensouled-presence that brings her into raw contact with the wounding and potential for healing within herself and clients;

- avoid translating complex processes and imagery into simplistic this-means-that rationalisations;

- embody the transitional by straddling chaos/order, life/death, before/after, dark/light, agony/ecstasy, success/failure... and open these both-ands to the extra-and... of soul; and

- befriend all by calling into the shadows, being patient, and accepting even the most prickly and poisonous parts of herself and her clients.

This orientation can, however, produce a vertiginous excess, calling for mindful containment ... suggesting a new direction for further research.
As your mother, I’m proud of how you’ve claimed and reframed the wounded/healer archetype. You discovered all-of-you is communicating, often unconsciously, to your clients in a myriad of tacit ways. It’s thus crucial that you accept and know your wounding and healing. Your continued ability to creatively be with your own hurt enables you to hold the space for clients to do the same. And your simultaneous ongoing engagement with your healing salvages this often-lost aspect of the archetype, foregrounding ways you may embody wellness for clients.

Deborah Green, 2014, Conversations with my dead mother (Detail). Artist’s collection.
This mindful-playfulness is especially suited to the chaos of enduring liminality. It helps clients to stay-play with formlessness until new order arrives, because:

- activating embodied sense-awareness not only helps with grounding in the present-moment, it also enlivens creativity, imagination and soul while providing rich material for poietic expression;

- interlinking calm-mindfulness with energetic-playfulness — like two wings-of-imagination — facilitates flexibility. In striving to help clients heal their own wounded wings-of-imagination, imagical play invites them to experience various manifestations of play. This increases their nimble-limberness and ability to remain supple in the face of forces that may induce unhelpful contraction and/or dispersal; and

- when the therapist takes responsibility for containment and order, she frees clients to enter the spontaneous what-if... of free-flowing play and this encourages them to stay with formlessness until new order emerges.
I interpret my Crocodile’s grunting:

**Chaos and control.**

My grapple with these lurches throughout my art, this research and my therapeutic practice. In confronting my own will-to-power, I experienced how new ways-of-being better suited to the chaos of disaster and distress can’t be imposed but rather need to emerge from the formlessness. Art-making, ABR and arts therapy thus become containers for chaos.

A therapist may embrace this chaos/control paradox if she:

- creates a containing relationship that focuses on intersubjective companioning as clients often cannot initially tolerate chaotic formlessness in productive ways if unaccompanied;

- uses poietic arts-making to encourage new forms to emerge from the formless chaos within the client’s psyche;

- enables clients to engage with the contradictory acts of progressively mastering art-making materials/processes and/or surrendering to those that refuse to be controlled to explore and increase their endurance of feelings evoked by chaos/control; and

- is present-to-herself as this helps address ways the therapist’s own uncertainty and anxiety could prematurely foreclose this containing transitional space and the arts-processes.
I can only infer that communitas impacted positively upon clients (opening a potential area for future inquiry). But for me, focusing on communitas both relationally with clients and internally within myself evoked ensouled-presence. This being-present-to-self was paradoxically crucial to me being able to keep the focus on clients. It allowed me to be still within their chaos, to create the container in which their dis-order could be held and transformed into art and the beginnings of tragic wisdom. This enabled me to experience and make available for clients the experience of internal communitas – a divisiveness-eliminating wellspring of pure possibility that seeks oneness without diminishing multiplicity as it doesn’t merge internal alters but allows the gifts of each to be alive to the full, inviting all into something magical.

A communitas-based therapeutic relationship is enriching in itself. It also gives the therapist and client courage to stay with chaos until order emerges. The therapist can engender this communitas by:

- creating a containing relationship that establishes a safe transitional and interpersonal space;

- being non-directive and co-creative; and

- assuming the role of ensouled witnessing-presence to the client, the artwork and herself.
An innovative ABR method arose when I interlaced aspects of a/r/tographic autoethnography with ensouled-arts therapy. During this inquiry my quake-arts therapy process of dropping-in-to-find-out-what-soul-is-doing emerged as a robust research method. I blended Rappaport’s FOAT, McNiff’s active imagination-based images-as-angels, and Hillman’s images-reveal-soul to drop-in. Using this process, I identified, befriended and expressed-in-artwork my inner state-of-being or felt-sense evoked by my quake-arts therapeutic experiences. This formed an intricately-detailed mode of data generation/gathering. The iterative process of interacting with these creations through the reflexive poietic-praxis of movement, writing, art-making and opening conversations between my creations and select texts then became a creative form of data analysis. This eclectically-derived arts therapy-based process of dropping-in-to-self has emerged as a compelling way to make art, a powerful quake-trauma arts therapy process, and a practical research tool …

… and, by emphasising the arts as expressing a mystery, this opens ABR further to the deliciously nettlesome notion of soul-based research.
We sit back in satisfaction ...

... and then I notice my Creative-Cat is, as always, quiet ...

purring.

We share a deep look and she smiles.

I know, I say ...

Figure 93. My lion and me (Green, October 2015)
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