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And I Still Love Them: On Touching Loss

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In this article, the author performs a re-membering practice that incorporates a relational materialist theory. It traces the disturbances that follow in the wake of three deaths in her family. Written in an autoethnographic voice, the article is a polyphonic composition of the narrative therapy approach of re-membering entangled with the spacetimematter of silence, speaking, sitting, staying, presence, absence, loss of momentum, dreams, trees, books, cardiac pace-makers, writing, breath, ashes, murmuring, suffering. Thus, the dispersed agencies of bodies, human and non-human, reinvigorate a linguistic practice and the author's personal and professional life.

Keywords: re-membering, materiality, silence, intra-action, diffraction, love

Key Points

1. In this article, I work with musical imagery and strands of poetry to craft a re-membering account of a continuing relationship with three significant members of my family who have died.
2. The article's diffractive structure and content traces the *effects* of loss with/in the author's family life.
3. In narrative therapy re-membering conversations, stories of loved ones are folded into continuing relationship between the loved one and the bereaved.
4. Human and non-human bodies come to bear on how re-membering practices are discursively crafted: the material nature of the world comes to matter.
5. Space time and matter are inseparable in new materialist theory – represented as spacetimematter. The article's improvisation of places, moments, and bodies proposes that re-membering practices pay attention to this inseparability of spacetimematter.

> The past is never closed, never finished once and for all … there is no taking it back, setting time aright, putting the world back on its axis. There is no erasure finally. The trace of all reconfigurings are written into the enfolded materialisations of what was/is/to-come. Time can't be fixed.
>
> (Barad, 2010, p. 264)

Overture

This article is an elegy of loss and re-membering. It traces a journey I have made into terra incognita. The once known and familiar of family life was irrevocably altered for my siblings, sons, nephews and nieces, and me, following three deaths in our family. A different stillness came over us in the southern hemisphere springtime death of my father in 2012, the mid-winter sudden heart-attack that took the life of my brother's wife in 2013, and the early summer death of my mother in 2014. Whilst I managed to maintain my engagement with everyday life, therapeutic work, and community responsibilities, my health slipped into chronic unwellness, and my doctoral research lost momentum. That I have regained a measure of good health, and my practice and research work are proceeding is, in part, an outcome of the re-membering work of this writing.

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Re-membering conversations (Hedtke, 2003, 2014; Hedtke & Winslade, 2004, 2005, 2016; White, 1988, 1997, 2007; Winslade & Hedtke, 2008) offer possibilities for therapeutic conversations that are 'predicated on the assumption of ongoing presence' (Hedtke & Winslade, 2005, p. 206) of those now deceased. In contrast to ideas that say the bereaved must 'move on' and arrive at 'closure' in key relationships of their lives, White (1988, 2007) was influenced by the writing of a number of people – notably Meyerhoff – in proposing that it is possible to bring forward and say 'hullo' to legacies and memories that can actualise persons' preferred identities (see also Hedtke & Winslade, 2005). Furthermore, as Hedtke and Winslade (2016) point out, memory transcends death (p. 73): 'grief is about at least two people, the living and the deceased, and counselors need to learn about both of them' (p. 78). White (1997, 2007) also took this position, pointing to the inseparability of significant persons from each other in an 'association of life' (White, 2007, p. 129) through shared values and commitments.

Time folds back and forward in re-membering conversations. There are moments that reach back into lived experiences that are touched by loss, to re-locate and re-incorporate[1] relationships with loved ones. Other moments move forward in time to inhabit the voices and legacies of persons of significance. The work of this article is to ride the waves of re-membering practices as therapeutic journey into what White (2007) calls 'purposive reengagements' with such figures (p. 127). To move across time is to enfold an 'as if' motif – a subjunctive grammar – into re-membering practices (Hedtke & Winslade, 2005, 2016). Although the writing of this article does not specifically include this grammatical variation, I too engage in 'as if' language practices in my counselling work, in order that multi-voiced stories of preferred identity may emerge. As such, therapeutic re-membering conversations are intentionally crafted to richly describe and honour the mutual contribution of persons in association with each other (Hedtke & Winslade, 2005, 2016). These ensembles go beyond who-when-where-and-what-happened narratives. Being thus transported introduces a fugal layering of notes of continuing relationship, an altered attunement to the lives of others.

Movement 1 – Materiality <-> Discourse

It is an assertion of this article that human *and* non-human materialities come to bear on how re-membering practices can be discursively crafted. Narrative approaches to therapy have an interest in exploring the landscape of action – events in the specificities of people's everyday lives – and in the meanings people make of these events. In this article, I propose therapists take a further step in recognising the dispersed agency or *thing power* (Bennett, 2010) of non-human actors in re-membering stories.

As we work in the territories offered by the various post-modern turns – linguistic, discursive, cultural – feminist theoretical physicist, Barad argues we should not lose sight of the significance of matter by prioritising language. Rather, Barad (2008) insists that materiality and discourse are conjoined, mutually implicated, and articulated and, therefore, neither has privileged status. To that end, the autoethnographic composition of re-membering in this article takes up the challenge of finding the serenade in dreams, trees, books, silence, cardiac pace-makers, heart-beat, heart stopping, rhythm, writing, breath, ashes, murmuring, suffering.

Each of these rearrangements of the world in its becoming, come to matter. The writing of words in this article traces the material disturbances of the deaths of my parents and sister-in-law into my life. One example: the account of my mother's dying in

this article implicates a cardiac pace-maker. Pace-makers have been researched, designed, crafted, and assembled by skilled engineers, for the purpose of regulating heartbeat. When a pace-maker is implanted in a human body, the body's heart and the pace-maker's components and electrical impulses produce a performance. Space, time, and matter are enfolded in daylight and dark, a hospital bed, an armchair, through movement, sound and silence. The re-membering work of this article ascribes to the assemblage of the pace-maker a specific *thing power* that makes a difference in the body and life of my mother, Shirley. In storylines beyond the scope of this article, the pace-maker also reaches into the lives of members of Shirley's family. As my sister and I read to know more about pace-makers, our lives and stories ride the waves of space and time to entangle with the loves and lives of Katy Butler (2010, 2013) and *her* family. She and we materially participate across these diffracted moments in knowledge-making.

Movement 2 – Diffraction and Difference

By using new materialist theory, this article moves away from familiar modes of seeing (reflection) toward the optics of diffraction. Reflection, as Haraway (1997) and Barad (2007, 2014) have identified, forms a mirror image of an object, thus producing repetition. Greater wave complexity occurs in refraction: light rays are bent as they pass from one medium to another causing visual variance. As an example of how therapy can be theorised through the metaphor of refraction, Larner (2015) offers a refractive dialogical attunement to the words and meanings of the other in ways that invite persons to re-imagine ourselves through the porous membrane of otherness and difference. Diffraction is yet more complex. As with reflection and refraction, diffraction involves change in direction but, with diffraction, waves pass through apertures or bend around obstacles leaving change(disturbance) in their wake. Diffraction of waves of water through a single opening, for instance, creates curved ripple patterns beyond the opening. Diffractive optics are shape-changing and reconfiguring, thus offering a wider scope for innovation than replication.

Even as I try to write this journey sequentially, I don't believe life's detours go in straight lines. The experiments with diffraction in this writing appear in content *and* structure. As Barad (2014) puts it, 'there is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then' (p. 168).

To that end, I have queered the timeline by interfacing my reveries of my father's life with a diffracted contemplation on my mother's heart, creating a crescendo in the closing section to honour the life of my sister-in-law. Such relational materialist approaches to knowledge-making practice (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) are attuned to difference, and map 'where the *effects* of differences appear' (Barad, 2007, p. 72). In a relational materialist account, human and non-human materialities are affecting and emerging differently *with* each other, in each moment. Intra-action is a term used in materialist writing to signify the non-privileging and inseparability of agencies. This proposes that agencies are not separate entities inter-acting with each other. In other words, agency is not what someone or something *has*. It is an enactment of changing possibilities. As part of the larger arrangement of the universe, we cannot respond to the 'other as if the other is the radical outside to the self' (Barad, 2007, p. 178). We are constituted and entangled together in each movement of the world in its becoming. We meet the other halfway. In one sense, bodies – human and

non-human – can be understood to transpose properties with each other, which, as Larner (2015) proposes, happens with words and meanings in dialogical encounters.

Secondly, deviations in content are enacted, as the diffracted overlapping waves affect – and are affected by – the multiple forces and bodies entangled in the narrative. Just as there has become for me an embodied sense that time is out of joint, there is a thickening web of how my self within many relationships, including in my body, has become undone: 'the self doesn't hold; the self is dispersed in an un-doing of self as a result of being threaded through by that which is excluded' (Barad, 2014, p. 178). I am living many lives: some of which I read in other people's writing; some of which are made up by other's people's stories of me; some I tell myself; all of which braid through spacetimematter.

Movement 3 – Starting Sometime/Somewhere

In my work as a counsellor, and in friendship relationships, I have encountered a double dilemma with women who have been harmed by violence in their partner relationships by men they continue to love. The ethical positions for me – and my colleagues – in working for safety for these women and their children, sometimes sits uneasily alongside the work we do to deconstruct an embodied continuing love; as it does for the women who consult us. In mid-year 2012, I began doctoral research work through the University of Waikato (*'But I still love him': Women talk about love and violence*) to investigate women's accounts of how this continuing love in the face of violence works, and counsellor practice in response.

The beginning of the research work coincided with the departure of my younger adult son and his partner to Switzerland. I could not stop the nighttime terror I felt for them in finding a home in an unfamiliar bureaucratic environment, driving on another side of the road, new languages, and distance from family. As it happens, my concerns for my son and his partner were displaced. Nevertheless, my body recorded and deposited these disparate distanced human/nonhuman notions materially. The account I am forming of this line of flight is that the overlay of learning cannot always over-ride so-called primitive reflexes of mammalian life forms (see Pedroso, 2008).

Time folds in on itself: I am returned to childhood, to recurring night-time dreams. In one dream, I am pursued across rough ground, unable to open my mouth and throat to call for help. In another dream, I am in thick viscous matter, unable to move. In the latter stages of my marriage, I dream that I am repeatedly calling 'Help me!' to my partner. No response is forthcoming from him, although he is well within hearing distance.

My earlier dream-time silencing, and the later response of silence from within a marriage, is something I have become curious about in my work as a counsellor and researcher. A woman in my second research interview group said, 'There is one thing that was done to me that I'm probably never going to deal with because I *can't* say what it was'. Following Trinh (1988), I propose that silence is not absence, although it may be read as such: persons may *intentionally* not say, or unsay, or work with undertones of meaning. The intra-action with the idea that not saying means 'it' is not dealt with, may yet be important to my research. In my own life, too much saying on some fronts, and not enough on others, may keep me from leaping off what Barad (2012) calls 'calculable paths' (p. 208). From within a family where drama was played down, I trod a path of public equanimity – perhaps, Barad again, taking 'action-at-a distance' (p. 208) – in the dying, deaths, and funeral services of my parents and my sister-in-law.

Poet and novelist Michaels (1997) borrows from geoscience to describe as plate-tectonic shifts the movements that occur in family relationship following significant events: one can find oneself suddenly closer or apart. I also go to Barad's (2008) layered writing to undo some of the sharp edges of what we, as family, embodied in the spacetimemattering of touching the world, other worlds, and words, of becoming a re(con)figured family. We said things to each other. We deliberately not-said things. We cut together apart (Barad, 2014) in ways that did and didn't move beyond the here-now and then-there (p. 168). As Barad says, and I have found to be the case, matter is dispersed with (in) the reconfigurations of discursive practices, and 'does not entail closure' (p. 168); there are all-ways 'traces of what might yet (have) happen(ed)' (p. 168).

Interlude I – Writing re-membering

How then might it be possible to undertake therapy that traffics in the myriad interferences – including material ones – that death instigates? How to be *in* the moment of memory, immersed and inseparable from it? How might it be possible to bring the world into therapy in ways that go beyond orthodoxy?

What this article proposes is that lines of enquiry that shape re-membering conversations will include strands of material *and* discursive significance. A re-membering account is oriented in the following ways: What storylines contribute to a continuation of relationship? How can important persons become protagonists in the stories we write and tell? Where does relationship continue to live, including in relation to materialities of what people have known together? How do re-membered persons continue to support the precious long-held values of those who live on? and How do loved ones and the bereaved contribute – including materially – to the other's life?

This article is itself a performance of writing re-membering. So one implication for therapists is to co-author written re-membering accounts whilst also asking ourselves: What is the merit, and what could be lost in crafting these stories through writing? Moments of writing can be shaped in face-to-face meeting, and witnessed in subsequent meetings.

The following questions offer a practice example with a bereaved person, in which materiality is diffracted into meaning: *Will you introduce me to your father? Were there moments of his earlier life that stand out for you? If I were to meet him, what might I see? What might we come to know about his achievements, interests, and aspirations? What artefacts of his life speak to you? And how do these objects speak to you of what was important to him? What stories can you tell about how your father came to contribute to your life, including materially? What does it mean to you that you share your parents' genetic legacies? What did your father appreciate about your contribution to his life and the lives of others?*

The scope of this article is not to fully reprise the narratively informed practice that then invites the outsider witness of others (White, 2007). Suffice it to say that further questions emerge in the invitation to read aloud any written re-membering accounts at subsequent meetings, and for persons to be acknowledged in these re-tellings. *When you are audience to your written words, what particular expressions stand out to you? Why that particular part of the story?* And so emerge new diffractive moments in place time and matter of what has been precious in the lives of loved ones and the bereaved, and opportunity for the therapist to write therapeutic documents in response. Another wave of writing.

Re-membering My Father, Fred

FIGURE 1

The author's father, Fred Snowdon (photograph taken in 1969, by S. Snowdon, used with permission of the family)

Fred was often described as 'tall, dark, and handsome' (see Figure 1). The sinews and muscles of his body were lean and long, and his skin olive-hued. In the first 75 years of his life he was physically active by day. He walked outdoors: up and down sloping landforms; in forests; urban landscapes; gardens. He held an interest in plants, particularly in trees and food plants. In the penultimate home garden he made with my mother, he grew 39 fruiting trees. My parents' flourishing garden was fed with concoctions of composting material derived from kitchen vegetable matter and organic liquid fertiliser made in a home-constructed metal tank. This latter innovation was a stretch for my father, whose abilities to execute construction or renovation were reluctant performances.

My father read voraciously: books on geography, biography, history, politics, and current affairs. He had the newspaper delivered to him every day and read the pages up until the final few days of his life. He retained a love of Latin into the last years of his life. His well-thumbed Bible was beside his bed for more than 60 years, and he opened its pages every day. Yet the dominating narrative that follows him through eight decades of life is that he is 'a man of few words'. In the latter five years of his life, my father lives in a residential home for older people, participating in our family life as a quiet centre of gravity. An unnoticed force within the family. He sits in his armchair when I arrive each Sunday morning. He smiles widely, and accepts the small food offering I bring. Always, he says thank you. Always, he insists we share a piece.

We sit. We say little. Reminiscent of Speedy's (2015) attention to the horse chestnut in her neighbouring park, we stare out the window. Notions of talking are lost to us, with the exception of our interest in the mature deciduous tree that grows beyond

the window. We watch its seasonal changes and we note the weather's influence, in brief sentences. Like Frankl's (1946/2006) interlocutor in the concentration camp, the tree as living being is both friend and animator of life:

> Pointing through the window of the hut, she said, "This tree here is the only friend I have in my loneliness." Through that window she could see just one branch of a chestnut tree, and on the branch were two blossoms. "I often talk to this tree," she said to me. I was startled and didn't quite know how to take her words. Was she delirious? Did she have occasional hallucinations? Anxiously I asked her if the tree replied. "Yes." What did it say to her? She answered, "It said to me, 'I am here – I am here – I am life, eternal life.'"
>
> (p. 69)

As it was for the woman in Frankl's story, the tree awakens and enlivens our time together. I buy my father a book of photographed trees with an introductory essay by conservationist Dr David Bellamy (Matthews, 1993). We leaf through the book often, a comforting doubling of Fred's long-held interest in flora and photography.

My visits with Fred are hushed encounters. Throughout his life, he has been painfully modest in his estimation of the life less ordinary that he has lived. His formal education was peripatetic and truncated. At 16 years of age, Fred embarked on a working life in the Guardian Trust office in Auckland. His interest in law was ignited there, an aspiration that did not eventuate. Instead, he lived in Papua New Guinea from his late twenties to early forties, immersed in religious and cultural discourses and environments that called on very different participations than those of his upbringing. The ways my father met the infinite othernesses of tropical flora, fauna, climate, and culture in the 16 years of his sojourn in Papua New Guinea were mixed. He befriended indigenous people in all the places he lived; he was a reluctant preacher, organised storekeeper, intrepid traveller, fond and grumpy father, and skilled loadmaster for the local aeroplane services. In other words, he touched into the lives of others (human and non-human), and himself, in a multiplicity of ways. According to Barad (2012): 'every finite being is always already threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time' (p. 214). Fred's love of Papua New Guinea, its landscapes and its people, retained its hold on him throughout the second half of his life.

Wyatt (2005) begins his funeral tribute to his father by suggesting that his father would have been 'embarrassed about the attention that he's getting today' . . . and suspects 'he would have loved it too' (p. 726). I can only guess at Fred's response to the appreciative stories told of him at his funeral. My brother and niece speak of the long commitment to justice for marginalised people that has threaded through Fred's life, his involvements alongside my mother's with people who sought refuge in New Zealand, from Vietnam in particular. For many years, Fred voluntarily offers budgeting support for people who have run into trouble with their finances, travelling the roads of rural New Zealand to fulfill this commitment.

The day after my father's funeral, I submit my application for ethical approval for my research. Ten days earlier, I arrive to visit my father as I do each Sunday morning. He is unwell. I stay all day. I return the next day and the next, and sit again, sometimes with my laptop open. The finishing work on my writing is braided into intervals when only my father and I are in the room. His body is occupied with drawing breath; I tell myself that he would want me to meet my deadline. He too has a deadline approaching.

My mother's presence and absences punctuate the days. The people who have had daily involvement with Fred enter the room to take care of him. One of them, a Punjabi woman who has befriended us over the years, bends and tenderly places a hand on his shoulder: 'Oh Fred, you are so sick'. Another afternoon passes. My father holds my hand. In early evening, one of my brothers arrives and suggests we go out to eat. I tell Dad that I will be back. His eyes are closed. I cannot be sure that he hears me. He grips my hand tightly. It feels very wrong to leave.

The last evening. I am with my father, mother, and brother. We murmur against the backdrop of my father's laboured breathing, bid him goodnight, and leave again. When we three are called two hours later, we return to the candlelit room where my father's body is now at rest. The bedclothes are straightened and a single red camellia has been placed over his heart. My mother and brother pay their respects and take their leave. I stay.

Over the following 10 hours, I do not leave my father. He and I have no words to say. We are making a future memory of our pasts.

Soundings: Saying, not Saying, Unsaying

Sounds are disturbances in every sense. The pressure of sound sets off the movement of particles through a medium like air, in repeating wave patterns of high- and low-pressure. In terms of sound and silence is there really a dividing line? When we speak as though there is a dividing line, what are we saying about the murmuring complexities of disturbance(s)? Are we suggesting that those disturbances to which we pay attention exist, and those we dismiss do not? Whether we attend or not, we are constantly drifting in and out of touch with other and self, including with alien selves to whom we offer limited hospitality, indeed hostility, associated with a sense of personal failure to measure up to standards of normalisation (Foucault, 1978; White, 2002).

Trinh (1988) proposes that 'silence as a language of its own has barely been explored'. Silence, as other to speech, may be seen/heard as lack. How is it that speech and words have come to dominate the spacetimemattering of modern lives? Is it really the case that silence (whatever it is) makes blank and distance? Are we – modern persons with noise-making, word-recording devices readily at hand – caught in an excluding logic that says there is sound *or* silence, something *or* nothing. Not to declare in words that one loves another may be seen – in (de)fault – to contribute to a lack of love. Alternatively, as I am finding in my research, to declare that one still loves a person who uses violence may be to court danger and attract urgent cautions and/or the silence of disapproval.

In the 10 hours before the funeral director arrives, I am one disturbance of many in my father's room. I am a body that breathes. I am animated force and he the still centre into which I overlap. I am indebted to my father, and perhaps he is to me, in the sense that our histories entwine, and in the sense that possibilities continue in these night hours. I enact the ordinary, small, and sacred gestures of waiting and watching through the night and into the morning: in 'silences filled with what is left unspoken... there is pain and love, and everything in between' (Rober, 2005, p. 395), a dance and dialogue that meets the universe halfway (Barad, 2007).

Interlude 2 – Materialising practice

A narratively informed therapy seeks to trouble what is taken for granted. I return to the storylines of time with my father's body to diffract my intentions into practice. In a humanist reading, one body could be read as active because it is breathing and moving, and another as inactive because it is resting and silent. In a relational materialist account, human and non-human materialities are affecting and (e)merging differently with each other in each moment. The weighting of my waiting with my father can be read in a more horizontal way as each materiality – my father's, the bed, chair, walls, the darkness of the room, the tree that stands sentinel beyond the closed curtains, and my body movements – simultaneously come into play. All of these intensities co-exist and co-ordinate, and are becoming anew in each moment of spacetimemattering, whilst retaining partial originality.

The following example questions for materialising practice put an emphasis on place and matter across time: *What was it like for you to get the news that your father had died? What was it like to see the camellia on the bed when you returned? Where did you sit during those hours? Or did you not sit, but move around the room? Tell me about that. What was your sense in being with him in the dark of that night-time? What was it like for you to open the curtains in the morning and see the tree that had been a companion to your father over the time he spent in that room?*

The many criss-crossings of these musings have resurrected what is *both* not lost, *and* not actualised before, allowing another's stories to become half mine (Larner, 2015, p. 165). As Hedtke (2014) implies, until there is opportunity for folding these stories back into the lives of the living (p. 12), they remain muted and absent. The diffracted re-memberings above have indeed enlivened my father's presence in ways that have turned out to be therapeutic. In re-authoring my father's life and presence, in many re-membering conversations of which this article is part, my own purposes have been re-animated. One immediate purpose was a commitment to attend to my mother (see Figure 2).

Shirley – A Mother's Heart

Early morning. 5.55 am. I am with my mother, Shirley, as she breathes out for the last time. On numerous times during the past five days, I have watched and waited for another breath. Five times in the preceding 10 months, my five siblings and I had wondered if she would slip away 'this time'.

The first of these times followed a family event. We had taken a borrowed wheelchair to the cardiac ward: the monitoring patches had been removed from Shirley's chest and back, and we wheeled her out into the warm summer sunshine to a waiting car. Shirley wore a hat, long-sleeves and dark trousers, and a finely-woven woollen shawl in vibrant warm pink.

Gathered at the cemetery lawn were members of our family and the parish minister of my mother's church. We positioned Shirley in a central spot beneath a shady tree to witness my father's ashes being interred beside his mother's. Organising this event had been Shirley's project for a number of weeks; there were readings to select, words to say, people to include: in the understated manner she was known for, she later remarked that it went well.

FIGURE 2

The author's mother, Shirley Snowdon (photograph taken in 2012, by D. W. Snowdon. Used with permission)

A little later in the day, after a shared meal, I pushed the wheelchair up the paths to the hospital entrance, and through the doors and lifts to the cardiac ward. Retracing our earlier steps. We retrieved Shirley's night-dress from the bedside cupboard, visited the bathroom, and one of the nursing staff came to adhere the monitoring patches to her chest and back again. The expressions of my mother's body spoke her great relief that she was now resting. During that night, the monitors recorded that Shirley's heart stopped beating long enough to raise an alarm.

An acccount of entanglement of human/non-human intra-actions that started Shirley's heart beating again: A story of 'no saying no' to a pace-maker

Shirley's heartbeat was increasingly irregular and disorganised from her late 40s. At that point in her life, she committed herself to a lifestyle that included limiting her intake of saturated fats and preparing all her food without added salt: she walked or rode a bicycle regularly in preference to driving the car: she spent many hours in her garden: she sang in choirs, attended concerts, and learned to paint in watercolour. These approaches to her health and wellbeing paid off until the last five years of her life, when she was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation and cardiomyopathy, commonly known as heart failure. Heart failure is a condition in which the heart no longer beats often or strongly enough to supply sufficient volume of blood (and, therefore, oxygen) to the brain and other parts of the body.

The last chapter of her life became a struggle for Shirley, a merry Fantasia dance with pharmaceutical medications, their side-effects, and contra-indications (including tiredness, shortness of breath, fluid retention in her lower limbs, the greater likelihood of stroke). Shirley, who had engaged with community events and social groups throughout her life, was now confined more to home. She gave her doctor written lists of symptoms. She nodded her head in agreement with him as he prescribed new pills, only to find her body saying no to the side-effects she later experienced from medicines that had

held such promise. She cut her pills in half, privately refusing the doctor's dosage, eventually returning to the doctor's rooms to try again. The journey was fraught with resistance, compliance, the 'no' that doesn't work, the 'yes' that hopes for something better.

In the autumn of 2012, cardiac specialists suggest that Shirley have an artificial pace-maker inserted. A pace-maker is a small flat cylindrical battery-operated device that can coordinate the electrical signaling between the chambers of the heart, speed up a slow heart rhythm, or regulate abnormal heart rhythm by stimulating the heart muscle. It is placed under the skin at the collarbone. Wires are sent into one or two chambers of the heart, depending on the heart condition to be remedied. The battery life of recent pace-makers is estimated to be eight to 10 years.

During the night that followed our family gathering in the sun-filled cemetery to remember my father's and grandmother's lives, Shirley's pace-maker did what it was designed to do: it sent the electrical signals to my mother's exhausted heart, and the beat began again. Such a re-starting is not an innocent event. In a painstaking account of the enactment of a pace-maker's signals within the ageing body of her father, Butler (2013), her mother, brothers, and their friends, inherit a future of less and less health predictability for Butler's father. As she tells it, the accumulations of these losses signify a series of fault lines and missed-understandings that produced a man unrecognisable to himself and others who have known him through his life. Reminiscent of Butler (2010), the pace-maker inserted in my mother's upper chest, brought my mother, my sisters, my brothers and me, another 10 months of purgatorial waiting. Until the moment in time when she breathed out for the last time, there were months, weeks, days, and nights of her life that Shirley's body could not decide for herself to say no to the pace-maker's tireless impulse.

Modern (western) medicine has 'pushed the fatal moment of many diseases further outward' (Gawande, 2014, p. 26), including the trajectory of congestive heart failure. Gavrilov explains human dying thus: simple systems, such as windup toys, function reliably until a significant component wears down or breaks, and then the toy simply no longer works; complex systems such as the human body, have layers of back-up (an extra kidney, extra teeth, brain plasticity) that 'allow the machine to keep going even as damage accumulates' (Gawande, 2014, p. 33). Had I had this metaphor earlier, I could have thought my way rather differently through the accumulations of shift and change that marked my mother's last four years, and the final year in particular. My mother did not relinquish her refusal of the multiple diminishments that congenital heart failure imposed on her, struggling through each day and night to maintain the integrity of her life. And I still love her for the legacy of determinedly feminist living she demonstrated throughout her life, and in her dying.

It is not only in stories/themes/discursive resonance that people's lives are joined to those of others. Material feminists insist that 'knowledge is situated in the material lives of social actors' (Hekman, 2004, p. 235). In diffractive re-membering practices, spacetimematter emerge through participation in the world. In this rendering, another's life lives on, overlapping, spreading, and combining, differentiating with others' ongoing encounters with the world in its becoming. These woven specificities are not a 'blending of separate parts or a blurring of boundaries . . . what is at issue [are their] unique material historialities and how they come to matter' (Barad, 2014, p. 176). As I introduce my sister-in-law in the final re-membering narrative of this article, a shiver of terror passes through me. And yet beautiful, 'as it may become' (Winslade & Hedtke, 2008, p. 10).

Above and below the way is known, but here we're blind (Michaels, 1997)

My brother proposes marriage to Bronwyn a week after they meet. Subsequently, on a bright summer day in Cambridge New Zealand, they marry. Twenty-seven years later, Bronwyn suffers a sudden cardiac death at age 52 (see Figure 3).

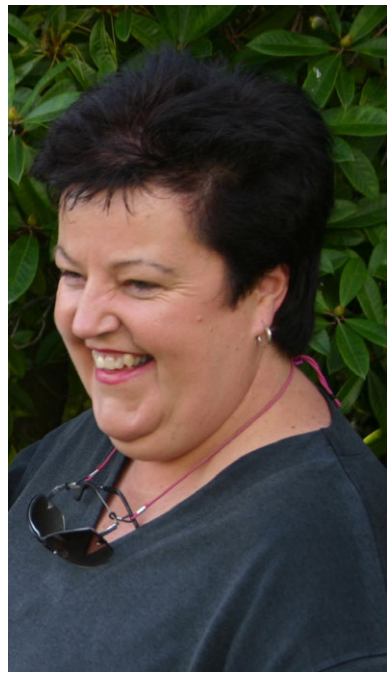

FIGURE 3

Bronwyn Snowdon, wife of the author's brother (photograph taken in 2006, by K.S.Taylor. Used with permission)

Not only for my brother and my nephews, a gaping hole opens up. The ground swallows us. We are trying to find Bronwyn as we meet together to tell our stories of our life with her (see Hedtke & Winslade, 2004; White, 1988) and she, perhaps, is trying to reach us. We piece together our words, stitching our memories together as 'cumulative selection' (Michaels, 1997). Glass of wine, preferably pink and bubbly. Hot pink, matching lipstick, big jewellery set in contrast to black and white attire. Fine coffee. Excellent home-baked Christmas cake. Big throaty laugh. By her own description, 'a good bossy teacher' and school musical director.

I take up a watchful position of my brother (and, to a lesser extent, his sons). I've done this before. I was nine years old when my brother joined me to live away from our parents' home and attend a 'proper' school, in a classroom. We travelled in a Cessna 180, single propeller aeroplane, over jungle-clad Papua New Guinean terrain from the delta region of the Fly River to Tari in the Southern Highlands province, altitude 2167 m (7110 ft). Three times each year, we had the opportunity to speak to our parents using shortwave radio transmission. Without proximity to our parents, I very quickly adopted a sense of responsibility for my brother's – and a year later, a younger sister's – wellbeing. At Bronwyn's death, I find myself again with my eyes on

where my brother is, how he is, and what might be called for in any given moment. When our family disperses after the funeral, the phone rings often, and the affect of our collective shock and sorrow flows between us.

My brother's body-mass falls away in a matter of weeks. It is as though without Bronwyn's body, his own decreases. His clothes hang from his shoulders, and he no longer takes up the larger presence he has presumed in past family gatherings. He embodies Barad's (2008) understandings of the production of power 'in the fullness of its materiality' (p. 128). He, in particular, is intra-active with/in the discursive effects of the family re/configuration following Bronwyn's death, and (re)materialisations of our bodies. Something has sharpened, and softened.

I stand on the sidelines, sometimes sit beside him, and I listen: there are waves of words and murmurings, punctuated with affect. So much in our lives has been disturbed. We are beings reaching into an entangled void, in which so much matters. It turns out that declarations come easier from my brother than they do from me. He re-turns to an earlier way of relating to me that had been lost along the way as I take a position of accompaniment alongside him (Weingarten, 2004, 2012). The re-versing and re-turning of my brother's stories overlay with and re-state themselves, tethered to the material and remembered worlds of our histories and futures.

Unspeakable Suffering

We are back with saying, not saying, and un-saying: Frank (2001) proposes that suffering presents persons with a sense that 'something is irreparably wrong' with one's life and 'this reality is what you cannot "come to grips with"' (p. 355). While one may experience dread through the irreparable wrong of suffering, it is unspeakable: 'Suffering involves experiencing yourself on the other side of life as it should be ... We suffer the absence of what was missed and now is no longer recoverable and the absence of what we fear will never be' (p. 355). What can I say? What can my brother say? According to Barad (2012), '*Touching is a matter of response. Each of "us" is constituted in response-ability. Each of "us" is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other*' (p. 215). If he is saying that he has gone to the edge of the abyss, perhaps I am saying that this is where we find compassion: we meet halfway. If I ever did, I no longer subscribe to the dramatic up-close-and-personal touching togetherness depicted in modern media. Rather, I am drawn to an everyday everynight endeavour, to Barad's (2012) 'possibility of hearing the murmurings, the muted cries, the speaking silence of justice-to-come' (p. 216). I am learning anew what response-ability can be. I hear my brother's longing for what he cannot come to grips with. He cannot but still love his beloved companion, out of touch in one way, yet still in touch through his response with the infinitude that she has become.

Finale

Aftershocks have cut into our family life following the farewells of my parents and Bronwyn. Not least of all I have been beset with health problems, and have only recently engaged with practitioners and practices effective in addressing these cumulative debilitations. These remind me of the infinity of continuity and discontinuity that intra-actions of the human/nonhuman kind can produce: the inseparabilities of

difference and how they are becoming; (in)stabilities; exclusions; approach/silence/retreat. I continue to hold to a commitment to stay close by, to ongoingly acknowledge, meet, and stand with all who touch my life, here and now, then and there. Also, the time has come

> to think again of dangerous and noble things . . .
> I want to be improbable beautiful and afraid of nothing,
> as though I had wings.
>
> (Oliver, 2006)

I have research work to do.

Coda

The large deciduous tree outside the room my father once occupied is springing to life again, five years on from the day we accompanied his body along the corridors towards the waiting hearse. The same tree kept sentinel when we trod the same corridors with my mother in early December 2014, in the company of many of the same people – their community and ours in these late chapters of their lives. And yet, the tree is not the same. Its branches stretch a little further into a cloud-studded sky; no doubt its roots have found their way a little further into the soil beneath the building; its girth is imperceptibly wider.

Taking an adventuring spirit into therapeutic work – as my parents did in the enterprises of their lives – I take inspiration from the steadfast determination of the tree to both stand ground and reach beyond its past. The call to us, as therapists, is to challenge and work beyond settled orthodoxy in our practice and what informs that practice (White, 2000a, 2000b; White, 1995). And to find, with people who consult us, a loving responsiveness to the human and non-human world in which we are embraced.

Endnote

[1] Note that the Latin word *corpus* means *body.*

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