IMAGINATION AND PRAXIS: CRITICALITY AND CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The Open Book

Stories of Academic Life and Writing *or* Where We Know Things

Ninna Meier and Charlotte Wegener

SensePublishers

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VOLUME 13

SCOPE

Current educational reform rhetoric around the globe repeatedly invokes the language of 21st century learning and innovative thinking while contrarily re-enforcing, through government policy, high stakes testing and international competition, standardization of education that is exceedingly reminiscent of 19th century Taylorism and scientific management. Yet, as the steam engines of educational "progress" continue down an increasingly narrow, linear, and unified track, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the students in our classrooms are inheriting real world problems of economic instability, ecological damage, social inequality, and human suffering. If young people are to address these social problems, they will need to activate complex, interconnected, empathetic and multiple ways of thinking about the ways in which peoples of the world are interconnected as a global community in the living ecosystem of the world. Seeing the world as simultaneously local, global, political, economic, ecological, cultural and interconnected is far removed from the Enlightenment's objectivist and mechanistic legacy that presently saturates the status quo of contemporary schooling. If we are to derail this positivist educational train and teach our students to see and be in the world differently, the educational community needs a serious dose of imagination. The goal of this book series is to assist students, practitioners, leaders, and researchers in looking beyond what they take for granted, questioning the normal, and amplifying our multiplicities of knowing, seeing, being and feeling to, ultimately, envision and create possibilities for positive social and educational change. The books featured in this series will explore ways of seeing, knowing, being, and learning that are frequently excluded in this global climate of standardized practices in the field of education. In particular, they will illuminate the ways in which imagination permeates every aspect of life and helps develop personal and political awareness. Featured works will be written in forms that range from academic to artistic, including original research in traditional scholarly format that addresses unconventional topics (e.g., play, gaming, ecopedagogy, aesthetics), as well as works that approach traditional and unconventional topics in unconventional formats (e.g., graphic novels, fiction, narrative forms, and multi-genre texts). Inspired by the work of Maxine Greene, this series will showcase works that "break through the limits of the conventional" and provoke readers to continue arousing themselves and their students to "begin again" (Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 1995, p. 109).

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A READER'S MANUAL

An old academic joke goes along these lines: "There are two steps to solving the work-life balance of academia. Step one: define all life as work. Step two: you're done." The joke paints a picture of academic work as never-ending and all-consuming: it permeates all life. Yet somehow, this only applies to the *amount* of work you do: even though you work 24/7 as an academic, references to your body, your emotions, and your so-called "private life" magically disappear or are left out of the majority of academic texts.

This book is borne out of written conversations about knowing, bodies, time and space, pain, doubt, love, sorrow, hope, anger, happiness, freedom, and research. It contains conversations about our shared ambition to dissolve what we experience as a false duality between life and work. If our work is not concerned with life, what makes it worthwhile? If life and work are opposites, life is effortless and work is death. We do not experience it that way. Our life and work as academics are interwoven with our life and work as mothers, daughters, wives and lovers, and friends. Some of the main characters you will meet are researchers, their colleagues and students, sons and daughters, mothers and grandmothers, husbands (past and present), supervisors, pets, old and new friends, and creatures from myths and dreams. Some of the settings include kitchens, fireplaces, sofas, gardens, universities, cars, and trains. These characters and places are all there to help us examine what the above elements of an ordinary human life might mean *in* research and *for* research. Writing the book was necessary: it was a way of making sense of, and coping with, the academic work-life balance (what a concept!) and, not least, coping with our life and all it entails. It fostered a friendship and nurtured a plethora of other writings (articles, conference papers, blog posts, research projects, and books). In the process, we grew to write in and out of each other's texts. Sometimes we replied to each other's accounts. At other times, we just added new perspectives and moved on. Academic writing is often infected by competition, inferiority, showing off, obedience to real or self-imposed conventions, and even feelings of aversion or anger. In this book, we aim for something very different.

There is a circularity to this kind of braid-writing that is strange: more than the sum of the parts. We have shared stories about our life without censoring, and without distinguishing between life domains and academic/non-academic ways of writing. We have explored how these experiences relate to what we may know and indeed *how* and *where* we may know – which, after all, are essential to a researcher's life and work. None of these experiences and life events is voluntary: they all come to us, or as Nadine Gordimer (2003) puts it, the subject chooses the writer. These kinds of writing involve a fundamental loss of control and a surrendering to events that occur relentlessly. What will happen in our life and in our writing? This is not entirely for

the writer to decide. For us, this kind of writing allows us to draw upon experiences that are usually private, because they do not belong to our mundane academic work procedures. Thus, being in these places that we have visited here does not foster creativity or potential *per se*; but as we connect our experiences to each other and to the writing of other scholars, we place them in a space of appearance: we make them public, sharable, and thus potentially powerful (Arendt, 1958). We make it possible for you as a reader to recognise them as truly human and genuinely academic. They strengthen our ability to convey in writing not only *how* and *that*, but also *what it is like* (Worth, 2004).

We started out just writing, word by word (King, 2010). As the book matured, we became aware of the fact that what we were doing spilled over into our research in unforeseen ways and changed the trajectory of our individual careers and collaboration. Through iterations of thinking-writing-talking, we found ourselves aiming to carve out a field of research that examines the role of writing in academic work and the concept of *resonance* in research. We have learned through our own process a way in which we can deliberately sensitise ourselves as research instruments by being opened up to many sources of insight. We can practise writing about it in a variety of ways to become as skilled writers as possible. However, we also need to ask: what makes these writings relevant to others, and (how) do these writings bring our research fields forward? We invite you, our reader, into a continuing dialogue about this. We hope you will be inspired to explore what drives your writing, what your grievance is (Van Maanen, 2010). Perhaps this text may even inspire you to start writing and publishing texts that expand the size and shape of the playground of academic writing.

How do we walk the line between detached, impersonal writing and self-conscious, declaiming writing? No one has expressed this imperative more aptly than David Foster Wallace in an interview with Bryan A. Garner (both deeply in love with words and language):

> there's a real difference between writing where you are communicating to somebody, the same way I'm trying to communicate with you, versus writing that's almost a well-structured diary entry where the point is [singing] "this is me, this is me!" and it's going out into the world. One of the things that the college drummed into me is, "Welcome to the adult world. It doesn't care about you. You want it to? Make it. Make it care." (Garner & Wallace, 2013, p. 34)

We have attempted to live the advice of the many novelists who have written about writing, but first and foremost we have tried to get out of the way and just channel what comes (Shapiro, 2013), dispense of moral judgements (Kundera, 1988), and explore what it is to be human and write what is true (King, 2010). As we all know, when we write, we write with everything we have, even though it may not always be visible. Thus, this book can be read as ways in which we "press against the bruise" (Shapiro, 2013) with two specific purposes: firstly, we want to explore

what this method can do for academic writing, to intentionally share reflections and experiential knowledge that may seem personal, non-academic even. Specifically, we want to do this in a way that allows for resonance and further reflections in the reader on this strange and wonderful work-life that is academia and academic writing. Secondly, we want to explore what our instrument is, what particular sounds we can make when we play it, and under which conditions we play our best. We want to make a difference in the world and we believe the way forward is to examine and fine-tune our most precious instrument in research: *writing*.

As the experiences and reflections we present are human, it does not matter who wrote what, and we hope you will dispense of the need to attribute voice to text and just *read*. Nonetheless, if you read like most people, you will probably want to keep track of the two voices in the text. To help you here, this introduction is also a reader's manual of what to expect and how we hope you will trust the text to make it worth your while. We read it as an exploration of how life – being a human being – mingles with humanities and social science research through being constantly curious of human existence and how we interact with the world. How you might read it, what parts will resonate with you, and what you will take away from it is beyond our control (Meier & Wegener, 2016). Most of all, we hope you enjoy reading it and that the reading will make you *write*.

Ninna and Charlotte

CHAPTER 1

TORN APART AND PUT TOGETHER, SLOWLY, CLUMSILY, OVER TIME

THE DISAPPEARING BODY

On the first pages of A. S. Byatt's short novel *The Biographer's Tale* (2001), the protagonist Phineas Nanson abandons his poststructuralist literary studies and walks out of the lecture hall into "real life" to become a biographer. In his quest for "things" and "facts", however, he runs into considerable trouble. There are indeed things in the world but some are "thingier" than others. Some things are so airy that they continuously escape him, and things have unfortunately inscribed meanings far beyond their factual appearance. In his new area of study – biography – facts turns out to be scarce and slippery and do not lead to any coherent stories or insights. Through writing, however, Phineas is eliciting himself. He becomes a person, someone who really exists in the world with both his body and his intellect.

I am writing my way to the body through Byatt's authorship. It may take a while…

Today, I have a fever. I was supposed to get up, get dressed, drive my car for an hour, attend a meeting in an ongoing action research project, collect data, have coffee, be enthusiastic about the project (which I am), be emphathetic to the project coordinator who has had a hard time (which I am), plan the next meeting, think clearly, include other peoples' perspectives, drive home, answer emails… My Spelling and Grammar program says: "Long sentence. Consider revising". I open the box: "*Your sentence may be too long to be effective and may be hard to follow. For clarity and conciseness, consider rewording your sentence or splitting it into two sentences."*

This is exactly the point. My days are too long to be effective and the abundance of activities makes my line of perception too hard to follow. My body is falling behind. It may even be *left* behind. I need time for clarity and conciseness, and I consider ways of re-inscribing the body in my processes of knowing. As John Dewey has taught me, epistemological and ontological processes are intertwined (Dewey, 1916). I do not intend splitting myself into two (feelings and thoughts, private and professional, pleasure and pain: ultimately, body and soul).

Today, I have a fever. My body is right here. I really missed it and needed it to make my work *work*.

I also need Byatt's authorship.

In *The Biographer's Tale,* Phineas sets out to write a biography of a biographer, Destry-Scholes. Since this biographer is a masterful storyteller and arranges fact so wonderfully to narrate other people's lives, he himself must have been an intriguing

person worth portraying. This is Phineas's reasoning. It turns out, however, that this may be far from the truth. Destry-Scholes's stories, allegedly based on facts, may actually be somewhat fictional. Byatt describes it this way:

> My own short novel, *The Biographer's Tale* is about these riddling links between autobiography, biography, fact and fiction (and lies). It follows a poststructuralist critic who decides to give up, and write a coherent life-story of one man, a great biographer. But all he finds are fragments of other random lives – Linnaeus, Galton, Ibsen – overlapping human stories which make up the only available tale of the biographer. It is a tale of the lives of the dead which make up the imagined worlds of the living. It is a story of the aesthetics of inventing, or re-inventing, or combining real and imaginary human beings. (2001, p. 10)

Why is this so fascinating to me? The dead ones, the ones that left, the ones supposed to be there when we need them. The imprint of a body no longer occupying this chair. The sense of what this emptiness allows for. I reach out and grasp the air, the memory, the longing. Something is disappearing, and yet, something is appearing; it slips through my fingers; I touch it at the periphery of my range. I want to write about it. Writing makes sense, not because writing produces a coherent life-story but because the *act* of writing makes it all overlap – feelings and thoughts, private and professional, pleasure and pain. Body and soul. The inventing, re-inventing, and combining of the real and the imagined becomes the only available tale. How can we write about things that are gone, and things that have not yet materialised? Things that are here right in front of us, but that escape uniqueness and solidity?

Are we as social science researchers all in some way biographers? Who are we portraying and how? Which information is supposedly the "facts" and what happens to these facts as we arrange them into writing? Which facts do we include and which do we leave out? How does the arrangement of these facts ascribe meaning to them? And how do we keep questioning ourselves and each other about these issues?

Sometimes I ask Phineas. During his quest for a new life beyond poststructuralism and uncertainty, he falls in love with two women simultaneously: one is a Swedish bee taxonomist, the other is Destry-Scholes's niece, a hospital radiographer. The bee taxonomist is red-haired, burly, and bold. She invites Phineas to join her indefatigable fight to save the brown bee. The radiographer is pale, delicate, and elusive. She invites him into the secret world of X-ray images and cries disconsolately over suddenly diagnosed cancer.

Phineas becomes the lover of both. Whom to choose? This is, of course, not the question. The brown bee may survive; the cancer patient may die. It is the fighting, the crying, the passion that produces a life story. It is also the scientific knowledge about bees, biotopes, X-ray technology, and cancer cells.

In *The Biographer's Tale* as well as in many other novels and essays, Byatt addresses the desire to transcend the self-referential postmodern subject. Her characters try to bridge the gap between language and an external reality and are

driven by a scientific curiosity to understand things in their biological aspects free from culture, allegory, or metaphor (Pereira, 2014). The body is indeed both biology and culture, the given and the made. Just like scientific writing involves both the reproduction and construction of life.

In an interview with Nicholas Tredell, Byatt states:

> I get so distressed by literary theories which say language is a self-supporting system that bears no relation to things, because I don't experience it in that way. I don't have any naïve vision of words and things being one-to-one equivalents, but they're woven; a sort of great net of flowers on the top of the surface of things. (Tredell, 1994, pp. 64–66)

Phineas, however, must face the impossibility of his quest for pure "things" and true "fact". He finds only fragment upon fragment of text:

> Confronted by both the fictionality and sheer absence of facts about Destry-Scholes's life, Nanson's task will, ultimately, lead him to himself, something that he acknowledges in the end, by stating "that because of Destry-Scholes's absence [his] narrative must become an account of [his] own presence, id est, an autobiography, that most evasive and self-indulgent of forms." (Byatt, 2000b: 214; Pereira, 2014, p. 492)

An absence materialises into a presence. I need to investigate this premise thoroughly. What we aim for is not autobiography, but maybe we need momentary self-indulgence to write in ways that do justice to the people we narrate and produce texts that touch our readers.

Time has passed and I have forgotten about my febrile body. Now it is time for self-indulgence again and I will stop writing.

ON BODIES, BIRTHS, AND DYING OR WHEN SOMEONE LEAVES BUT IS STILL THERE

When I was a university student, my favorite professor had a series of lectures each Tuesday morning from eight to ten on *Modernity and Metaphysical Experiences.* At this point in my life, I was 23-years-old, a single parent to a two-and-a-half-year-old boy who loved sleeping in and taking his time in the mornings. As I wanted to attend the lectures, I had to wake my son, get him dressed, fed, and ready for his day in the nursery, and somehow manage to get my body placed in the lecture hall before eight am. This was no easy task, and I distinctly remember arriving several mornings, out of breath, completely consumed with the stress of battling a strong-willed kid who had just refused to put on his overcoat and shoes. All my fellow students, it seemed, had arrived in good time, with their things in order and a nice, big cup of coffee and ready for whatever the day would bring. I, on the other hand, counted it a success if I managed to be there physically in time. If my mind was still lagging behind, concerned with feelings of parental inadequacy or all the tasks that awaited me at

home when I left the university, then that would just have to be how it was. When the professor would start talking about metaphysical experiences, I would think: "This is exactly what I live every day! The feeling that something is bigger than me: the awe of this experience; the bodily sensation of being a tiny piece in the big puzzle of everything, of bringing a new person into the world." It would *feel* big, but *look* small when I attempted to put it into words: I didn't feel I could raise my hand and share my personal reflections, although the professor distinctly pointed to birth as a metaphysical experience. Somehow, it just didn't fit into the lecture hall that I had given birth to a child.

The other example he gave was death. In these moments, he said, we often feel connected to something beyond us, whatever we believe that might be. Art and nature, he said, referencing Immanuel Kant, are other phenomena that might allow us these experiences. In a way, I think, what he was trying to teach us back in the late 1990s is the fundamental human condition Hannah Arendt described in 1958: we are all the same, and simultaneously all unique. Why birth and death are experiences that open us to these feelings, I don't know – perhaps because they are experiences that are certain in every human life? We are all born and we all die. And it is exceedingly likely that we will experience other people's births and deaths throughout our lifetime, although these experiences are becoming more and more institutionalised and removed from "everyday life", whatever that means (Gawande, 2014). At the same time, birth and death are embodied through and through: it is something you *do*, something your body does to you, without your will having a say in it. You cannot time it or plan how it will proceed, and you are fundamentally alone in going through it.

Death is a moment in which the human body undergoes the most profound transformation it possibly can: from being alive to being dead. In losing my mother, I knew things in my body more than in my mind, and in the months to come, having been there in person in the room was a central aspect of really understanding that she was, in fact, dead. If knowing is embodied and emotional, what is it that makes us downplay these important aspects in the way we talk about knowledge? The day my mother died is etched into my memory. It is as Dani Shapiro so eloquently puts it: *pain engraves a deeper memory* (2013, p. 106). I can revisit it voluntarily at all times, and it also comes to me at others, brought on by the weather, a scent, the passing of an undertaker's car in the street.

The event unfolded as follows: on Saturday 9 April 2011, a little past 7.30 am, my mother finally dies. It's a beautiful morning, and it feels like the hospice is this big organism that has been holding its breath, waiting for this to happen. My sister is with her at the precise moment that her breathing changes. For days, we have had to witness her breathing, an automatic and seemingly difficult, coarse, and loud gasping for air; the whole of her body moving, her chest rising and falling, with every breath, around the clock, no change, no relief. We are all there in her room for the one-and-a-half days it takes her to die. We listen to music, talk, and try our best to make the background to her dying as homely and safe as possible. She is

unconscious and the nurses tell us she is in no pain, but we can't know. Perhaps she can hear us being there? Even this isn't sure. For what feels like the longest time, I have been looking at her, searching for signs of how much time I have left with her, monitoring her slow and relentless loss of even the most basic physical and cognitive abilities. When she lost the capacity to swallow, I knew that we had taken one step closer to the end, but as the nurses keep telling us when we ask them: "There are no certain answers, and everyone's process is their own. Some patients seem to wait for their loved ones to leave the room, it's like they can't let go, when the people they love are sitting right there, holding on to them."

Right before she dies, her breath changes to light, peaceful, almost graceful breaths, and it is evident for us all that it is time. We gather around her bed silently. I have never seen anyone die, yet I know with every fibre of my being that this is what comes next. It is a perfect example of the difference between being certain and having knowledge, as Ludwig Wittgenstein taught me, and it is beyond anything I can articulate. I am relieved and heartbroken at the same time. We take her hands, stroke her hair, and tell her things we want her to hear in those last moments. It's mostly for us, I think: she hasn't been conscious since Wednesday evening, where she started vomiting due to the pressure of the tumours on her brain. Her chest is barely moving, her breathing only involves the upper part of her lungs, almost like gentle, gentle sighs. The rhythm becomes less systematic, the pauses longer, and eventually it happens. She doesn't take another breath and she is dead. After a while, two nurses come in and tell us it is time. They are polite and respectful but insisting, and they explain that they have to wash her and dress her within a given timeframe or the rigor mortis will complicate things considerably. Again I note how they give us enough information for us to understand why, yet spare us all the details. My sister and I stay and help the two nurses; they move the bed into the middle of the room, so they can better walk around it. Looking at this, I am reminded that while the image of my mum dead in her bed will always stay with me, this is just another day at work for them: this is what they do on an everyday basis. They move slowly, as if their bodily movements can somehow signal respect, and they talk to her while they are undressing her, constantly telling her what they do: "Now I will move your arm and remove your nightgown over your head." It takes a while; they have to remove her catheter, the IV access through which she received her medication, and she is not easy to turn over in the bed. Although many of her muscles are gone from weeks and weeks of lying down, her body is dense, heavy, and we all help each other in carefully getting her ready.

Grief is a strange thing. It ignores the main parameters by which we live our lives: time, space, dream, and reality. The writer Joan Didion wrote a book about the loss of her husband called *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2006). After my mum died, I didn't really experience magical thinking. Rather, I had to work hard just to understand that she was dead: it felt unreal and if I said it aloud, it felt like I was lying. Right after she died, it was as if my body and mind were in different worlds. It was as if a large part of me was still stuck in the world where she had been ill and we

had taken care of her, and after her death, the door to this world closed, but I didn't get all of me with me as I left. I dream nightmares, not in the traditional sense, but even more cunning and horrible: frankly, I am appalled that my mind can conjure up these situations while I am asleep. Why doesn't it give me a well-deserved and much-needed rest?

One night I dream that we are all back in my mother's old house, the house I grew up in. My two sisters and I have been visiting her for a period of time, a holiday of sorts. It's been great having some time together and I remember feeling happy and grateful. Everything appears normal; no one talks about the fact that she is dead, but as I am getting ready to leave, I *know* and I can't say anything. I feel torn: it is so fantastic to get this brief time with her again and I am not going to spoil it by telling her and the others that she is dead. At the same time, I feel so immensely alone: it is like I am simultaneously occupying two different dimensions: one where she is alive, and one where she is dead.

As we are getting ready to leave, I keep postponing because I know that once I leave the house, I will never see her again. I tell my kids to hug her and give her lots of kisses. They look at me as if I am strange: "Relax, Mum, we're just going home, not leaving the country or anything." But they don't know, and I don't have the heart to tell them that is the last bit of time they will ever have with her. I still vividly remember standing in the hall: everyone is ready to go, bags are packed, and she is standing there, looking at me, probably wondering why I am making such a fuss about leaving. I hug her, long and hard, and try to imprint her embrace, try to remember what it feels like to hug my mum. Then I look at her, really look at her face, and say goodbye. Abruptly, I wake up, my throat is all bundled up from not crying, and I hurry out of bed and tiptoe downstairs, making sure not to wake the kids. As I go into the living room, I fall down on my knees. And I *scream*. I don't cry. I scream with everything I have got. There are no words to explain what I feel. I scream until all the muscles in my back hurt and my lungs are in pain.

I wake up in my bed crying. It was a dream within a dream, and because I just spent this time with her, it feels like I have to reboot the system to get it: she's dead. My head doesn't want to know what my body is certain of.

When someone dies or leaves but is still there in memory and in dreams, time acquires a hint of mercilessness. From that point on, when the body of the one you love is gone and the emptiness remains, all past time spent together is viewed through the lens of the present absence: the person missing. Moreover, time spent with others, still in the present, takes on a different character because you know that the move a body makes from being there to not being there can be abrupt, is not under your control, and has the potential to shake your life and mind quite alarmingly and lastingly. I sometimes long to tell other people, people who have not yet been touched by the mercilessness, that it may change all too fast – they should cherish their time together! But it is pointless: this is not knowledge you can give to other people, only experiences you can share with others who have been through

similar things. Why is that? What is it in these kinds of experiences and this kind of knowing that makes them simultaneously universal and so very individual?

ON THE SMALLEST PARTS AND THE LARGEST WHOLES

I keep thinking about having been torn apart and put together, slowly, clumsily, bit-by-bit over time. It is as if trauma and grief displaces your body and mind in time and place, and for me, writing is one of the ways in which I can be put back together.

Two great storytellers, musician and song-writer Sting (2014) and author Stephen King (2010), suggest that you write about what you know. This does not mean that you should publish your diary – don't write about *you.* Rather, they suggest that you sidestep your own ego and give voice to someone else. In this, Sting's method is to empathetically stand in the place of others and give voice to their viewpoints and experiences, while King draw on his and others' experiences, mixes them with imagination, and moulds them into stories. I go about this in my own way. I want to write about my experiences of taking care of my dying mum, because I believe they contain more than a personal narrative: they are stories and reflections about death and dying, about love and grief, about research, work, and life, and about the marvellous and awe-inspiring human mind. In short, it's about all the things I learned while taking care of my mother as she was dying from brain cancer, and all that it cost me.

The brutal truth is that this experience also stirred my academic imagination and left me curious: I want to know more about knowledge: *where* do you know something? *How* do you know you know and when, and how are you certain? Can certainty be shared? And what is the role of the body in storing certainty, knowledge, memories? Are they stored *in* your body (remember, your brain is part of your body), or is knowing something we are capable of only when we are in the right place at the right time? For me, knowing is often place-bound: I know where I was when I learned something or thought specific thoughts. For these reflections, I need to go back in time and re-know the things I knew back when I studied philosophy at university: they are still there, but I need to read the books again to read them with my new brain, my new filter for understanding and for putting into context. I was too young then, too "clean" a slate.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IF KNOWLEDGE IS ALSO TIED TO PLACES?

THE HOUSE

I always return to the house: even now, I find myself thinking about it and dreaming of it, although I know it doesn't look anything like I remember anymore (I know this, because I drive by and look at it from time to time). This old house is where I spend the first twenty years of my life – a quite ordinary childhood, nothing special ever happened here – and yet I keep returning to the house in my dreams and in my thoughts. Even in this story, which doesn't even take place here, I think about the house. In a strange way, the house I grew up in seems to be the mental and emotional scaffolding on which my thoughts hinge. (Months after writing this, as I am browsing through the text, I realise that I am echoing Gaston Bachelard's reflections on the home in *Poetics of Space* (1958), a book I don't even remember reading anymore.) Perhaps I return to the house because this is where my earliest memories of my mother originate. I don't know, and in a way it doesn't matter. At the present time, we are all long gone and live scattered in flats and houses in different cities, but some of the formative memories that are crucial to my imagination and my cognitive backdrop were formed here, and I feel an urgent need to go back.

When I lived in the house, and now in my mind, it is a yellow-brick villa with a red-tile roof; it has a funny, crescent-shaped window right above the front door; and at this point in my life, the house was huge and time was this unending, stretchable material that was almost visible. I would come home from school, give the big, worn-down wooden garage door a push with my hip, and open it. The backyard consists of a garage, which is never used for anything but storage of old, strange things in amounts that conceal half of the inventory. I used to imagine how, among the huge piles, I could find really useful, valuable items; but somehow that never happened, and I never went looking. Inside, the house is like a sweet shop to me: it was built in 1910 and has a large, open ground floor containing the kitchen, the dining room, and the living room. It holds a variety of built-in cabinets on all floors, filled with places to hide things and potential treasures – or so it seems as I am growing up. It has beautiful wooden floors where I spend hours looking at the rays of sun and the shades they make. For a while, my favourite thing to do when I am home alone is to go through cabinets and drawers in a futile attempt to make the house reveal its secrets to me. I don't even know what I am looking for, but I am systematic, because I am sure that somewhere in the house *they* have hidden important things or secrets, and it's just a matter of patience and determination before I find them. I am sure adults have overlooked or forgotten important items that are waiting for me

somewhere. As I grow older, I realise that there are no hidden secrets or treasures, just the usual amount of things that any regular life will amount to: bank statements, old photographs, letters, outdated clothes, old shoes. But I love the house: it feels like it contains years and years of history, of stories, and I used to imagine all the different lives that originated and played out there.

Before she lost the ability to speak, my mother confessed to having burned and disposed of so many of these things – old letters from her past, clothing, books, wrinkled school notebooks and essays, and report cards that we never gave a second thought, but that were at one point in time of the absolute importance. After her death, I was relieved and sad that she had done all this cleaning up. Years of our growing up and accumulating things and memories had been partially erased. Only the purposefully left behind items were there as tangible evidence that she had a life of her own, and I remember thinking that we only got to see the edited version of her leftover life. I was disappointed: I don't know what I had expected, perhaps a better understanding of her or a way to reconnect?

HOUSE FOR SALE

The house my grandparents lived in is for sale. It has been so for two-and-a-half years. It is hard to see why if you read the real estate advertisement:

Ten-bedroom villa:

> Elegant, presentable and very exciting villa with soul. The house has been the setting of the medical clinic for generations and thus contains the space and possibilities for family life as well as liberal profession. The villa sits on a large and exciting plot – the garden is hilly with several cosy corners. The lower part of the garden has a small pond and many lovely fruit trees. As soon as you step outside the door, you feel the smell of the beach and salt water – the bay is located less than 350 metres away with good opportunities for nature experiences, walking, water sports, fishing, etc. You can enjoy the prospect of the water from several places – but especially the lovely covered terrace is perfect for quiet contemplation. Here you have a nice view to the inlet and the garden. A villa with great conditions and countless opportunities just waiting for you to fill them. A spacious house in a beautiful location. Come by and take a look.

Located on this tiny island, the price is one-third of our house here in the city. At least. Obviously, no one wants to live there. I consider buying it and scroll through the 27 photos on the real estate homepage. Some of the rooms and surroundings are so well known that I feel them in my body. The terrace. I recall a photo of me sitting naked on one side of my grandfather's shoulder. I am looking confident and courageous. Big, bright eyes ready to take in the world. Self-reliant and too young to be ashamed of nakedness and greed for the world.

I look at the photo of the living room and lose my sense of direction. Where was the big bookshelf located? The sofa set? The living room was much bigger, wasn't it? I recall another photo. My grandmother with a blanket over her knees, my tiny newborn sister in her arms, and two-year-old me by her side. I stare into the camera lens with blank eyes. The photo is too red. She is grey-haired and furrowed. Her eyes look dead. Maybe they are just infinitely sad.

The sofa set in the living room was the place for drinking tea with sugar, sugar cubes in a silver bowl, and a silver tong that we were supposed to use – not your fingers! Dinner was served in the white dining room. Along one wall was the sideboard with silverware and along the other was the bureau with my grandfather's herb schnapps, every one of them with a handwritten wooden sign around its neck. Bog myrtle, walnut, sloe. My grandmother's pills were on display in front of her plate. Red, blue, and white in a neat row. She swallowed one at a time, drinking water and throwing her head backwards, repeating this until the last pill. Slowly but steadily resigning. The disappearing body. We had home-baked cones with whipped cream for dessert served upright in piles of caster sugar.

Soon after, my sister and I silently slid off our chairs and disappeared into the patients' waiting room, reading Donald Duck magazines lying on the ice-cold linoleum floor. Much later, shivering and with stiff joints, we sneaked into the consultation room and inspected the gynecological table with its foot racks and oversized kitchen towel. Were the women on the kitchen towel treated or mistreated? Suddenly, the heated living room seemed immensely attractive. In my grandmother's grey bureau, each of us had a deck of playing cards in a golden twin-box, mine with a blue decoration, my sister's with red. We knelt at the coffee table and each set up a game of solitaire. My grandfather played the grand piano or put on a Roger Whittaker record. I spend the nights in my mother's old room reading her collection of childhood books. Next door, my grandparents had *en suite* bedrooms. I recall the scent of my grandmother. Perfume, powder. The scent lived in her dresses, which later became treasured dress-up clothes for my sister and me. At home, as classy ladies in oversized clothes with bosoms made of socks and scarfs, we never gave it a thought that their owner was gone. The dresses too are gone now, unfortunately. I was the victim of this crazy trend about tidying up. Get rid of your clutter! If you did not wear this piece of clothing for the last year, then throw it out! I did not wear these dresses for 40 years, but now I need them. I want them back! It seemed so important to move on, make space to invite the novel (and better, of course) into my life. Forward, forward. Progression, learning, development, and always making something out of it. Everything happens for a reason, and everything comes together in the end. I believed in that… I rarely went to my grandmother's bedroom. My grandfather slept in the first bedroom, my grandmother in the next. It was something of a long journey to get in there.

Well, now I am exactly halfway through the pile of term papers. I put on Jennifer Warnes and reach for the coffee table book *Frit Flet* [*Bountiful Braid*], written by

three female writers who have taken co-writing to its limits (Aidt, Knutzon, & Moestrup, 2014). Their texts merge into one another, sometimes in unison, sometimes polyphonic, screaming, teasing, and whimpering, but primarily as very powerful and funny utterings. They are really getting a move on. My brain and heart, my whole body, are filled with envious desire to write as they do. This is contemporary women's history. They find freedom in this fearless collaborative investigation of being a woman: freedom is giving up one individual voice and immersing oneself into one collective writing body. However, now I must assist the making of a bar graph. My twelve-year-old is pissed off, convinced that producing this homework is a mean thing and that her mother is to blame. I tell her that a bar graph diagram is just like two rulers and that she has unlimited power to decide which should display "time" and which should display the "number of observed birds". Additionally, *she* can decide the measurement interval depending on *her* needs. We construct a diagram: she draws one graph and tells me she can do this on her own. "Please mind your own business, Mum."

Mission complete.

OF MIRROR NEURONS AND GENERATIONS OF MOTHERS

When I grew up, we had an old-fashioned bread cutter. It was made out of iron and had a tray where you placed the bread and a handle with a sharp blade that cut the bread it slices: chop, chop. My mother was an efficient, fast (noisy), and good cook. She did, however, not really mind her body: she was always in a hurry, and if a bit fell off here or got caught in something there, it didn't really matter. Once the bread cutter took the outer piece of her thumb with it and the blood kept gushing out in amounts that were frightening to the eight-year-old me. I asked her to go to Accident and Emergency, but this only made her laugh and say: "I am not going to do that, they will laugh their asses off if I show up with something like this." I had never heard her use this kind of language before, and it stuck with me. There is a strange inconsistency at work here: all through my childhood, she made fun of my grandmother and her insistence on buckling up and keeping going, even if she was ill, in pain, or needed rest. She kept saying: "Girls, remind me not to become like her, it's driving me crazy, caring for someone like her." And yet, in the early stages of her illness, I learn that she has fallen down the stairs and off her terrace without letting us know or seeing a doctor, and because I don't know any better at this point, I think: "would it have made a difference if we had known? Could it have been prevented?"

On the other hand, the ability to keep going on sheer will amazed me all through her illness. "I have decided not to be difficult," she announces early on. It feels like a promise and she keeps it. Through brain biopsies and MRI scans, chemotherapy, and whole-brain radiation treatments that require her to show up every morning and lie completely still with a mask made out of an iron net over her head, she buckles up and keeps going. For whom is she doing this? Us? Herself? I am not sure, and the answer probably lies somewhere in between. But as the illness progresses, it

becomes difficult to talk about the other option, of not doing so much, of not trying so hard, when we know that there is only one possible outcome.

Mirror neurons are fascinating things: they are central in our most early years as we bond with and imitate our primary caretakers, and for the rest of our lives they allow us to feel empathy and connect to other human beings, to imitate behaviour, and mirror the feelings of others. They are implicated in the contagious nature of emotions and probably in many more important areas of our lives. I read the other day that the scientist who discovered them initially had his paper rejected by the prestigious journal *Nature*. Apparently the potential escaped their attention at the time: this was the early 1990s, if my memory serves me, and neuroscience was excited about all the possibilities in new imaging technologies. Perhaps the link to relationships, emotions, and why we make such funny, almost involuntary, faces when we talk to babies signalled less important knowledge? I don't know; I am just guessing. To me, they represent an important piece of the scientific evidence that we are relational beings and they provide a possible explanation to why I get nauseous and the hairs on the back of my arms stand out when my kids have hurt themselves and bleed. I take it as a sign that their bodies are still connected to mine, somehow: that my body reacts physically when theirs are hurt.

My favorite neurologist, Dr. Ramachandran, made simple, elegant studies in which he demonstrated how people would have involuntary physical reactions (elevated heart rates and pulses) to damage to a tabletop if they looked at it through a mirror and it appeared connected to their body. I find it endearing that we on a physical level are capable of connecting so fast and so profoundly to things. Somehow, mirror neurons remind me of quantum entanglement or "*spooky action at a distance"*, as Albert Einstein called it (Emerging Technology from the arXiv, 2012). They remind me that we are neurologically connected at a distance and across the outer boundaries of our physical bodies. How, I find myself wondering, is this connected to cognition and the way we know things? Do mirror neurons require sight, sound, smell in order to work? Or can they be activated by memory, by something we read?

In the world of human relationships, this ability has caused me a great deal of pain over the last few years, and during my mother's illness I started studying the human brain. I read neurological papers, textbooks, case studies, and more popularised books by Ramachandran, Oliver Sacks, and others. But somehow, the answers to my questions were not there. I don't understand how you can grow accustomed to a situation that for everyone else is a nightmare and accept it as your life and persevere because you have to. Yet, I have lived exactly that. When you do this, people will come up to you and remark on your strength. But they are mistaken: it is not about strength. It's about your needs not being relevant, and in this, the "buckle up and continue" mode that I have embedded in my body through generations of mother-daughter relationships kicks in. Because on the official list of priorities in such a situation, you just don't make it to the top and you know it, because you *made* the list. This is not the least bit emotional: quite the opposite, actually. It is extremely practical: someone is dying a horrible and slow death and it's not you. This someone

took care of you for years and years; now it's your turn to take care of her. It is as simple as that, and for me very rational. But, on the other hand, there is a body that has to do all the hard work that my judgement has decided is the way forward. And this body pays the price for being there. I don't know if I am particularly sensitive, but during the process of taking care of my mother, the boundaries of our bodies dissolved. I had to put myself in her place in order to imagine what she might be thinking and saying, because the aphasia made her speech illogical and seemingly disconnected. Her tumours affected her sense of time and space, and we had to help her interpret and negotiate reality, because it was slippery for her.

At one point, we are home alone and doing crossword puzzles, which was one of our favourite things to do together on a Sunday morning, with Billie Holiday on the record player and steaming hot coffee in our mugs. She would always have finished the easy section before I got there and we would do the difficult one together. She was amazingly sharp and fast, and often I would feel like I had grabbed on to someone running at full speed, doing my best just to tag along. I loved it. This afternoon in November, the roles are reversed. We sit by the dining table with the crosswords in front of us. She is clearly happy that today's slow programme (Sunday is the only day with no radiation treatment) has left her with no headaches and a surplus of energy that she can now spend with me. For me, the situation is bittersweet: she is searching for basic words and I wait patiently; even though I can clearly see the next ones, I don't have the heart to point them out to her or fill them in. At one point, out of nowhere, she looks up from the paper and says: "I wonder where my CDs are? I know they should be on the tall, slender shelves. But I can't seem to find them anymore." She looks puzzled. Then she says: "Do you know what's upstairs? I don't know what's upstairs; maybe they are there?" I know she will not find them upstairs, because we are not even in her house anymore. She does not know this most basic of facts about her everyday life: she has to live with friends because she can't be alone, and I wonder how much time it will take before the tumours take over. What makes a person a person, and how much can you take away and still be you?

AFTERMATH

My mum dies on 9 April, we had the funeral on 16 April and 22 April we celebrated her 63rd birthday at her house. In an act of sheer desperation, I call the Human Resources (HR) office at my university and ask to start working again on 1 May, just after the Easter break that year. I do this because I need a break from taking care of other people: I need to get away from my life, from my house with my devastated kids who need me, from all the memories, and getting to go to the office every day, even just for a few hours, seems like the best solution at this time. HR had administered my leave of absence, so going back to work is easy. The large bureaucracy of the university works like a charm and kicks in immediately: I get an email notifying me that as I assumed work again on 1 May, my new deadline for

handing in my PhD would be determined according to this. The assumption seems to be that as I have ended my leave of absence, I am ready to work full-time. No one asks me in for a talk and suggests that I perhaps start working on reduced hours, or maybe take some time to recover from the seven months I have just been through. And as all I want to do is to physically remove myself from my house, I tumble back to the office. During these months, I literally feel as if my skin has been peeled off: I feel naked, raw, and as if my body is one big abrasion. I sit in my office, I read my emails, I attend meetings, but I feel as if anyone at any time could say something and I would break down.

I have a colleague at this time who had lost his wife, and every time I would meet him in the hallways, by the coffee machine, or in the lunch room, I feel like I am looking into a mirror. His face is frozen in this immensely sad expression as if he cannot really believe that this is his life now. Usually we would talk for half an hour about how we felt, and this would provide little windows through which I could let out feelings. But I would always go home with headaches, completely drained. Just looking at his face I get an instant dose of the sadness, the immense loss he is carrying, and I remember thinking "why doesn't anyone react, clearly we shouldn't be here?" wanting someone, anyone but us, to take charge and send us home. I was a sleepwalker or a zombie: I could see this was not the best place for me to be, but I was incapable of finding an alternative so I kept coming to work, returning reluctantly, like a ghost in a movie, haunting the place.

My sister is upset with me because I didn't take sick leave, but instead went back to the stressful work of finishing up the PhD. She feels it is insane, like I am asking for a breakdown. I, for my part, am worried that I would *never* finish if I went on sick leave and actually acknowledged the extent to which I felt broken. And because my mother had been such a support when I quit my job and got a PhD scholarship, I feel like this was partially "her" PhD and that I *have* to finish it.

Around September, one of my supervisors expresses concern about whether I am being productive enough: I haven't done the last round of field studies and I have not yet written more than one paper or attended more than a few conferences. We have had our difficulties before, but as he sits there, looks at me, and says those words aloud, I feel outraged. I can't believe my ears and I want to say: "Listen, I have been to hell and back and I deserve a fucking medal, just for fucking showing up!" But that's not how academia works – what you *do* counts and I hadn't done enough, that much was clear to everyone. So, instead of yelling, I become ice-cold, and I just know that this is the end of him supervising me. I talk to my other supervisor, explain the difficulties we have had, and he agrees that it is not productive to continue the relationship. After this, I do my best to ignore everything else and work on the PhD. The field studies in the oncology ward are cancelled, a fact I now appreciate, and I plan the last round at the radiology ward. Getting back to work emphasises the feeling of being stuck in this other dimension where there are only other "survivors". It is so hard for me to wrap my head around the fact that life just goes on, relentlessly, after she died. At the same time, I long for this. I long to not feel so wrecked, to not

feel like anything could tip me off the boat. This feeling of being trapped in two worlds at the same time makes me feel immensely lonely.

Terminal illness and death may enter our lives in many forms, often unexpectedly, but not necessarily suddenly. While every one of us may (reluctantly) hold a dual citizenship to "the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick", as Susan Sontag (1991) so beautifully put it, relatives are in both worlds at the same time, often acting as translators between inhabitants of the two worlds. Not quite belonging to the kingdom of the sick, they may find that they spend the majority of their time in "Tumourville" or other cities of illness by virtue of caring for a family member. Christopher Hitchens (2012) coined this term to demonstrate how in such cities, the inhabitants are strangely cut off from other people. While nurses, doctors, and other caregivers come to work here every morning, they get to leave again at night. Patients don't. As severe illness and death find most of us unprepared, navigating in these strange cities is mostly done without a map, a guide to the social conventions, or a handbook of the most basic phrases. Non-membership of the kingdom of the sick may grant relatives permission to go back to the kingdom of the well from time to time, but being fully in neither world was a defining characteristic of my experience as I took care of my mother. Like many relatives, I was caught between the clinical world and the world of her life at home. Work in the clinical world is practised by professionals: educated people who learn how to keep a professional distance, who wear a uniform, have colleagues and managers, and who are either at work or off-duty. Relatives work primarily at home, simultaneously in the kingdom of the sick and the well, and they are relatives around the clock without uniforms, professional training, or the support system that a workplace can offer.

I felt this as a form of dual existence: often I even felt displaced in time and space as if I was somehow the only person just a tiny bit off in relation to everyone else. Time takes on a very circular notion like iterations of processes, repeating thoughts and experiences again and again. Situations I thought I had forgotten and situations that are forever etched in my mind; time doesn't care, they mingle with everyday activities. When I make tea in my kitchen, I am reminded that this was the first time I saw a symptom of her illness. At the time I didn't know, but now I do. The reason why she couldn't remember the steps in making tea, the reason why she reacted so strangely when we saw a film that night, was because she had the tumours growing in her brain; we just did not know it at the time. In this memory, time is unfolded in three dimensions: me making tea in my kitchen remembering when she made tea and I didn't know she was ill and the memory of when it initially came to me that this was the first sign of an ending approaching.

What does it mean, anyway, "aftermath"? That you take stock of your inventory after the event has passed and do the maths to see if you came out positive or in the red? It seems an impossible piece of maths – to list the positives and negatives of your mother's illness and death. Yet I am grateful and feel like she has given me a gift (what a horrible thought!). But I mean it. There are so many things I know now, things I only know because I spent all that time with her. I know that she had the best

possible last time we could have given her: my mind is at peace here. I will never have to worry about how she is going to die: I now know it was without pain, with dignity, and surrounded by people who loved her. I know so many things about the body and knowing, things I cannot articulate yet because I have not written them down. I know I can handle the most horrific situations, become broken and one again. In a way, it is reassuring. Perhaps this is what aftermath means? The amount of situations that happen after an event has passed? If so, I am afraid that aftermath lingers.

WHERE DO WE KNOW?

I am not kidding: this is a serious question for me. Where do we know the things we know? I am not talking about if we know things in our hearts – what an awkward thought for me, to know something in a muscle – but in our brains, in our souls, or across our entire bodies. You sent me a great story of two Danish writers who talk about writing. If I remember correctly, the more experienced one talks about writing with her kidneys. When I ask this question, I am more concerned with the space-body-knowledge link: a link I become more and more convinced is an important part of human cognition in a broad, embedded, embodied, and social sense. And then I start wondering about the elusiveness of experience and time, and how what we experience is always mediated through our body because our minds are embodied. At the same time, cognition is often shared and distributed among people, just as memory can be collective and distributed, and emotions social and contagious. How, in all of this, does the question of where we know fit in? Can I know something at home and then go to work and *not* know it – and vice versa?

A storage theory of the brain would argue that we *have* knowledge and that we are able to access parts of it when it is useful for us or when it is activated through memories or activities. It's the "you never forget riding a bike" argument: it's stored in there, somewhere. But what if knowledge is also tied to places? What if *where* we are when we know something is an integral part of knowing? I am not done researching this, but I suspect that there is something here that research so far has not shed sufficient light on. Some of the data I have in my research are "off" in the sense that they presented themselves to me in a weird light. There is no other word for it, unfortunately, I am well aware of how this might sound as I am writing it. Nonetheless, when I conduct field studies and observe people, some situations will "stand out" and assume this strange fluorescent light as they are happening, and I know that although I do not know exactly why right now, something is occurring that I need to pay attention to. It might be the fast-paced physical movements of a coordinator nurse, her waking pattern on the floor, the stories of a patient and his wife, the images I get in my head during an interview while a participant is talking, or the notes I am writing down in my notebook on my way home on the train. This is what I love about fieldwork: nothing beats the impact of being there in practice, of being tired and faint from hunger, and yet oddly energised while

shadowing physicians; of seeing their different efforts at *weaving together* the parts in a patient process; or of adjusting your pace, your tone of voice, and body language to match the behaviour of staff working in an oncological bed unit. Some of the "odd" data I have made me think that this question is not only related to research: it is perhaps a part of the human condition that we tend to overlook because we focus on the cognitive aspects of knowing. Is it even shared or is it only me? I don't know; I have not yet worked it out. In my quest for understanding, I have circled back to philosophy that may provide me with some answers, research on the significance of place, and my next step is the novels of David Foster Wallace. I have no idea whether he will offer help, but I have a good feeling that reading his books might get me a bit closer to knowing.

CHAPTER 3

REST, SPEED, AND RECOVERY TIME

KEEPING UP WITH CREATIVITY OR WHEN THE BODY IS LEFT BEHIND, ON THE COUCH, RESTING

I called you today, because we hadn't talked for a week and this is most unusual for us in the midst of creative and productive periods. You told me you had been shuffling about in Copenhagen with a bunch of Norwegian colleagues last week and afterwards you had needed not to think about work for a few days; the self-imposed pressure of hosting their visit had taken its toll on you, you explained. Then we talked about our current writing projects and all the different things we are doing at the moment, and then you said: "Perhaps this is why I said I had been shuffling about earlier on, when I explained my trip to you. I feel like I am shuffling all the time these days, like I am hanging on to all the things we started. Perhaps this is the real reason I needed time on the couch."

We laughed a bit about the image of you latching on to our work which had assumed a life of its own and was moving forward at a sometimes dizzying speed, disregarding our need for insignificant things like rest, food, and time to do the actual real work we should be doing. *Real work* as opposed to, what, *imaginary* work? The work we do together is the product of a force (there is no other word for it) I have never experienced alone or with others. It is the combination of the two of us; it's like the ideas spark off our conversations, and when the latest idea is far enough and "on track", we catch and develop the next. And more and more, this work is squeezing its way into the centre of what we do; slowly, bit by bit, this part of our work is growing, sometimes entering the centre from hidden back doors and surprising us by bringing areas of work together and on stage in unexpected ways. A work passion that started as something we did *outside* "real" academic work is increasingly becoming a main element of what we do.

There is a dark side to all this creativity: it's demanding and potentially all-consuming. It resembles what I imagine it must feel like to have an over-flexible mind: dissolving boundaries, playing with categories, and allowing oneself to be pulled into unchartered territory again and again, following a gut feeling that it will pay off in the end. I discipline myself into saying that I can only develop a new project when the "old" one is in production. This way I retain a bit of control of the creativity between us, but the ability of an idea or a project to wriggle out of our grasp and, to some extent, detach from us, leaving us – its parents – on the couch, exhausted from trying to keep up with the relentless pace – this fascinates me. The embodied aspects of this work, the exhaustion, the displacement of body and mind

in these processes – the body being this physical entity that is tied to one place at a time and bound by certain needs, while the mind feeling in this kind of creative endeavour more attached to the idea – remain a wonder to me. Why is it that this dissonance between the creative force and the body can feel so urgent? It is not only a matter of being tired or "maxing out your creativity credit cards". Something else is happening here.

SPEED, SLEEP, AND EXHAUSTION

Thank you so much for your text. It arrived in my mailbox yesterday but I did not read it until now – it's ten pm and I'm dead tired. Again. What is this exhaustion? I want to sleep, but more than that, I want to write. I put off opening the file because I wanted some quiet time to take your text in and not just hurry over it between chores. Lately, we have both experienced colleagues around the world mourning over not having the time to write what they want the most. I attend a writing group at my department and today I received an email from Thomas, who is next in line for a peer review in the group. He promises to send us a draft in advance; however, he has just had a fun idea for a paper that he really wants to embark on but wonders if he can allow himself to pursue "fun" when there are three or four other writing projects that he ought to deal with first. Exhaustion takes different forms.

I welcome exhaustion and feel an urge to be slow. We talked about speed and lagging behind the swirling of these weird thoughts and ideas and *bisociations* that explode just because you call to say hello and I tell you I'm on the sofa. Arthur Koestler (1964) puts forward the idea that any creative act is not a simple association, but rather a "*bisociation*". He coined this term to mean "perceiving a situation in two habitually incompatible associative contexts… [which] causes an abrupt transfer of thought from one matrix to another governed by a different logic" (Taylor, 1999, p. 34). According to Koestler, *all* forms of creativity – whether in science, comedy, or art – are driven by this mechanism of bisociation. It is so fascinating an experience. However, in the mist of this explosion, it feels like slowness, unproductiveness, and introversion, or other ways of losing control – how would we ever know if yesterday turned out be doomsday? The day our own ideas left us behind for good. They passed some finishing line without us and we might never ever again catch up with them; they're out in the world, celebrating, and we're on the couch, exhausted, discarded by what we've created.

AFTER-THOUGHT FOR THE NEXT EXPLORATION OR ON THE FEAR OF NOT FINISHING WHAT WE STARTED

Why is it that academics share this fear of starting fun writing projects? Of pursuing writing where it is easy, pleasurable, joyful, and flows? Is it our concepts of writing? Of work? Or, as I suspect, of time? I keep cycling back to this topic. We need to look at the "data", collect our stories, and write this piece!

This might be the entry for the piece you suggest. The strategy is called "spiralling down". Some weeks ago, we talked about Lars von Trier's and Jørn Leth's film *The Five Obstructions* (2003). This film about filmmaking investigates how limitations, commands, and prohibitions can serve as creative forces. We considered a similar game about writing in which we would impose obstructions on each other and what fun it would be. Fun? What a joke! Why didn't we realise that this is not at all the time to impose obstacles on each other's work? Life itself does this so much better than we would ever be capable of. Your right hand is in bandages and twice the size after an operation of which you do not know the long-term effects. I am mourning lost love (this is not acute, it *is* the long-term effect). Obstructions are obvious and we curse them. This is not fun. This is hell.

Later, on the phone, I apologise for potential bewildering communication, I tell you how I hate splitting up with my husband, and I cry. We talk about pain. (What did you say about Jerry Seinfeld's show, *Comedians in Cars Drinking Coffee?* I forget.) In words, we paint the image of the two of us shuffling about, latching on to our life, bandaged, lifeblood flowing, hanging on.

Okay, life isn't that great right now, but oh my, it feeds creativity! And guess what. I just got an email from Thomas in which he sketches his fun, new writing project to discuss in our group on Monday!

CREATIVE OBSTRUCTIONS OR PAIN IS KNOWLEDGE, RUSHING IN

One of my favourite bits by Louis CK is a stand-up routine in which he talks about being 40 and how this is no fun, especially if you have an injury (YouTube, 2012). He explains how he went to see his doctor because his ankle hurt, and the doctor basically told him: "your ankle is just shitty now," and that he could do stretches. "For how long?," Louis asked, to which the doctor drily replied: "That's just a new thing you do now."

I am 40 and I am currently living a paradox. On the one hand, my work life is at its best: I have a nice, coherent chunk of time to analyse the last round of data from a three-year-long study I have undertaken. I have planned these months with detail and love and I have imagined myself sitting in my home office with all my books, notes, drawings, and just *working*. It was going to be great: hard work, but great!

Then my wrists got injured and kept hurting. I had examinations and ultimately laparoscopic surgery. The results were *bad*: my hand was filled with torn-off scar tissue; it should have looked like a hard-boiled egg, but instead it looked like cotton, swaying in the wind. "What's all that?," I asked the surgeon, as I was watching his movement in my wrist on the monitor, worried. This didn't look like any egg I had ever seen. "It's scar tissue", he explained, "damaged cartilage and it needs to be removed". A procedure that should have been a 45-minute exploration of the extent of the injuries ended up being 90 minutes of damage control and cleaning (the tool the surgeon used was jokingly called the vacuum cleaner, he explained, while

he vacuumed my wrist just to see what was wrong with something called the LT ligament).

After the surgery, the surgeon came to see me and my husband and explained that the damage was more severe than he initially expected based on the MRI and that the LT ligament was completely torn: it just wasn't there. I was to go home, wait twelve days to have the stiches removed, and within a four-six month period we would know if the removal of scar tissue could give me less pain and a level of functionality I could live with. "What's the alternative?," I asked. "Well, not good because the extent of damage leaves us with no good surgical options. Basically, as a surgeon, you have three possibilities: you can perform a ligament transplant, or you can surgically remove one of the smaller bones in the hand and stabilise the others with a partial arthrodesis, or you can put in an artificial wrist. They last about 10 years. But you are not a good candidate for any of these, because of your extensive cartilage damage. So we really don't want to do this, unless we have to." "What are my odds of getting a result I can live with?," I asked. "50 per cent," he replied. "Don't you have ANY good news?," I asked, appalled. He smiled a thin little smile and said: "Well. We did manage to get all the scar tissue out." "So, what do I do now?," I asked, a bit shocked. "You wait", he said, "in 4–6 months we'll know much more". "What can I do? Should I take precautions?," I asked. "Well, you can't really do anything wrong as it is completely torn, the LT ligament. Just use it, gradually, and if you use it too much, you'll know, because it will hurt. So don't do that."

I felt like laughing, because it was so surreal, being inside a Louis CK joke. Perhaps it was the painkillers, perhaps it was a coping mechanism, but it took me a while to really understand the degree to which this could mess up my life. The last bit of emotional pain and knowledge came rushing in this Monday when I was at my doctors to get the stitches removed. She looked at me and asked, "so, how did you feel, when you got this message?", and I could see in her eyes that this was severe. I told her I was seriously considering what to do with my work life as I expected a three-hour window of writing time each day. "At best", she said, "that's probably a maximum. And I think it is a good idea to consider your work situation very seriously. I am so sorry, it really just sucks," she said, looking at me apologetically. She was right and I couldn't agree more. But – and this is where it gets really provoking – I am currently working on research about obstructions as important elements in creative processes and on a project that explores the creative potential inherent in what might look like a detour. Life is spelling it out in capitals. I get the message.

When I was at a low point, you send me a link to a *TED* talk called "Embrace the Shake" (2013) bout an artist, Phil Hansen, who had permanent nerve damage and had to rethink his artistic work. So that's what I do. I try to think of this as a creative obstruction I need to embrace. Writing with one hand? Writing through speech? Speed-writing? I am *becoming* my research topic, reluctantly but surely: embracing the restraint is the only way forward, but this is easier said than done. Today I went to the office for the first time. I had actually looked forward to it, but it ended up

being a farce. My computer was taken out of circulation (I had only been gone three weeks!), so I couldn't log on and had to get a new one. "So, now we just have to recreate all your programmes and your profiles," my helpful IT guy said. I took a deep breath: "Seriously, if you make me do this now, I will start crying. I will. I am not kidding!" "Okay, we can just do it some other day," he said, now in a soft voice like the one you use for kids or scared animals. "Don't worry, I'll help you." And I went home, with a headache and an aching hand. Today the obstruction didn't really feed any creative thoughts, just an urge to write.

ON WORMHOLES, LONG JOURNEYS AND THE DANGERS OF SUDDEN COLLAPSE

Last December, we went to a conference in Singapore. We did all the right things: we responded to a call for papers, got our abstract accepted and our full paper peer reviewed, booked flights and accommodation, and on the surface, it looked really efficient and like we knew what we were doing. But for some reason, this journey was a farce from the beginning. Fearing the strict law enforcement in Singapore, I went and bought a new suitcase with a combination lock for the travel. I packed it with all my things and tried the new code I had just installed in it, and it wouldn't open. Just wouldn't. Somehow, I had installed a code slightly different than what I thought and now all my things were locked in, inaccessible, and you were coming to pick me up for the airport in one-and-a-half hours. In a scene fit for an old comic film, I had my husband help me clip the newly bought locks with one of his power tools, pry open the suitcase, and repack everything in the old, ragged one I had initially discarded. You arrived an hour too early and we decided to send the taxi home and order a new one closer to our departure time. This taxi didn't arrive, however, and after waiting for twenty minutes outside my door, we had to walk very briskly to the bus stop.

We made our flight, but in retrospect it seems like the beginning of the trip set the mood for the whole conference. We were jetlagged and overslept the first day, arriving too late for the keynote speech that opened the conference. In spite of numerous warnings, we managed to leave the hotel several times without an umbrella and got caught in the tropical monsoon rain in summer dresses. Repeatedly, we felt disconnected and displaced, like our bodies had arrived in Singapore but our minds were not all there. Our outer appearances mirrored our inner state, and we found ourselves having morning coffee with the other attendees with toothpaste in our hair, price tags on our dresses, and despite my best efforts to subdue them, I ended up with uncontrollable frizzy curls due to the extreme humidity within a matter of hours. The only person we really connected with at the conference was another Dane, and even though we made efforts to mingle, converse, and include others, we often ended up being left to ourselves: perhaps we were mentally in a kind of bubble.

Events culminated on the last day of the conference where we had signed up for a guided tour of the city. Always worried of lacking food, I asked if we could get

a sandwich before we left for the meeting place at five pm, and you agreed: "But surely, we will get something to eat. The tour is scheduled to last until nine pm." We arrived to find a small group of participants and a short, busy guide who hurried us all into a minivan. We were three people crammed into the back seat and five people in the two front rows. The minivan had small windows placed where you couldn't see out unless you crouched down and tilted your upper body strongly to one side. Every time we arrived at a stop, the guide would hurry us out of the van and start walking fast as soon as the first person was out: "Come one, hurry, hurry. We have fifteen minutes! Look at plants! Look! We must go see trees with lights! Hurry, look at plants! If you need to go to the ladies room, it's now! We'll meet here in fifteen minutes!" We all panicked and ran to the toilet arranging with each other: you wait for me by the sinks, do not leave without me! And, as I had feared, the tour consisted of an endless row of stressful sights and no food. When the guide finally let us go around nine pm, we collapsed at a Japanese restaurant with our new Danish friend where the food was plentiful and the beers ice-cold, recovering from what felt alarmingly like being taken hostage (you actually developed a hint of Stockholm syndrome, insisted she was not that bad, and wanted to keep wearing the badge she had made us wear). But what also came out of this crazy journey were truly important personal insights into what kind of academic work we want to do, what the next step in work and life might be (when to hold on and when to let go), how we can connect the work we do on the space and time of knowing, on our writing experiments, and on stubbornly insisting on using joy and feelings of "there *is* something there" as guiding lights for our work.

The Singapore trip made this guiding light shine so bright. We invented the title for an edited book and starting to invite people we like and admire to contribute to it. It had a name and immediately it was brought to life: *In Praise of Detours* (Wegener, Meier, & Maslo, 2017). The trip made us both even more emboldened to pursue something even though we do not know what it is. There is just something there – some author we love reading, someone we want to talk to, something that *attracts* us*,* draws us in. We do not have a research question. Instead, we say: "I feel attracted to this author/performer, to this idea, this utterance."; "in some way it resonates with me"; "in some way, it constitutes an answer". What if we actually have the answers and what we are looking for are the questions?

I use the search function in my file archive to find a quote from the mathematician Carl Friedrick Gauss, who said: "I have had my solutions for a long time, but I don't know yet how to arrive at them." (I found it later: Koestler, 1967, p. 327.)

I do not find it in the first place. Instead, I come across some of the initial sketches for our paper, "Writing With Resonance" (Meier & Wegener, 2016). The original titles were "Writing With Your Guts" or "Writing With Your Gut Feeling". Here is our very first start:

> *Writing* vs writing: as readers, we just know when something is well written and moves us. It may not be the same for everyone, but for a lot of us, it is quite

> easy to say whether a text is good or bad. Or even worse, leaves us cold, even though we might have a hard time explaining what exactly it is that puts us off. Some texts even leave us feeling sick to our stomachs (consultants' evaluation reports often have this effect on employees), angry and pacing up and down the floor (if we disagree with the writer), or emotionally touched by a sentence, a situation, a story. What's going on in those texts, what is needed for writers to engage readers, for readers to go along and enjoy the ride and – possibly even remember – the text? Being able to do this holds a potentially very powerful key for all writers.

Keywords for sections are Voice, Body, Clarity, Power, Mystery, and Doing Research and Living a Life. Yes, we are still on that tour, and there is no short, busy guide pacing us. We know when it works. We know that we find the illuminated trees tasteless, we know when we need to go to the toilet, and we are not afraid of being left there to find our way back home all by ourselves. The answers are right there in front of us and our job is to grasp them, remould them, connect them, make wormholes. We *are* home already.

DEAD ZONES

Now and again, the light is so bright and then suddenly I realise it has died out. Oxygen is out. Oxygen-depleted water is also called "dead zones". When I can't see the light, I feel like I am in a dead zone and it is time to head for the light. But how? Sometimes, the light only exists as a faint memory, and sometimes I even fear that my time with the light has passed. Maybe the question we pose all the time in still new configurations is how we can keep heading for the light, how we can make it shine even more brightly. Maybe we ask: what feeds it? Where (and on who) do we want it to shine? In the book *Women who Run with the Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes (2008) talks about going home. How do I recover from the wheeze, the sadness, and eventually, return from the dead zone to "go home"? I feel it now and have felt it on and off for a long time. My lips, my tongue, my chest shrivel. A freezing in my body. Emails keep appearing: "The supervisor you assigned to me is not helpful at all – can I get another one?"; "you need to update your timesheets" (I sent that twice – to two different office assistants. What is the matter with you?). I sit in my office with my laptop in front of me. I am just sitting there, not even pretending to work, gasping for air.

Later, I am at home (or more precisely, I am in my house) on my sofa beside the fireplace with my laptop in front of me, less panicked, slowly adjusting to oxygen depletion. I have lit a fire and the cat is here too. It should be comforting. There are things I must do and now I will just pull myself together and do them. It does not feel right to be so sad all the time because "there is something there" deep down or out there. Still, the only thing I can do is to swim right on into the dead zone. My kids are leaving to dine with their dad and I am left for some hours in the cat's company.

Dead zone ahead. Then another email pops up. It is an abstract for our book on detours from Nancy and Sarah:

> How do we make sense of the collaborative research and writing process? How do we understand the timescales involved in the creation of a paper? What is the "starting" point and how do we understand "completion" – let alone the spaces, places, and the journey in between these poles? In this book chapter we offer an archaeology of a research paper. Using the work of the psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, we position our work as a combination of his concept of the "unthought known" and his seminal work concerning object relations and the role of free associations in making sense of the myriad, bizarre, yet often connected thought tendrils we encounter in everyday life and the everyday life of research.

Oxygen! The light flares up and I can cry, at last. And then I add to my own abstract:

> I find myself effortless and genuinely synchronised when I write with no intention. My state of "no intention" seems to occur randomly and has nothing to do with the amount of deadlines and people who wants something from me (also called disturbances), or the amount of time on my own (also called immersion). It has been a long time without my precious "no intention" and I miss it.

I rewrite our introduction to the book and… and…

The kids are back: "It's really hot in here. Hi, oh… Mum, do you know that *nothing* has moved since we left? Even the cat is in the exact same position. Did you eat?" (My goodness, I am hungry.) "I *did* move," I insist, "I got up to maintain the fire…"

MAINTAINING THE FIRE, CONNECTING FROM THE INSIDE

It is Saturday morning and just before my spinning lesson, I notice three text messages from you. I read them one-and-a-half hours later dripping with sweat. You think it has been a long time since we talked and notice that your phone log tells you it has been two days. You ask if we can write more about dead zones and you tell me that you are going to a cocktail party tonight where you will be wearing a peacock feather dress. This is a wonderful crash of scenes – me finishing a spinning lesson in a room that a guest would find disgusting and you on your way to a (pea)cocktail party. This is what we do. We do not need explanations all the time; we do not need to test an idea; we simply make room for connections and know that "there is something there" and we can make it work. I have finally ended my marriage and it feels like the things that really matter and all that is life-giving just flow in. I am not really doing anything. Well, I sign up for the spinning lesson and show up; tonight, I cook dinner for my friend whose youngest kid is moving out today (he's 21, so basically it's fine); I write this piece

for you. Yesterday, I signed the final documents, and for the first time in my life, I have a mortgage loan that is entirely mine. I am on my own. It feels weirdly liberating.

Five seconds after I signed, an email popped up and I assumed it was a confirmation letter from my mortgage banker. However, it was from my editor who told me that the manuscript for my book *Writing with Joy: A Guide to Academic Writing* has been accepted in its current form (Wegener, 2016). This sequence of events played out within five seconds. We act in the world and the world strikes back. We call upon somebody and another one responds. We make the toughest decision of our lives and think we will burn in hell. I ended something that was supposed to last forever, for better and worse, and my life turns out to be a hot air balloon ride in which I am able to drop with joy one sandbag after the other. Going up, up, up. This is not a story of cause and effect. I will probably never ever again get a reply from my editor when I write to my banker. To me, however, in this moment something connected from the inside.

Now, finally, I see the red thread of this text: I was looking for a chunk that contained the expression "Connecting from the Inside", which is the title of this chapter and which we edited out from "Writing with Resonance". I found it in an earlier version of the paper in this excerpt of a letter to you:

When I read with my leisurely body and mind, relaxed, randomly reading by an impulse, playfully writing with no specific purpose, I happen to feel that my time is all spare. This is pure joy. I do not at all believe this is work and I am convinced that I have the best job in the whole world. I have no idea of where it will take me. The Friday newspaper comes with a "Books" section and I always plunge into it immediately. Today, the young Danish novelist Josefine Klougart tells the story of her rereading the French writer Marguerite Duras (2014). Her first encounter with Duras ten years earlier had been instrumental in her decision to write, and even in getting a sense of what writing means, she says. Listen to what Klougart tells us about this encounter with a voice that resonates with her:

> Duras introduced me to a voice I could trust. A voice which made me think that literature first of' all is borne by a voice that you simply believe in. Deceitful and affected, plain and waffling, but always in some way present and consistent, maybe in its discontinuity and/or abruptness always a voice you feel safe about because it has a kind of authority which cannot be ignored. A voice which can do everything – and the things it cannot do become insignificant to the reader at that moment. We are engaged in the world that this voice gestalts.

What is authority? An authoritative voice can be both deceitful (at least in fiction), affected, plain, and waffling. This is not about finding one's *own* voice. This is not about expressing identity. An authoritative voice may be one that is *present*. How does one manage to be present in one's texts? According to Klougart, Duras does it this way:

> The connections between her different scenes exist but she does not deign them a word, sometimes not even an innocent "as". At the same time, this is what shines the most – everything's relatedness. Her focus is so strong, the scenes stand out so clearly that the connections become obvious and inherent. Things connect from the inside.

The becoming of inherent connections! Klougart describes how she is staying at a writing refuge to do a final edit of her novel before it goes into press, but instead finds herself "irreverently" rereading Duras (switching between different novels, reading only parts of chapters), and writing new documents herself. She returns back home with an almost complete manuscript for a new novel. She cannot do any ticking off of the to-do list, but she has created something new by making Dura's texts shine on her own writing. This is what an encounter of resonance looks like to me: a reading experience that provides the power of creative production in its light.

This is what we are after. Things that provide the power of creative production in their light. These are (among an abundance of other things) our texts to each other. The texts we produce are not the result of cause and effect and they are not even written in a linear manner. Rather, they look like this: I receive an email from you in which you write:

> I reread your last piece again this afternoon. It draws me in because you are thinking my thoughts; I saw what we are doing much more clearly as I read your additions to my text. A wormhole in the space-time dimension of thinking opens up through this kind of writing and your text connects itself to my earlier writing on my mum and brains and distributed cognition. Our cognition is not distributed; it feels like you *are* in my head and yesterday I send you an email, asking you to read something, without even considering the need to attach the file (my approach seemed to be: if I can access it, then so can you). No, our cognition is not distributed: it is extended, integrated, and this has developed over time. A few years ago, we could connect when we needed it and "borrow brainpower" (Wegener, Ingerslev, & Meier, 2014); now I feel like I need to write to you as a way of thinking. Like our iterations, building on each other's words, are becoming a way of being. Strange, but it feels natural, like it is not necessary to discern who is thinking/writing/thinking: it's a joint venture, an ever-evolving bricolage of thoughts and words. It makes me wonder: if there is something there regarding the question *"where do we know?*", then I feel like extending it to explore if I can know something in your thoughts and words. In our brain.

Which piece? Which one is my *last* piece? Your email has this subject line: "spooky action at a distance (Def: Quantum entanglement)". It is not a reply. However, I remember (maybe because you explicitly write it) receiving an email from you asking me to take a look at a file that was *not* attached and I replied asking if I was

supposed to access the file through a wormhole (thinking I was very funny) and for you to attach it. I search my inbox for "attach file", find the email, and start connecting things. The way I do this is by writing this section in the Book. I fully agree with you that this is not distributed cognition. This is a way of being, making space for things, connecting from the inside, maintaining the fire.

THE FIRE

Well, what is this? A dream some time ago: I am facing myself as a five-year-old. I like her/myself. We have some kind of connection and I wink with my left eye (I would never do that in real life – it would be the right eye), and then I wake up. Reconciliation. Something that drives me: the fire. My grandmother's fire. Something that frees me.

I have always had this fire. This longing for freedom in expression. I finally know how to fulfil it. It is not that this fulfillment will ever be accomplished, but that is not the point. I know what to do. I can *act* in the world. This fire has nothing to do with physical limitations, children, and the body. And yet, it is all about motherhood, the body, physicality. The fire of my grandmother can turn into a beautiful story and into a very sad one. Who am I to judge? Nevertheless, to me, it is about the kind of fire that means everything. It's life or death. You can't obey it partially. If you don't go, disaster will sweep you away. There is nothing in between. In her life, she maintained the fire with helplessness and suffering.

When I told my mum I was going for a work trip to Nottingham, she informed me that my grandmother had studied there. I had never heard of her studying before. My mum did not know what she studied or for how long – maybe one year. My mum showed me an album with photos of her wearing a graduation cap, casually in front of a Ford A, in the park surrounded by young men. My mum scrolls back: my grandmother as a young schoolchild with braids, and later, photos with no braids. My mum tells me that my grandmother hated the braids and cut them off herself one day. She was short-haired ever after. In the photos from Nottingham, she is boyish, wearing trousers, admired by young men, tough. I ask my mum if my grandmother got an education, and she tells me that my grandfather wanted her to take medical secretary training to assist him in the clinic but she refused. From time to time, she worked at the telephone exchange.

I think she was busy being a mother and being ill. Sometimes, she was busier with illness than with motherhood. Does illness explain anything? Maybe. Or maybe illness was just an excuse for this wild desire to be free, break free. Or the result of not obeying the fire.

I look into her as if she is my mirror. What do I see? I never cared that much and now she goes right to my heart. She disappeared long before she died. My last memory of her is my dad carrying her up the dunes to look at the sea one last time. This trip to the sea is evidenced with several photos. It is windy; my grandmother's face is furrowed; I am wearing an anorak, hat up, carrying stones to take home. On

our trips to the sea, I always collected more stones to take home than I was able to carry. They were in my anorak pockets, in my hood, and in my arms. I wanted to take them home to display in my room or in front of the house.

She had that fire. I have it. Until know, I did not know how to handle it. I ignored it in favour of other peoples' needs, out of indolence, because I feared seclusion or being wrong. I was disorientated. I suffered from fatigue, a devouring fatigue. I have lived for years with this scary vision of my life in which everything is falling apart, leaving only the devouring fire. I have envisioned myself finally reaching my goal, performing perfectly. My total redemption while the rest of my world is in chaos. And then, regret. The ice-cold finale. Isolation.

Everything has changed. Now I know I can make the fire my friend, albeit a demanding one.

PYROMANIA

I have always loved burning things, although I had forgotten. When I read your text, I remembered! One of my schoolmates was actually a bit afraid to play with me, because of the potential danger in my passion for experiments and for settings things on fire. I think it was because I lit chunks of cotton (to see what happens, naturally) in my room on the wooden floor. What happens, I can tell you, is that the cotton burns *fast!* Your text reminded me of the extremely powerful force that fire is. And how burning things to the ground is a way of starting new cycles of life.

When my oldest was three, we went on a family holiday to Sicily. We stayed in a big, rented house at the slopes of Etna and every night, after nightfall, we could see her spewing lava up into the air in pink and orange cascades. Etna is one of the relatively stable kinds of volcano: she is in a state of more or less constant eruption. She doesn't build up the same dangerous pressure as Vesuvius or other volcanoes: her eruptions are predictable, stable, and even the large, destructive ones are relatively safe, because they can usually be detected in advance and people can be evacuated: at least this is the story the locals told us. But she erupts, make no mistake. As you drive slowly and on an endless road of hairpin turns, large black tongues of cold lava show you how far the last eruption travelled. But on these very same slopes, the most fertile land for growing oranges, wine, tomatoes, lemons etc can be found because of the eruptions. I used to wonder why on earth people would want to live on the slope of a volcano – a giant mountain of fire waiting to burn down your crops? But it was evident that the volcano also gave considerable gifts of life back to the people who lived there.

Now it strikes me as curious that volcanoes are often named after women, and as I re-read Estes's book (2008), I wonder if there is something there: the life force, the creativity, the potential danger in a fire gone astray and these very same elements in women (people) who have a certain kind of spark or "crazy". Perhaps this is what Estes means when she talks about caring for and carrying around a little bit of the wild, of the wilderness with you.

I keep thinking about your dream: you and your five-year-old self, connecting, approving. I love that image, and I think that she winked at you to let you know she understands and that it's going to be alright. (I scroll up to read the dream again and realise you didn't say who winked at whom. My interpretation is my own reading of the situation.) Five-year-olds are awesome, in the original sense of the word. They are curious, keep pushing for more knowledge, and they don't really know what is appropriate or inappropriate yet. I love that.

When I read your thoughts on fire, on your grandmother, and on loss/freedom/lightness of being, I think you have a lot of wilderness in you and it is emerging now, as you drop the sand bags and let go. Perhaps you forgot these aspects of your badass nature? Perhaps you tucked the wolf tail back up under the skirt so others don't notice it, and only nurtured the other, more surface-friendly, aspects? I don't know. I might be writing about myself and my weird fear of taking up too much space (yes, seriously, I know), making too much noise (laughing too hard, too loud, or too long at bad jokes or the wrong things), and being so free and wild in my behaviour that I accidently make others feel small. I think I have a big, hairy, wild, and very loud wolf-like part of my psyche that I find increasingly difficult (and now, as I am writing it, unnecessary) to hide. I want to be badass, to kick ass, and to stop feeling responsible for everyone else's feelings. On my way to my peacock party, I listened to the audiobook of *On Writing* by King again and he reminded me of the one credo all writers must obey: tell the truth as they see it. And if you're worried about what others think, you shouldn't write, because everyone will always have an opinion and it really won't matter in the end. Your obligation is to tell the truth and not care. This I passionately want to learn how to do: untangle myself and my writing from what others might think. Imagine the freedom!

So I am all for burning down the house, for torching old, restraining notions of self, and for watching new things grow out of the black, fertile soil.

CHAPTER 4

COMFORTING AND VERY SAD AT THE SAME TIME

WITHDRAWING TO REACH OUT

I keep thinking about how academic work is both contextual and tied to a person/a body in time and place *and* utterly free to travel and connect with people and thoughts across time and space, in several places at once. This is an important part of the materiality of research, I think: that thoughts need what we could call an action point or touch point, a body and a consciousness, to connect. And that the connection is always conditioned by what this person brings to it. I feel this split more acutely when I dive into intense data analysis, and I am on the verge of one such period now. "On the verge": it sounds like I am about to have a mental breakdown. In a way, this is not completely wrong. I know that these periods require my fullest attention and that what I really want to do is to ask everyone just to back off and leave me alone. At the same time, being isolated is not good for either me or the process: I need to come up for air now and then. But I fear the split: it is hard emotionally to feel torn between connecting in real time and having the peace and quiet I need to think. The process really doesn't care if I have a family or friends I would like to see. Relentlessly, it continues, and as a result, I might end up producing something that will have its own life and connect to people distributed across time and place. It's not *me* that's connecting, I hope you see this. It's the work.

And for this reason, academic work never ceases to amaze me: it is the result of individuals' achievements; it is tied to, and carried out by, a human being at a certain point in time and space; and yet it is free from these dimensions, able to extend vast distances and travel beyond the author's control to reappear in multiple locations at once or after hundreds of years. Writing is related to time and place in another way: as King (2010) reminds us, writing is portable magic. Through writing we may communicate across time and space, yet *as* we write, we are simultaneously beings in a physical world as well as utterly free. Most of us have had the pleasure of losing time when we write, perhaps even feeling as if we emerge from a deep dive to the surface, refreshed, when we are done with that day's work. At other times, writing (as the activity of crafting sentences) continues regardless of where we are as physical bodies: we may start writing in our heads when we are still asleep. This happens to me during deep, continuous periods of data analysis and writing: I'll wake up around six am, already crafting sentences in my head, and the best way to harvest the words is to go, undisturbed, to the computer and start typing without speaking. During such periods, I am not much fun to live with, because even when I am present, I am not really fully there. I don't go to the office, because

the act of preparing to meet the world (make-up, nice clothes) is a distraction to my concentration. I need to *not move* physically to be able to move forward analytically, and my home office becomes an extension of my thoughts through notes, large post-its, and drawings on portable white boards. Ideally, my husband jokingly noted last time, I would be hooked up to a catheter, an IV fluid bag, and a nutritional probe. An all-body management solution to facilitate all mind work.

MOIST TO MOIST

Today, like yesterday and the day before, I am struggling with a conference paper that really needs to be shaped up and finished. It is a co-written paper with a colleague whom I like very much. I like the idea of the paper, I like her, and I envision our conference participation with joy. However, I do not like writing this paper. Instantly, I read every email that pops up, I talk to the cats, I write, delete, move bits of text from one place to the other, and find that I have lost sight of my navigations and that these antics do not make the text work. I am severely constrained and demotivated. I open a piece I published some time ago on the same subject and re-reading it makes me realise what is wrong. The old piece has an ease to it: it seems so effortless and light on its feet. It was not easy to write and it took a lot of revision. What is the difference now? I connected to my veld when writing it and I am disconnecting now. This is not about procrastination, not being able to focus, or being lazy. It is about writing. It has to do with a writing practice in which thoughts can thrive, connect, and transform. I need a writing practice that is light on its feet to make my work *work*.

Finally, I surrender and open the Book. Last night, immediately after receiving it, I read your piece in which you worry that I may think you are having a mental breakdown. I closed the document with will, replied briefly by email, and shut down my laptop. I knew that if I started a reply in the file I would exceed my bedtime far beyond what is healthy. Now I re-read your piece and sense how tough it must have been for you to write because you are in pain and you are worried that your bad hand will constrain your work, maybe forever. In your email you told me not to worry: you had just had a bad day. Still, you are able to write "portable magic" received by me and in some way prepare yourself for another deep period of data analysis. Is seems that you are not worried at all about your ability to absorb yourself in data, thinking, and extending your thoughts by text production on diverse paper and plastic materials. So, I do not worry.

I wonder, however, how the Book will influence what we can do. Self-control and willpower used to do the job for me: I would be slow; I would complain; I would be bad-tempered; but eventually I would perform. I don't think that self-control and willpower will do any longer. I have lots of self and will and power, but they are of the kind that need to be fed from the veld. On the phone, you said that your attitude (no more bullshit, no more being "nice", no more obeying stupid rules) is a bit dangerous. There are so many versions of controlling your excesses,

and social science research is in danger of exactly that. Excessive life events (also called "data") squeezed into a neat article; weeks or months of excessive analysis transformed into a twenty-minute controlled conference presentation; the researcher body hooked up to a catheter, an IV fluid bag, and a nutritional probe to keep it alive through deep dives of thinking, reading, writing. Then walking out the front door in perfect make-up and a nice dress as if nothing happened. Pure self-control.

Nancy, who is arranging the conference stream on writing, asked us what a wormhole text might look like. Or a wormhole presentation. We cannot keep up appearances and cope by means of self-control. We need to be free. Willpower is fine. But the utterance that is brought about needs to be *honest*, just as you made King (2010) remind us. Relying on self-control is a risky strategy. I disconnect from the veld. I used to keep working and writing despite disconnection (maybe reconnect a bit, maybe not), but this is not possible right now – or ever again?

This is what I can do with "self-control" and "excess":

> I am interrupted by an email telling me that the assessment committee for the associate professorship has been approved, and here I am, absorbed in writing the Book and *not* writing my conference paper. Writing the Book right now is me connecting to the veld. It is life or death. As you wrote: "Most of us have had the pleasure of losing time when we write, perhaps even to feel as if we emerge from a deep dive to the surface, refreshed, when we are done with that day's work." But I am not at all done with that day's work. The assessment committee doesn't know, however, so what the hell.

Back to "self-control" and "excess".

When I left home at the age of sixteen, wild and vulnerable, I took with me one of my mother's old books. It has a front cover in delicate rose and an ink painting of a girl with a small waist, pointy breasts, and a ponytail, sprawling in an armchair. It is a book written as some kind of motherly conversation with the newly invented phenomenon: the teenager. I have read the book several times since I was a girl and it has had a revival in my adult life. Maybe because my youngest just turned thirteen. (In school, she is reading a LGBT-themed novel, which is pretty "in your face" as she puts it. Times have changed.) As ever, I find my mother's book entertaining and educational. My entertainment is not of the intended educational kind, I am sure: as ever, it sparks joyful rebellion inside of me. I never really knew what kind of manifestation this particular joy could have until I read a review in the newspaper of an exhibition called *Moist to Moist*. Now I have two wonderful texts and I can't wait to juxtapose them.

The exhibition *Moist to Moist* examines how body fluids are fundamentally transboundary because they are some kind of medium between subject and object, says the artist Miriam Wistreich to Eggert Scherrebeck (2014). They challenge our perception that identity is bounded. When artists use the abject in their art, they do it to investigate and exceed the bounded individual. This is also the case with menstruation.

Miriam collected her menstrual blood and displayed it in her room. Over time, it became clear to her that she no longer considered the blood as a waste product or as something she had abjected: "It was over there on the shelf, and I really felt like it was a part of me over there. Something that was still part of my body. There was no separation," she says. "The project challenges the conception of the subject and of identity as something well-defined, because in this way you can have your body scattered all over and still identify with the parts."

Inside my mother's book (Byrdal, 1952), there is a thin booklet by the same motherly author and with a preface by Sv. Felding, MD, dr. med:

> Through reading this booklet you are ensured sufficient knowledge about these important matters. It can be summed up as follows: in every respect the young woman should adhere as little as possible to the normal, regular menstrual period, and only in case of significant irregularities she should consult her doctor.

Back to the conversational tone as we know it from the "mother" (un-bloody) book:

> Never use cotton wool! You can buy pretty, small belts in pink rubber band with a buckle that "holds" well and does not rust when washed. Find the right size. If it is too large, it will show in a tight skirt or slacks. And although, admittedly, there is no shame in menstruating, you do not want anyone to discover. It's a private matter – something you keep to yourself!

DEEP DIVES OF THINKING OR WHERE DID ALL MY BODY PARTS GO?

I sit here, angry and feeling sorry for myself, and then your text arrives and I am instantly in a better mood: I snicker at your quotes and examples and I can't help feeling so immensely lucky that I have had the pleasure of learning how I might feel free. I think my sense of danger stemmed from the fact that I knew that we (I) approach the point of no return more and more each day. In the beginning, writing in the Book was fun and felt good and needed. Now it's a part of my body/thinking/brain and I need it as a form of transitional object, just like kids need their favourite teddy bear or comfort blanket. I know that at some point (probably when we publish it), I won't need it anymore; I know this because when we're ready to make all this life and thought public, I will have grown a thick enough layer of skin to just not give a fuck what anyone might think about an academic writing as if she was an author (aka me). As if this was what she wanted to *do* and not just a way of disseminating results.

When I read your text about the menstrual blood, I immediately thought about death. Weird, isn't it? But that's where my mind went. To death, my mum's death, and how parts of my body died in a way. Not in a touchy-feely kind of way, although I am sure they also did that, but in a very serious and biological way. If we are to believe that we are relationally connected, biologically, through our mirror

neurons, I can't help thinking about all these connections that my mum and I have formed over 37 years of connecting. She was my prime witness and my first, real relationship (her and my dad split up when I was six months, so I think it is safe to say that in these formative years, my mirror neurons were primarily activated by hers). I imagine them activated by each other, reaching out and connecting, like weird action at a distance (there he is again, Einstein, he keeps popping up and reminding me that I need to read more books on physics). What happened to these connections when she died? Did they just know to stop connecting, reaching out? I know the brain is plastic, and I imagine them rather quickly redirected and attuned to others, but there is something immensely sad about the image of them searching and not finding.

One day, perhaps three years after she died, I registered a body that looked like her on the street. I deliberately use the word "registered", because I didn't *see* this person: something that was not my conscious self "saw" this woman and I only realised it a fraction of a second later because it felt like I had had a stroke or someone had sent a powerful electrical charge through my brain. At first, I got scared by the jolt of white electric current in my head, and then I saw her and I had to hold back from crying. I could easily see that this was not my mum, but the physical resemblance between the two women must have been sufficiently large for something (mirror neurons?) to react. As I write about it now, I realise that perhaps it means they weren't dead. Just hibernating, ready to react if they should encounter her again. In a way, this is comforting and very sad at the same time.

CHAPTER 5

THAT'S OKAY, THAT'S LIFE!

LOVE NOTE TO MY SUFFERING

Today on the phone, you told me that you were going to spend some of your "ten per cent disabled" compensation on a beautiful ring for your "shitty hand" and then you would marry it and rename it. Most of the compensation, you will spend in Oxford with your family on Easter break. I know you love this place and the knowledge, wisdom, and beauty it holds. This is just the right way to spend your compensation. Comforting and sad at the same time, just as you wrote yesterday. There is so much truth in embracing suffering and beauty in one hug. Indeed, our brief talk over the phone had both. Karen, one of our friends, just had a severe bike accident. I did not know and you asked if you should bring her flowers from the two of us. Then you told me about the ring and your Easter trip and asked if I had read the Wallace quote you sent me yesterday. I had not because yesterday I was absorbed in mundane problems: that fucking mortgage loan decision that I suspected was fine and would allow us to sleep at night… now I feel undecided. In uncontrolled moments, I consider asking my ex-husband and sense the comfort and then, "a fraction of a second later" as you put it, realise that this is not an option in my life anymore. An injured friend, an injured hand, an injured heart. Yet what I remember from our talk is laughter. What did we laugh at? I don't know, but I know the comfort I took. Things can be so comforting and sad at the same time. That's okay. That's life.

I open Wallace's quote. It is from an interview with Charlie Rose, in which he talks about David Lynch and other great artists: what they do, he said, is be entirely themselves; they have their own way of "fracturing reality, and if it is authentic and true, you will feel it in your nerve endings" (Manufacturing Intellect, 1997).

We all need to be great artists in our own life, fracturing reality in our own way. We also need to put reality together in our own way; juxtapose texts about menstruation; associate menstrual blood with death and loss; tell stories about things we do not understand when we are supposed to disseminate research "findings". Last night, I did not dream of mortgage loans. I dreamt that a friend of mine who is pregnant and lives on a hill was going to drive me home in a tiny car. It was snowing and I told her to stay on the hill and that I would go by bus. Just then, a bus comes wobbling by, its rear end slipping to the side as it drives into a snowdrift. It stops and I enter. I ask the driver what to pay, and he says: "an egg".

I have been thinking about that egg all day. In a strange way, it feels more important than the mortgage loan.

CHAPTER 5

CO-HATCHING UNCONTROLLABLE CREATIVITY

I love your dreams. As I read them, they convert to images in my mind. This one has an almost cartoon-like character to it: the tiny car driven by a pregnant woman down the hill in the snow. I imagine you all cramped in there, your nose almost touching the window screen while your friend tries to get the car free from the snow and you saying: "Don't worry, I'll catch a bus." And then, miraculously, a bus appears. And the door opens and the bus driver looks at you with his "are you coming or going?" expression; he's seen it all before and he just takes people places without concern for who they are and what their story is. But the price is an egg.

Seriously, an egg? Your subconscious is worried you might not get the message, so the symbols are like big, red, blinking lights flashing their message. Let's examine the evidence. In your dream, your "friend" is pregnant, lives secluded from town, and drives a tiny car. (I am thinking she is your way of thinking about your past in suburbia/"nesting"/"the too good mother", as the wolf lady Estes would say.) She offers to drive you (seriously: she's pregnant, it's snowing, and her car is tiny. Woman, you need to think about yourself first), but you are responsible and decline her "too good offer". Your trip back to civilisation can be made by bus (shared public transport, the sensible choice). You ask what the price might be and you are told: an egg. Eggs are powerful symbols: they are fragile, they hold potential life, they are packed with nutrients, and you need to nurse them, keep them warm and safe for whatever is inside to come out. Thus, they are often associated with creativity, potentiality, life, but can also be seen as symbols of wanting to stay "in the womb", so to speak, or of great changes, the stage where you are on the verge of moving from one state of being to another. What I notice about your dream is that you didn't pay him your egg, and you kept thinking about your egg long after you woke up.

Something is stirring, moving about in there while you are sleeping, and it wants out.

HOMEWORK

Upstairs in my grandmother's house was the big bathroom. There is a series of photos of my cousin and I, both of us about five-years-old, in the bathtub. One shows us pouring water onto the floor using big measuring jugs. Our faces are serious and concentrated. Another shows us side-by-side, him looking directly into the lens with a cool attitude and an arm around my shoulder. I remember that day. It is not just because of the photos. I remember the fascination and disgust when looking at him drinking the bathwater from the measuring jug. I wonder who the photographer was. Obviously, someone who did not bother to interfere with our efforts to empty the tub. Someone who put the camera away and willingly mopped the floor.

Downstairs was the small loo. I loved it because of the plateaued toilet bowl, which provided excellent opportunities to explore closely the body's most fascinating waste matter before flushing.

In spring last year, at the point of no return, I went to a retreat monastery to escape from doing what I knew I had to do. I had to end my marriage and I wanted to make time stand still. Not that I liked the presence of that particular time, indeed not, but I disliked the future even more. It was just a week. I was supposed to write (this was *work* and not *life*) or, bereft of productivity, maybe sense some kind of inspiration, peace, or even spiritual healing that would make me strong enough to cross the threshold to the future, terrifying as it seemed. Instead, I visited the past.

After days of sleeping and moving the few metres from my wonderful, ceilinged cell to the kitchen to the library back to my cell only to sleep more, I looked up the address in the real estate advertisement and went for a drive. It occurred to me that I had never before gone for a drive without telling anyone I was leaving, without telling (or even knowing) where to go, and without giving any information about when I would return. I felt lonely and liberated. Two hours later, I let the car roll slowly to a stop on the roadside, put the gear in neutral position, and applied the handbrake. To the right on the gravel entrance was a dark blue Toyota Avensis. To the left was the "For Sale" sign. There were recently planted pansies in pots up the doorsteps. "For Sale". 896 days lay time, the advertisement said. The people who live here have tried to move out and move on for two-and-a half years. Stuck. What do they dream of and how do they spend time in a house they want to sell? I tried to imagine. This was my grandmother's house, or rather, it was my grandfather's workplace. His clinic was here and she lived here because she was married to him. Maybe she, too, wanted to move out and move on? Her only means of transportation were the pills. Her destination, numbness. She was stuck, for much longer than two-and-a-half years.

The road sign said: "Ferry port, ten kilometres. The ferry leaves every twenty minutes." I ended my observation, drove the ten kilometres, and parked in the line-up space with the sign: "Travellers for the ferry". Was I a traveller for the ferry? I turn the car and park in a greater distance from the pier. The ferry enters the dock and releases its travellers, or rather, traveller: a white minivan with "Kurt's Construction" written on its sliding door. There are three cars in line for departure. A fourth drives right onto the ferry as it leaves the pier. Four cars? Every twenty minutes? I cannot imagine what they are doing on the other side in an even more desolate part of the country. It feels like I have a tiny polar bear cub inside my chest, scratching mournfully. I am stuck.

Two weeks later, I wrote:

> It's been a while. Reading Elisabeth St. Pierre's (1997) piece about homework makes that "click" sound inside of me. It is a "connecting from the inside" click. St. Pierre writes about travelling back to the place she was born, her home region, and how this is identity work because those women in her home city taught her how to be a woman. The story does not begin and end, she says: it is there all the time and she is the one who pops in and out of it. She reflects on not being able to write the conclusion of her doctoral thesis. I wish

> I had read this text when I struggled with my own conclusion. Conclusions are authoritative, and that was precisely why I could not write it. I did not want to finalise, as Mikhail Bakhtin might say (Helin, 2015). I told you and Karen about this, and because we recorded it on my phone, it turned into data for our paper "Borrowing Brainpower" (Wegener, Meier, & Ingerslev, 2014). St. Pierre talks about "circling the text" and "nomadic writing". This is what I do, this is the only thing I *can* do*:* I can write in circles. It is meaningful not because I decipher *a* meaning, but because I can express myself free from chronology, cause and effect, and forced progress.

Hence, this is my life free from chronology: daughter hugs cat. Husband moves out. Son organises movie night, cooks lasagne for everyone, and chills out, entwined with girlfriend on the couch. Friend takes me to the sea. This is something. This is my life. Most of all, I was scared of loneliness. I am less secluded than ever.

My grandmother is here with me all the time. What does she tell me? It is not a narrative. It is a nomadic walk across time and place, without beginning, without end, outside time. Neither collapse nor edification. It is just something I need to write, both her and me beyond chronology. It is St. Pierre's "turmoil of time and place". Time is not progressing from one generation to the next. I need to write to examine the fire, as it is. The fire is a generative, creative, and destructive energy outside time and space, merging generations until we do not know who is who. "Moving towards the outside", St. Pierre writes. What does she mean? What is the "inside"?

We need to write more about *Kairos*. Timing. This is not *Cronos*, chronology. I am going back into my grandmother's life and I find the fire and myself. That fire is deadly destructive if you ignore it and do not learn how to channel it. Anaesthetics may appear as the only weapon to kill the fire, but pills and booze just prepare you for an even bigger explosion. One that is lethal. That is why we also need *Cronos*: we need to learn.

HOMEWORK TWO

I read your text and I had the strangest and most rare feeling. You did two things: you wrote about your grandmother and your marriage and your retreat and then, through the words you chose and how you formed your sentences, you created a textual figure (sorry, I have no other words for it: it has an outline or shape, a size, and a texture. In my book, that's a figure). This textual figure has sharply defined contours that your words outline: you write about certain things and leave out others. However, the way you wrote this piece, the words, the composition, the rhythm of the text, the events that you share: together, they outline not only their own figure, but also hint at something more. This something more, not unlike Brian Massumi's (2002) "ghost surplus value", is what we could call the *surplus meaning*, another figure standing right next to the visible one, only detectable through its relation

to the other's existence. This figure is beautiful: it's like a sculpture that fills the viewer with sorrow or longing or a bundle of unresolved and mixed feelings that are overwhelming yet you can't take your eyes of it. I read your piece several times trying to "stay" with the figure and keep looking. In the end, I went to sleep and when I woke up, I knew what to write.

FOR ELLEN, MY DAUGHTER

It is early March 2013 and I am sitting in your great grandmother's room at the nursing home, where she has been admitted since January. After she lost her daughter, she decided she didn't want to live anymore, and she called us all and announced that her physicians had told her that it wouldn't be long. What he forgot to tell her (or what she conveniently decided not to know) is that if you still eat and drink, it actually can take quite a while. And she's lonely, your great grandmother: she lost her husband and her daughter. My aunt, your grandmother's big sister, is mad at her. For years, these women have been getting on each other's nerves, causing each other to be miserable and unhappy, and your grandmother tried again and again to make them reconcile, but they were too much alike and too stubborn and they never really did. They probably didn't think they would ever have to: why should they? After all, they had *her* to mediate, to listen to complaints, and to do the different chores around the old woman's flat.

But she did die, your grandmother – my mum, their sister, and daughter – leaving them both in sorrow, unresolved, and with no one to talk to. So *I* talk, as a sort of stand in: I sit by your great grandmother's bed in the sad room. We have brought several flowers from her living room including the beautiful blue-and-white porcelain pot that is on your window screen right now, but it can't hide the fact that this is a transitory place, a waiting room for death. Here, I keep her company for hours and we talk about when she was young, her marriage, and her kids – mostly things she regrets: this is her preferred topic. As weeks go by, she fades away, it almost seems like she sinks deeper and deeper into the bed. Her body loses all muscle mass, especially visible in her hands. Hands with no muscles look immensely fragile, like a soft, delicate fabric is stretched over a collection of bones. Again and again, we talk about the last months of your grandmother's, my mum's, her daughter's, life. It's painful and we cry, but I feel it is necessary to help her to come to terms with death: her own and her daughter's.

"Do you think she was in pain, Ninna?," she asks me. "No", I answer, "it was calm, almost beautiful, and we were all there in the end and held her hand as she died. It was a good way to die." "I am scared, I am *so* scared of dying alone," she says, and holds on to my hand. "You won't", I say, "I promise I will do my best to be here and make sure you have someone to the very end". "Why are you doing this for me?," she asks me one day. "Because you did it for me, grandma; I remember you so clearly taking care of me, when I was little. I remember sleeping over at your house, the one grandpa built, where the bedroom had the big purple flower

wallpaper. And I remember you made me feel safe and I loved being there." She smiles, content with this answer, I imagine. I tell her stories of playing in her sewing room with my sisters and cousins, of eating raspberries in her sister's garden next door, of how I loved watching her cook for everyone, and how I used to follow her around when she watered and talked to each and every one of the more than one hundred plants she had. Her house was filled with things: porcelain birds, rare plates with flower motifs, crystal glasses in a special cabinet: all the things that look like treasures to a little girl with a vivid imagination. The stories seem to make her less worried about dying, or at least happier while she is waiting.

Paradoxically, while the interaction between me and her is peaceful and very meaningful (I feel like I am doing the good, hard work of helping someone to die; work that it seems is forgotten or put aside these days), the decay of her physical form takes more and more presence in the room. She talks less, she is drifting more and more in and out of consciousness, and her body takes on a life of its own, like a split between the two (body and soul?) is growing every day. Her lips are dry to the point of cracking, but she doesn't have the strength to swallow. So I take one of the specially made pink little sponges on a stick, wet it, and wet her lips, over and over. The tiny droplets of water that trickle into her mouth are refreshing: I can see this on her face. As this is not my first death, I know that even though I have an instinct to feed her and give her water, this might be counterproductive at this point. Her body is shutting down, and attempts to keep it going like this would only cause her more discomfort or even pain. All of her organs are shutting down and they are affecting each other. Her lungs are the worst problem for me. Because she is not really eating or drinking, it is minimal what she pees or defecates, and she is wearing a large diaper in case she needs it. But her *lungs*: she coughs and coughs and I keep wiping thick, yellow-green phlegm from her mouth. She doesn't have the strength to do this herself. She sleeps with her mouth open for hours on end and sometimes, while I am sitting at the intermediary work station in her room, preparing my PhD defence, she stops breathing for periods that seem longer and longer. Each time I leave the computer and the work and go sit next to her, I just watch her, while I hold her hand or stroke her hair. Is it now? Is this it? Will she actually be able to go this peacefully? I hold her hand and talk to her, tell her stories, hoping she can hear me wherever she is.

But no, the coughing takes precedence: her body jerks, and although she doesn't wake up, it looks like it takes something out of her. Every time sounds like she is dying, choking in the most horrible way. In one of her increasingly rare moments of consciousness, she says: "What if I die in a cough? I don't want to die in a cough; it's so awful. Can't you do make them do something?", and then she's off again. I contact the nurses on her call button and they agree to send for her doctor. He arrives and examines her, but other than making sure she is in no pain, there is really nothing he or they can do, they tell me. The coughing is part of the process, they assure me, and it is increasingly involuntary. She coughs per reflex now, and I remember sitting next to my mum's bed for the last 48 hours when *her* breathing

changed. I start spending nights in her room at the nursing home, on a bunk-bed beside hers. I wouldn't say I was getting much sleep, because she coughs all through the night, and every time I get up and clean the repulsive phlegm off her mouth and lips, I almost vomit, but I manage to hold it back until afterwards, when I can go to the bathroom and clean my hands and wash my face. I look in the mirror and tell myself that this is just not about me and it is really irrelevant whether I find it awful or not: someone has to be here. Someone who knows her and loves her has to be here, and since my mum isn't here, the rest of us have to step up and do it. One day it will be me and I would want someone there as well.

One Sunday in the midst of March, I wake up to a message on my phone: she is dead, she died around eight pm the night before, but my aunt didn't want to spoil my "night off" (we've been taking turns sitting with her) by calling to inform me about her death. I sigh, but I am truly happy for her. I only wish I could have been there. I get the kids ready for school and ask my husband if he will go with me to the nursing home for one final goodbye. As we are walking across the parking lot towards the front entrance, my phone rings: "Hi, I'm calling from the IT department at Aarhus University. I'm calling, because at your PhD defence this Thursday, we can't promise you that someone will be there to make sure the Skype connection works. We know we promised it, but I am a bit under staffed. So… just so you know." For a split second, I don't know if this is a joke. I had almost forgotten about the defence: I had focused so much on saying goodbye. I say: "Listen. I am standing in the parking lot of my grandmother's nursing home, *literally standing in front of the nursing home*, because she died last night and I have to say goodbye to her. So, I don't really care what you have to do to solve it, just solve it. Call my department head if you have to, I am hanging up now." I turn off the phone and go inside, already leaving such irrelevant issues behind me.

I know what to expect – this is not my first dead body – but she looks so small and fragile, like she could break, and at the same time mummified. You wouldn't know it to look at this shell, but she was a feisty and strong-willed woman who was not easy to get along with and who didn't take orders well. She was ahead of her time and caught *in* her time with regards to the possibilities this afforded her as a working-class woman, and she was determined to change this for her daughters. I notice that her purple dress (they've already changed her clothes and made her ready for the undertaker) is not clean. It has little specks of dust, dandruff, or some other white substance, probably from when they had to drag it over her head and on to her body. Rigor mortis sets in and the body stiffens and gets cold quite quickly, and I wasn't here, so I don't know how long they waited before they dressed her. This annoys me immensely: she was always attentive to details and how things looked, and she would have been mortified. In a strange inexplicable way, this is the most undignified element of her death for me: that they did not make sure she was clean and presentable for receiving her last visitors. I go to the bathroom and fetch a cloth and meticulously clean the dress and tidy her hair. And then I go and sit by her bed for one last time to say goodbye.

I am not crying because she died, but because she wasn't very good at living. She was emotionally clumsy and hurt people with unthoughtful remarks that left scars for years. Once she told your grandmother, at that time a twelve-year-old girl, that jeans (the new hot fashion thing that all the smart girls wore) *weren't really for her: she couldn't "carry" jeans.* This stayed with my mum for a long time. When she told me, when I was about twelve, she laughed at it, but I remember being horrified: how could a mother say such things? Hurtful things? I just couldn't understand how *my* mum could be so considerate and sweet and nice, when *her* mum had been so clumsy, so uncaring? Was there no justice in these things, I wondered? Later I learned that my grandmother really did the best she could and that she made some brave and amazingly strong decisions for her daughters: decisions that were frowned upon at the time but that helped them throughout their lives. She and my granddad worked so hard for years to save up and scrape enough money together to send both my mum and my aunt to the private school in their town, where all the good teachers and rich kids went, at a time when educating girls was considered a waste of time and money in this rural area of Denmark. (Why bother? They were going to get married anyway and wouldn't use it for anything. These were the remarks she got, she later told me.) My mum, your grandmother, ended up in the local paper, shaking the principal's hand, and receiving a medal for being the student with the best exam results that year. I still have that clipping somewhere.

Then I think about you, Ellen, and your paintings. I am so immensely grateful that this uneducated, hard-working, and sometimes difficult woman had the foresight and the perseverance to make and stick to the decision to send her girls to school. Because somehow this decision, and all the good things that came out of it for my mum, were paid forward. My mum studied and studied. She took four or five different degrees and never stopped education herself. I learnt so much from her about how to raise kids and talk to kids and support kids, and now I think that what she learned from being her mother's daughter trickled down to me and my sisters, and hopefully to you and your siblings. The things that both of these women taught me are the foundation upon which I can say to you: *don't* focus on an education at all costs. It's going to be okay, and if you need it, you have a large, thick, and strong web of relationships suspended under you; we'll cheer you on as you do the thing that makes you feel as free as you clearly need to feel.

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After I wrote this text, I wondered why it was for Ellen. Then you replied this morning that the women element had been there all along and I agree. You reminded me that Estes (2008) writes about the thousands of years of accumulated knowledge that wild women have access to, and I don't know why but I *feel* that our Book is somehow connected to it: that this knowledge and this text touch each other sometimes, that we are tapping into things or describing, circling things that we collectively have known for millennia. That there is a time for things to live and for

things to die, and that this circle of life/death/life is so fundamental to us and to the experience of living that it can be discovered in all aspects of our existence.

I think a lot about the scary freedom and weird galvanising strength that comes from rising from the hardest blow, wiping the ashes of your shoulders, and keeping going. I now know that I can cope with death: I can be in that room and I can help the dying person and the decaying body. I have passed this rite of passage and I didn't fail. I also know the "too nice mother" has to die for the heroine to grow, and I practise, practise, practise being a mum that is not too nice – a wolf mum, one that knows when her cubs need a push and to be left on their own, what value and survival skills she is actually giving them when she teaches them the importance of maintaining your relationship to "the pack", and most importantly one that understands (because she feels the same way) the importance of freedom for being a healthy wolf.

CHAPTER 6

TO STAY WITH IT AND DON'T RUN AWAY

THE ALLOWANCE OF AN EVENT TO OCCUR

While intensely writing and extending this file, we also talk on the phone and send each other text messages. This morning, you texted me that is was about time you read Bollas. I don't know his work, so I browsed through a few reviews of *The Mystery of Things* (1999). Then I started writing and soon, a new version of your text from yesterday emerged in my mailbox. For the first time, we were writing simultaneously. I quit writing to read your text first. For the first time, I was scared.

What are you doing? You are taking me right to the deathbed and making me stay. I don't want to be there, I don't want to see, smell, hear, and sense death arriving. Yet, I know it is the right place to be, precisely there. To stay with it.

This is what you did. You stayed with it.

One reviewer, James Donnelly (2011), writes that Bollas extends Sigmund Freud's free association and free-floating attention beyond the therapeutic situation, which provides a radical paradigm shift in Western epistemology. Psychoanalysis is not a *method* or a *technique.* Likewise, St. Pierre says that research is not methods and techniques. It is far more, involving all aspects of life, or what she calls "transgressive data". We know that research is an embodied practice. A practice that transcends method and technique. Maybe we write on free-floating attention? Maybe we write *as* free-floating attention? The review says that Bollas's therapy is "the allowance of an event to occur" between client and therapist. Maybe our Book is exactly that. We know that what we are pursuing cannot be hunted down, captured, and contained. It only makes sense if *it* finds *us.* What we can do is to *be* there and *allow*. To stay with it and not run away. When we stay with it, we are freeing ourselves – and our daughters. Time and again.

ON HAVING THE COURAGE TO DIG DEEPER

Tonight I send you a Youtube clip of Louis CK and his talk in memory of his great idol, George Carlin (YouTube, 2011). He talks about how he listened to a CD of Carlin at a point in his life where he was at an all-time low and struggling. Carlin, CK explains, taught him to throw everything away and start afresh each year, but most importantly to say the things on stage, as comedy, that he wanted to say the most and that he was most afraid of saying (these were usually the same things). Louis explains how he started out one night by saying what he *really* felt like saying*:*

"I can't have sex with my wife because we have a baby. And she's an asshole, this baby. And I use to not get the whole 'babies in the garbage can' thing, but now I totally do." The audience just *reacted,* and he decided there and then that he would rather have *this* [a strong reaction] than indifference. After this, he never looked back from there; he just went deeper every year. "I started with the kids", he explains, "and then I dug *deeper* and started talking about my feelings, and then I dug *deeper*, and I just continued and then", he says with a smile, "it ended with my balls".

I find this Louis CK clip very inspiring and very anxiety-provoking at the same time. His advice seems to be: just dig deeper, talk about your feelings, what's *really* on your mind. It's much harder to preach than practise, and I can feel the members of the "itty bitty shitty committee" (Taylor, 2006) in my brain going "why should anyone care what you think or feel? Jesus, that's so narcissistic of you to think that this has merit for anyone else than you", and my deepest fear is that there is some truth in this. I have decided to try: to be brave and dig deeper and let what I really want to say take up more space in the Book. After all, this was the original idea. I just never knew that it would take me here.

JUST ANOTHER DAY AT THE OFFICE

To me at this point, it is all about flowing downstream and paying attention. This may be one way out of many for digging deeper. I think about your Grandma's deathbed every day and that your itty bitty shitty committee ought to vote "Yes – merit for everyone". I wish that one day I am able to write into it, but I must wait for the right thread to start the braid. Here is something that *my* committee is debating fiercely:

> Yesterday was a "Book day", although I did not write a single word. I did not get a chance to write, but it felt as if the Book was right beside me all day whispering: "Open me, write me, recount your life, I am allowing you – bear testimony." I sensed everything through the Book. Yesterday *unfolded* as an account in the Book, while I breathed the day in and out. This writing project has become not just a way of expressing myself and being in dialogue with you. Obviously, it is now a constituent in my life, far more than a container for feelings and thoughts to be melted and moulded. It has become a way of sensing and experiencing; it is shining its light on my everyday life and work while we are writing our everyday life and work into it. I woke up this morning and found myself narrating my early morning dream to myself as if I was writing an account for the Book, but this account is not about sleeping. It is about waking up.

Yesterday, Friday, was the culmination of a week of gruelling decisions, or rather indecisiveness, about mortgage loans (financial leeway or certainty), banks (overt or covert fees), and, not least, who can help me decide (or even better, just instruct me what to do). I will return to Friday and the presence of the Book, but first we need the preceding days. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, I visit homepages with an abundance

of general advice, each of which sums up that it depends on "Your Individual Situation". If you need personalised advice, please call. There are no pricelists and the absence of fixed prices tells me: This Is Gonna Cost You. My mum writes me an email asking how I am doing, and I reply that speculations about the monetary basis of my future life are taking up a lot of time and mental energy. I leave the advice homepages and go for another bank meeting with another nice banker. They are all nice with nice loan offers. Back home, I dig deeper into the bank homepages, finding appendices listing the allowance to be paid depending on the *loan-to-value ratio*, the number of years of *deferred amortization*, and, not least, *derivatives*. The more I read, the less I feel I am capable of decisions. I don't want to be in an *individual* situation! I mine my knowledge of friends of friends, neighbours, and colleagues with some insight into these matters and find none.

This is the reality of my life right now, and I *must* decide about this and move on. I realise that I am terrified. Really scared. It is soothing, in a way. This is only superficially about that fucking mortgage loan and the reliability of one banker or another. This is about me taking responsibility for all aspects of my life. On my own. Thursday, I go shoe shopping with my daughter. I sit on the sofa noticing thousands of snowdrops in the lawn. I cancel a conference trip. I call our friend, Karen who had the bicycle accident, to ask how she is doing. She does not answer. Later, she texts me that I can call after nine pm, and I do. She has just started working again, the wound is healing, and she seems so glad to talk to me. It's been quite a while. Before hanging up, I ask her if she knows anything about mortgage loans and she says that her dad does and that he is happy to help. She will ask him right away.

For the first time this week, I sleep all night.

Friday is my son's 23rd birthday. The Book wakes up beside me and does not leave me all day. I am driving with a colleague. He has a lot of publications coming out and is very busy giving talks, offers coming in, and officious students hunting him down. The Book is floating in the cabin, absorbing it all. At 10:32 pm, Karen writes to connect me and her dad, and I send him loan proposals and a bunch of questions about dependency on the *loan-to-value ratio*, *deferred amortization* or not and for how long, and, not least, *derivatives*. I watch the Youtube clip of Louis CK. I answer emails quicker and briefer than ever. I hang in my colleagues' doorways, coffee in hand. At 12:16 pm, Karen's dad writes back explaining derivatives, comparing all loan proposals, and points out one bank with the most favourable terms and conditions for Your Individual Situation. He also advises me to negotiate the costs and tells me how to do it. "With Warm Regards".

This is the end of my "gruelling decision week". He HELPED me.

I call my son to congratulate him. I call his dad. He congratulates me – our firstborn, it's such a long time ago. He says that he is so sorry for ruining my life. For ruining his own life. I say that he did not ruin my life. That he will get better, eventually. That I will never let him down.

***

I wake up this morning, The Book has been rumbling in the back of my mind for a few days now as I haven't written in it since Thursday. (Or, a better image: it has been quietly, consistently, following me around, hovering next to me, invisible to everyone else. Would you have seen it, I wonder? Will I see it next to you, next time I see you?) I notice that you sent me something last night, ten minutes past midnight (actually today, then), and I sneak out of bed and slide into my office chair, no glasses on, no breakfast or coffee or anything. I just start writing.

I loved your account of how you struggled with the bank decision (so much dark, dry humour), and I read your last sentence over and over again: "That I will never let him down." There is so much there in that sentence. Why would you feel a need to assure him you will never let him down, I wonder as I read it. I read it again, as if your words might have left hints for me on the page that I didn't get the first time. I start thinking about the bonds that having kids and history forge regardless of what *you* want. But also the freedom and the love (in a way) there can be in seeing events over long stretches of time – it took me back to when my oldest son was born and I had to figure out everything (renting a flat, raising a kid, getting an education) all on my own and all at once. I know the two situations aren't comparable, but what it made me remember (and I am really grateful for that, thank you!) is that out of all this and my years of frustration with his biological father, I am just filled with gratitude and care for this man. Because he *insisted* on the honest approach: he couldn't be a full-time father at that point in time. Somehow, this set me free. I raged and sobbed and was filled with disbelief over this, but he never wavered and I moved on and became a parent in my own way. In turn, this allowed him to become Jacob's dad in his own way, much earlier than I anticipated, and to build a solid relationship with him. Although I was initially frustrated, I *allowed* the event to occur: I let go. That's how I think about it now, in hindsight, when everything looks easy. I breathed and lived through it.

It's funny how this book works. I had no idea I would write about this when I sat down. I thought I would write about how you live *with* the Book now; how it is there, in the frame, not making much of a fuss, but consistent, calm: *it is just there.* I realise as I read it that this is what it had been for quite a while for me; you were able to write my thoughts for me. (By the way, in my mind it is blue, the Book, with a beautiful pattern on the front page, very much like the Byatt book. It looks old, not worn, *old*: distinguished, like it has secrets in it. I am not saying this is how I *prefer* the Book to look. I am saying this is how it looks in my head.)

I have a piece "brewing": it is woven into the data analysis and material that I am immersed in at the moment but it is not ready to come out. It is about being in multiple places at once when you write: being back in the nursing home or on the oncology ward *and* being in front of your computer, writing. I feel this very urgently now, as I am listening through 42 hours of interviews, meticulously rewinding, listening again. I am in these rooms in so many different ways: the moods, the tone of voice. I attune myself to the people in the room and what they bring to the situation. I can hear it in the recordings. They are so different in how loud or soft

we speak, how much we are interrupted, how long the pauses are, how we laugh, curse, or almost choke up. I thought this was what I would write about. When I am working on the material, I long to write in the Book, but apparently what *I* want does not matter. It is not a voluntary act, writing: I can't *will* a piece into the Book. It will arrive when it is good and ready.

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The board of directors of The Itty Bitty Shitty Committee of What Proper Academic Life and Work Look Like invites all shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting that will take place simultaneously in Ninna and Charlotte's brains at any time. The Meeting will be wormhole transmitted. The Extraordinary General venues will be open for registration at any time. The number of quorum of 50 per cent was not met at the previous Extraordinary General Meeting, and thus the Board was not able to validly discuss and resolve the agenda outlined below. Accordingly, Ninna and Charlotte kept writing the Book and even managed to intensify their work.

Shareholders who wish to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting must be registered in the share register of the company maintained by We Are Entitled. A request for such registration along with a notification of attendance at the General Meeting must be submitted in sufficient time. Forms for notification of attendance and proxy forms are available and will also be sent out to registered shareholders. Shareholders who have other questions regarding the Extraordinary General Meeting in Ninna and Charlotte's brains may also contact Vice President Miss Detergent Smug.

The Extraordinary General Meeting is convened to discuss and resolve the following agenda:

1. Meeting is called to order.
2. Election of a chairperson for the Meeting.
3. Preparation and approval of the voting list.
4. Approval of the agenda.
5. Election of two persons to verify the minutes.
6. Determination of whether the Meeting has been duly convened.
7. The President and CEO's presentation of the background and reasons for the new resolutions.
8. Presentation of documents pursuant to Item Nine on the agenda.
9. Resolutions on:
    a. what do we accept as proper research matters;
    b. what does and what does not belong to the category "data";
    c. a revision of our "stick to the plan" guidelines;
    d. approval of the resolution by the Board on the new regulations.
10. Meeting is adjourned.

CHAPTER 6

UNHOOKING

I was a bad sister. I tormented my cute little sister who was so innocent and just wanted to sit in my room quietly. I was so annoyed at her big brown eyes admiringly looking at me, and my mum and dad at the periphery silently cheering: be nice, take her in, be a good sister, be GOOD. I don't remember any of the bad things I did to her (I remember a lot of adventurous playing), but I remember my mum once chased me round the dining table. I have no idea what she might have done to me had she caught me. She never beat me. I neglected my sister, no doubt. I was condescending. Our uncles said: "She is so pretty, and you, you are so clever." One uncle still recalls every time we meet: "Oh, you were so clever. You could barely walk, and we said 'turn on the radio', and you toddled over and pushed the button."

I didn't care about being clever. I wanted to be pretty!

Still, I also wanted to be clever. I sensed that pretty is just something you *are,* but clever is more creditable because it takes an *effort.* Honestly, I wanted to be both. Even the label "clever", however, imposed a problem as I had this insidious feeling that it was much too easy to be recognised for my cleverness. I did not really do anything and still, they all fell into a swoon. I wanted to scream: "Get a grip! Expect a bit more. You are satisfied already, teaching me to be satisfied too, not explore further, not strive. But this is nothing, *nothing.* You do not know me *at all.* Pay attention to who I really am."

When I mocked my sister, my mother paid attention. This is classic, isn't it? Then, one day, she said something that was worse than being beaten: "Even though you don't love her, could you at least leave her alone?"

I knew this was wrong. I loved my sister madly from the purest place of my heart. In my heart, from now on, I also knew that I was a horrible human being to torment somebody I loved.

I don't want to be crippled anymore. In an interview with Saundra Goldman (2014), Natalie Goldberg talks about unhooking. This is what I am doing. Unhooking. The path to freedom is not solely riding a hot air balloon joyously throwing sandbags overboard. It is also sitting in a dark corner, hunched over, slowly pulling out hooks from your heart.

UNHOOKING TWO

I am in the midst of deep dive thinking and I haven't written in the Book for days. This morning I thought about it and I thought: "It is okay, I am doing something else, right now, it is okay that I don't feel the feverish need to write *all* the time, it's not like I am abandoning it, I'll come back to it", and I felt good about myself because I could have this mature and balanced relationship to the Book – a relationship I thought had been a bit on the problematic, addictive side.

Then I went downstairs to get lunch and I saw you had written me an email – "Fuck! This hurts. But we are doing it together" – and I told myself I could just read

it, while I had my break: "I am sure I can manage. I don't *need* to respond, it's not like I can't control it." Here I am, writing away, less than 45 minutes after you sent me your piece.

It was your last sentence that did it: the image it made in my mind, of you *sitting in a dark corner, hunched over, slowly pulling out hooks from your heart.* I knew that I had to share how this resonated with me. I have never read about unhooking, but I could *feel* the pain of sitting there, in the corner in the dark. I know how I feel: I am sweaty from the fear of the pain and from the exercise of control it takes me to grab a hold of that hook, that old hook that's been in there for so long that it almost feels like it is a piece of me. I can almost convince myself that it doesn't really do that much damage; I can just leave it there; it is stuck, anyway. I also know that I am fooling myself. It needs to come out, and I reach in and grab it with both hands, they're bloody now, and I need to stick my hands into my chest cavity, under the edge of my sternum, move flesh, and muscle, and skin to make room so I can pull it out, and I need to do it fast, because blood is already trickling onto the floor. I start by pulling ever so softly, but even the smallest movement makes me moan loudly in pain: it's like my whole chest is moving every time I try pulling on it. On the floor beside me are the smaller hooks I managed to get out (of course I started with the easy ones, to get a success story under my belt), lying in a pool of blood, like surgical tools, tossed carelessly one by one in the middle of the procedure, blood splatters around them on the floor. And there is no way around it: either I pull it out, forcefully, in one go, or I leave it in there, knowing for the rest of my life that it is there, moving around in my chest, dangerously close to my heart. What kind of choice is this, anyway? So I take a few deep breaths and I grab it with both hands and I pull, hard, in an outwards movement, away from myself. I keep pulling, even as I am shouting my pain, just like a woman in labour. I keep pulling, even though I am crying and I want to give up and just get someone else to do all the hard work. I keep pulling, even as the hook latches on to a portion of my rib and resists the pull – and then in the end, it is out! I don't feel free, though, not at first. I feel wounded, as I am. I feel like I have just pulled a big, metal hook out of my chest and that I have a gaping wound there that needs immediate attention if I am not to collapse and bleed out on the floor. So I dress it is well as I can with whatever I can find and I slowly crawl out of the corner and into bed where I sleep and try to recover.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Two academics writing about scars, fresh wounds, hooks, and freedom – why are we doing this? One answer is that we did not know what we started before it was in full swing, and now we can't stop it. I knew that I interrupted your deep dive thinking, and still I posted my piece right away. I was so grateful that I could write this to another human being in the moment and not just to an imagined future audience or to myself in a diary. I cried while I wrote it, and I cried even more when I read your reply. These were tears of pain and acceptance, of dealing with life. It was okay

because I could write it. Not because I could write *about* it. We are even learning to make writing happen. Getting out of the way, as Goldberg says. Writing this way makes me feel connected. To you and to the veld of creation and to who I am about to become.

SYNCHRONIZED

Finally, I am able to relax. To not work. I even watched TV. Nina and I watched this feel-good movie, *It's Complicated* (Meyers, 2009), in which Meryl Streep is having an affair with Alec Baldwin, her ex-husband. Streep's character is so successful and self-reliant, their kids have good genes (as Nina puts it), and Baldwin is overweight and rather pathetic (still good-looking, though). In the end, of course, she does not want him back, and she walks in the rain under a large umbrella with her architect, played by Steve Martin, who is supervising the building of the extension of her already big and gorgeous house. Target groups: I do not think *any* that includes men.

I had a great time. Nina stayed for the whole one-and-a-half hours. She fell in love with the son-in-law (I did as well). Divorce is bad but joy is still here. This was healthy for both of us.

Days pass. It is the Easter holiday and I am taking time off. I am looking into the future and I am looking back. I realise I have been occupying myself with work for so long that now I get scared that I will never want to work again. Finally I am able to not care. Deadlines. Yes, these are someone's deadlines. Not mine. Well, they are mine too, but they are not *that* important. If I do not meet them, who cares, truly? Joy is here, even after not meeting a deadline. It is not that I overworked. (Okay, I *did* overwork.) I just used work as therapy and it worked well. I do not need therapy anymore. So, how do I get work done now that I have no desolation to drive me, and how much work is actually required? There is no standard metre of academic effort and that is what I love about my job. Now, there is only one path to follow and that is the path of trust. Eventually, I will do what I have to do and that will be sufficient. There is no one to ask for guidance.

I have spent the day with two old friends. One of them is taking care of her bipolar cousin. She is also creating beautiful embroideries based on her grandmother's patterns. Her project this summer is to build an insect hotel in her allotment garden. We talked about mental illness and even more about embroidery and gardening. We ran our hands through piles of yarn and browsed through dozens of pattern books. We made plans for my other friend's new embroidery project making use of hundreds of balls of yarn inherited from two aunts, both named Anna. My friends asked me about my yearlong (stalled?) cat embroidery – maybe it's about time to resume? I told them about my yoga retreat last weekend and my new (and yet longstanding) dream of setting up writing retreats. We touched upon funerals with or without kids, weddings with or without dads, life with or without being in love. We were not busy going home.

This morning, before leaving for my friends, I resumed reading Wallace's short story collection, *Oblivion* (2004). My ambition was to finish the first story about the focus group testing the chocolate cake. I did not manage, but I enjoyed the first 30 pages and then time was up. How is it possible to write like that? Which reader is supposed to latch on? This is both virtuous and demanding. In a long gone newspaper review of one of Wallace's books, I remember the headline, "The Man Who Could Write about Anything". I love that headline and I envy that man. Yet, how much is there to envy if this man who can write about anything finds life so unbearable that death is the only way out? Wallace wrote his ass off. He wrote about depression that it does not feels like grief or sadness or melancholy, but as if your whole body is fundamentally sick, as if all your atoms and cells hurt.

Wallace was 46 when he committed suicide.

I called this piece "Synchronised". The beginning does not synchronise so well with this ending. Yet, maybe it does. Not only do I have a cat embroidery in my closet; I also have a cat on my lap appealingly leaning towards the keyboard and distracting my writing. Where is this piece heading?

THE GLOVES ARE OFF

My son was depressed: he had a mood disorder, a school-induced depression (so it is termed). He is getting treatment and he is getting better, but it is serious stuff and I have never in my life been so heartbroken.

I have lost my mum. I have lost my grandmother. I have had a child, unplanned, with a man who was not ready to be a father. But I have never been this heartbroken.

We went to Oxford with him and all his siblings and he was so immersed in what all the parent manuals call "comforting and soothing activities": they played board games, played in the park (sunshine and exercise are good for your depressed child), we went for walks in the old neighbourhood, and to his favourite museums. He had such a nice time that when it was time to go home, he plunged temporarily into despair. It is the only word for it: he despaired because good things come to an end, because people you love can die (yes, he took my mum's death as a hard blow), and he despaired because his mood may change so dramatically and leave him feeling at the mercy of his body/brain/chemistry/feelings that he cannot trust. When he is at the mercy of this, he feels it is too painful to endure and that he cannot go on. My stomach turned to ice as I comforted him. I have never been this heartbroken. We helped him the best we could: we took care of him, talked to him, we "love and accept him" (not to make fun of guidelines, but this is listed as a key point. No shit). We have taken leaves of absence to secure a "safe home environment", we provide him with healthy food and good sleep routines, and do not pressure him to go to social events or large gatherings if he is not feeling up to it.

Yesterday, my sister brought over two-thirds of the collection of family albums. It consists of twelve thick photobinders with pictures of all of us from 1972 to 1992. I looked at them before I went to bed and I had deep, deep dreams. It felt like the

strata of the dreams were deeper, somehow. I know it doesn't make sense, but I felt they came from a different place, like the colours and the material were from another pool altogether. I had the same kind of dream last night. I was walking through a coffee house with late-eighteenth-century-style interiors with my sister and my two cousins on my mother's side. We walk past a party of family members on my father's side and they call out: "Hi Ninna, come join us!" "I'll come by and say hi on my way out," I reply, and keep walking until we find a table in the back where no one is around. My cousins exchange disapproving looks. "Ninna, we're just going to come right out and say it. Go in there and say hi! It's your family, it's so impolite!" I turn to my cousin and say: "I don't do things anymore just to please others. I have done so much for others. In fact, I have worked myself to the bone for others and I am not doing it anymore." They look at me, taken aback by my comment, and murmur something about how it was just a small thing, a hi, and that I shouldn't take it personally; how hard can it be to say hi? In this part of the dream, time stops, nothing else moves, and I say: "Before you have helped another person die, you don't know. You *can't* know, it's like nothing else. It is the hardest work in the world and if you haven't done it, you don't know what I am talking about. We did this. We helped our mum die, her mother couldn't help. Your mother, my mum's *sister*, didn't help. We asked her for help once, *once,* and she didn't help, she made up an excuse, she was busy that afternoon, taking you to the train."

As I am writing this part of the dream, it hits me what it is about. I wondered all morning: "Why am I dreaming this? I am over feeling this let down. I am on the other side of this." Now I know: I am dreaming this because I feel like I am doing the reversed work now. I am helping someone return to life, stay vibrant, stay curious, happy even, and on the path to his future: to stay himself.

CHAPTER 7

LUGGAGE

A SORROW THAT SMELLS LIKE SPRING

The other day I thought of hospices. Why is it that a hospice is always located far away from everything else? Is it to isolate the dying from the rest of us, so we don't see them in our everyday life? Is it to give the dying a sense of already being outside the world, in a transitional place, not quite dead but not fully living anymore? The hospice my mum died in is set near the brink of a lake, in a clearing in the woods, outside the city. The building is small, almost star-shaped, with a garden in the middle, the shared facilities such as the living room and dining room in one half of the arms, with the private rooms in the other. This Sunday afternoon in February, I am sitting in the living room. It is empty but for me; the whole hospice seems quiet; even the woman two rooms along from my mum's has stopped calling out; perhaps she is sleeping or I just can't hear her (she calls for her family, for help, or just calls hallo, regardless of whether the nurses are there. Listening to her endless, tragic, and confused callings makes my mum worried and upset). Outside, a thick layer of snow has covered the ground and the blizzard continues. I am trapped here; there is no leaving the hospice for the next many hours, but it doesn't bother me: this is where I am supposed to be. Besides, what can happen? She may die, yes, but this is what we are expecting. She sleeps for long, deep stretches of time now, and I usually sit in her room, reading a book or listening to music. But today, I needed a break. I told the nurses I would go and sit in the living room for a while, and I curl up on the couch. I look out the window: the wind and the snowflakes are dancing, it seems, whirling around the house's edges, producing beautiful shapes. Close by, the forest is dark and threatening. If I didn't know better, I would swear the naked, black trees are moving in.

I've always had a knack for organising events: birthday parties, dinners, trips. In March, this skill puts me in situations almost fit for farce. For instance, as it is clear to all of us that my mum is now very close to dying, and as my little sister lives in Copenhagen with her small kids and my big sister doesn't want to handle it in the same way as I do, I find myself biking up the hill to the West Cemetery one beautiful spring day. I have an appointment with an employee of the cemetery, and after I have parked my bike, I go find him in his office. We walk over the grounds, he shows me the roses and the chapel, and asks me who I am here for. I give him a polite version of the story (mum, dying of cancer, preparations must be made), and he is pleasant, professional, but I am nauseous all throughout the talk. I quickly bike away, feeling guilty and ill-prepared at the same time. She *is* dying, and I know that there are

all sorts of decisions to be made, rooms to be booked, catering companies to be contacted (grieving people also eat). It's important for me that when we do have her memorial service that it is as nice as can be. In a way, I feel it is her last party and that she would have had feelings about how it would unfold. Also, I tell myself, the more you can do *now,* the less you'll have to deal with *then,* when she is actually dead. I have no idea how it will feel and how *I* will feel, so I prepare the best I can. Even death calls for a lot of organising.

We taste wine, we find a caterer, we get permission to use the large canteen in her work place, and we hire a woman from a non-religious organisation that helps atheists get the funerals they want. My sister and I meet to talk with her so she can prepare her speech. In the end, we give her a letter from all three of us to read: a beautiful letter my little sister wrote us to show the woman because she couldn't be there. When the day finally arrives, it's surreal. It is a sunny day and close family keep showing up to say goodbye to her dead body. The now sunny hospice garden fills with the people she loved; we lie on the grass and enjoy the sun and the warmth, the flowers, and all the birds that the garden is filled with. We talk about her and keep each other company, while people go in and sit with her one by one, to say their goodbyes. I remember calling my husband, first doubting whether the phone will work. It doesn't make sense that it does – how can *this* be reality? We meet with an undertaker who arranges to take her body to the morgue. After her body is no longer there, the hospice feels empty, pointless, and we go home.

I have trouble sleeping: I keep imagining her in the morgue, in the freezing storage room, cold and gone. After months and months of not leaving her side, all of a sudden no one looks after her. No one needs to – she's dead. But her body is still there. And I feel like I have abandoned her, left her alone. On the morning of the memorial service, I am as nervous as if I had a big, important exam that same day. I notice, and wonder: why am I nervous? Sad, I get that, furious even, but nervous? It's not like you can screw up your mum's funeral; pretty much any behaviour will be tolerated. Then it hits me: I am nervous because I know it will be hell and I really don't want to go. My house is filled with mourning family members and my kids' grief is much more than I can handle. I get my husband to take them and I bike to the chapel, an hour before anyone else. In the chapel, she's already there. Her body is in the centre of the room in a casket; I can't see it, but I know it's there and I realise this is the last time I will have any time alone with her. I sit down on a chair and look around. The room is beautiful and already filled with flowers. I helped arrange them so my grandmother's flowers are clearly visible. I know she will appreciate that. After a while, my sisters arrive, my husband, and the kids, and the chapel fills up with friends, family, and colleagues; many haven't seen her since she left from work that fateful Thursday in October and just never returned.

Here, years after her death, I have a dream. I was buying a house. It was old, massive, built in the 1910s, and in pretty bad shape, but it has a sense of greatness to it (it used to be a school), a dignity even, and I loved it instantly. In the dream,

I walk around inside the house, with my mum, an old, old friend, and my sisters. The downstairs has a large living room facing the ocean, only separated by an old ocean view road. A couple of girls walk by and I can hear them talking while they are walking on the pavement. I think: Hmm. That might be a problem: that everyone can look directly in here and I can hear everything that goes on out there. But it doesn't put me off, I still want the house. I walk around in the old, worn-down kitchen, and I find treasures: talismans from all over the world, made out of bone, jade, and wood. I gently place them on the kitchen table to show the others, but my old friend comes by and she almost doesn't give them the time of day; she even breaks one by accident. I scoop them up and place them back where I found them, knowing I will make sure they will survive the renovation. I go back into the large living room. It has three windows from floor to ceiling, all facing the ocean. I imagine how I will decorate this room: where I will put my sofa, how I will sit by the fire and look at the sky. All of a sudden, it is night and thunderclouds and lightning roll across the sky, and it is beautiful! After the rain, it's day again and we are outside the house, looking at the foundations and the neighbourhood. Renovations are already in progress: the cellars are drained for water and cracks in the walls are being filled. I look at the neighbourhood and I take a deep, happy breath to take in all the smells from the fruit trees in the garden and around the houses next to it: there are cherry trees, apple trees, and Mirabelle trees, and they are all blooming in shades of white and pink. I walk around, bare-footed on the wet, warm pavement that is speckled with flower petals from the trees, and I feel at home.

I wake up and start writing the dream to you instantly as I am afraid I might lose it if I go downstairs and talk to people or go about my day. I am sad, a sorrow that smells like spring: I miss my mum, and I want to live in the old house, surrounded by fruit trees in bloom.

NEWBORN GIRL SWATHED IN FLAG

A few days ago, a caretaker found a newborn baby in a garbage container in the backyard of a housing association. The baby was crying and that was why he took a close look into the piles of waste. There she was, a cooled and crying baby girl in a plastic bag, together with the placenta and nothing else. The caretaker called an ambulance and he was told to wrap the baby up to keep her warm. He found a flag in the basement and swathed her until the emergency crew took over a few minutes later. In the newspaper, it says that probably the girl was thrown into the rubbish chute in the entryway, implying she survived falling four metres to the basement into the container that was later drawn into the backyard to be emptied. It also says that she is in good health and that a foster family is ready to take over as soon as she is discharged from hospital. Next to the main article is a supplementary one together with a map with marked locations. Clicking the links, I read about other recently abandoned newborns, more than one each year. Most were found alive but there

were also a few discoveries of dead babies, including that of a lower body found in a gravel pit.

On the same day, my student writes to me to say that she has given birth to a lovely boy and that she will now embark on maternity leave. She has inserted a beautiful black-and-white photo in the email. I write her back instantly, congratulate and wish her and her first-born a great half-year in each other's company.

Why am I writing this?

One girl is brought to life in a staircase by a mother who puts her in a plastic bag, throws her in the garbage chute, and disappears. The media covers the incident with the few facts available and an abundance of speculations from neighbours and psychiatrists supplemented with archive material from similar incidents. One boy is brought to life in a hospital bed by a mother who takes him in her arms, poses for the photographer, and posts the photo to her Masters thesis supervisor. The back of police officers working behind crime-scene tape and a sleeping baby in teddy-bear linen and a striped blouse with rolled-up sleeves. The two images crumble and coalesce in my mind. These two human beings will grow up and celebrate birthdays the same day, will be the same age each day for the rest of their lives. What difference will the plastic bag and the teddy-bear linen make?

This morning, you called me, and once again, what I remember most is the two of us laughing. We write about death and pain and depression, and then laughter bursts out as soon as I hear your voice. Of course, it is because these writings are all about freedom and trust (which, as we know well, include pain and sorrow). We talked about your dream house. This is not a term referring to glossy magazines, but, of course, to the house in your nightly dream. I think you already live in that house. You are the one who knows how to handle the treasures. You know their value and importance. However, you need to find out what to do about those windows! You need the undisturbed ocean view, but you also need undisturbedness. You are not supposed to take in and care for everybody who happens to walk by. You need undisturbed time free from chitchat, hollow phrases, and platitudes. You need both visual and audio space to take care of the treasures in the house, and the house itself. You know how to do this and you have a whole bunch of healthcare practitioners waiting for you to convey to them a poem.

What happens to us when we conceive of our research participants and research material as precious treasures? We become the caretakers. Sometimes in the guise of a loving mother well prepared with a striped blouse one size too big, sometimes in the guise of a renovation worker paying attention to unanticipated noise from a garbage container.

It feels wrong to use a baby – especially an abandoned baby – as a metaphor. What I am working towards, however, is caretaking as a metaphor. This leaves me with the unbearable questions: where did the failing mother go and who is going to take care of her?

THE THINGS WE CARRY WITH US

Yesterday was the five-year anniversary of my mum's death. My mother-in-law was here all week, taking care of our youngest while my husband and I were working. One evening, we talk about my mum. She says it was so hard for her during the time my mum was ill; it was too close to home; she thought about the possibilities of her own death. She tells me she was worried about the kids and that she thought about how it was so hard on them. She asks me if I really think my mum wanted this: me, all worn down, the kids without a mum a lot of the time. "It was not like your mum to put herself first. Could you have told her you were taking care of your own family, just a bit more? Did you have that option?" I say I don't know when her brain tumours began to affect her, but that it was my impression she was glad we took care of her and that she savoured every minute she got. "I didn't feel I had a choice", I say, "and it's why I am sitting here today, relatively sane, because I know I did everything I could".

Afterwards, sadness lingers, and I find myself reflecting on it anew: *could* I have done more for the kids? What if I had taken more care of them and less of her? I am not really doubting my choice, but my mother-in-law's words keep popping up in my head, and for the first time in five years, I feel I really could have done more – perhaps? If I had tried? Should my responsibility and attention have been oriented more towards them? How are you supposed to prioritise? People who need help to die or people who need help to live?

THESE ARE NOT MY ROADS OR ZERO GRAVITY

This piece, which I named "Sensitivity", did not reach you because your mail program decided to categorise my emails as junk. We both found that genuinely funny and it sparked a new co-writing project which, so far, is just a title: "You've Got Mail". It will be about our writing and it is going public – The Book is leaking into the world. You know that when it has a name, it exists in the world. The piece that didn't make it to your inbox until we, over coffee, rescued it from the junk mail folder was about lucky incidents. The email about the Book was not alone there. Three other emails from me were carefully transported to your inbox. I did not anticipate how important our instant communication was until it was interfered. It is funny because my piece was actually about emails and similar kinds of helpful disturbances that flow into my thinking and writing. Well, here is the piece:

> I know I write a lot about lucky incidents. I am fascinated by pop-up windows, emails in the midst of low motivation, browsing from one link to another, and forgetting what I was searching for in the first place. It looks a lot like procrastination. I am more and more convinced, however, that it is something quite different. I am not able to tell the difference, only retrospectively, but I notice that I become more sensitised as time passes and while writing this book

> with you. Elisabet Gjerluff Nielsen, the Danish singer-songwriter, says that she is inspired by everything! In the morning, instead of listening to the weather forecast on the radio, she takes a short walk outside to sense the weather. She reads the local newspaper and the printed advertising that she brings in from her mailbox. She involves herself in her daughters' everyday lives. She bakes bread. All of it drifts into her lyrics. It's not that she is looking for something in particular. She is not *looking.* What she does, I think, is transact. I was fascinated by Dewey's (1916) term long before I actually understood its implications beyond pure biology. Now I have a clear sense of what it is like, and sometimes I cannot write if there is no transaction going on.

Yesterday, I embarked on a long-deferred task of writing an editorial for a special issue about surveillance that I edit together with my colleague, Thomas. I knew (or assumed) that I had to write about Michel Foucault, and I didn't want to. I am not an expert, but it was not *that* difficult to write one or two pages about surveillance and then link the four articles together. Nevertheless, I just didn't do it for weeks. To be honest, I didn't care if the issue was ever published. I even didn't worry (that much) about what my colleagues on the editorial board would think of me. Usually, I have friendly relationships with deadlines: I just meet them. No big deal. However, this resistance went on for weeks. Eventually, I confessed to Thomas that I was blank and that any ideas, prose, or bullet points would be highly appreciated. A few hours later, I received two pages about Foucault. Why did I spent weeks *not* asking him? I embarked immediately on the final part, linking the four articles to Thomas's text and to each other. I was not exactly transacting, but I knew I would finish soon. What a relief. Just as I pressed the full-stop key for the last time, presuming I was done, an email popped up:

> In conjunction with your recently completed financing agreement with us, we ask you to evaluate your experience. We continuously focus on improving our customer service – each time should be a good experience and create value for our customers. Therefore, we hope you will join this small study. It takes about four minutes to complete.

There it was, everyday surveillance! My mortgage loan struggle was finally paying off!

I copied the text and inserted it as an opening quote for the editorial. I searched my mailbox and found the parent satisfaction survey from Nina's school that I did not respond to despite several reminders, and the email with the review of the five best running apps of the year ("reading this will impact your workout immensely"). I inserted both and finished up with one more quote: "This Sunday, you bought morning bread from us. Please press the smiley that best describes your pastry experience." I then admitted that we had made up the last one and wrote a section about everyday surveillance and bridged it to Thomas's Foucault text.

The editorial ends this way:

> We hope the articles will inspire debate. Surveillance data are not innocent descriptions of reality. The ways in which we monitor and are monitored also produce reality and therefore produce us as citizens and consumers. To what extent are we free people with a free will? This question is as important as ever. Answer the questionnaires that pop up in your mailbox. Read reviews of the five best running apps and download one of them. Press a happy or angry smiley from the bakery. Or don't. We will not be watching you.

I had so much fun.

Is fun a reasonable request? If it is not there, I may not be able to work at all. Really scary.

This is the end of the "junk folder" piece. Today I do not pursue fun. I am certain that fun is only half the secret, but I am not sure what to name the other part. It feels like pain. Last week I was lecturing together with a colleague who is also an organisational consultant and psychologist. There is so much quick fixing going on in consultancy, and much therapy is about piecing things together, creating coherent narratives about our lives, and explaining the "reason why". This is so comforting but only for a little while. Soon the narrative wriggles, it becomes dusty, not really that convincing any longer. The obvious "reason why" must compete with several other "reasons why". Well, in the break, my colleague showed me a list of questions he uses in consultancy with people who want to reflect deeply on their life, as he put it. One of them was: you are standing at a crossroad looking at two signs pointing in opposite direction. What do they say?

I really, really hate questions like that! They indicate that you can narrow down your life to a choice between two things and that you can put a label on these. This is *impossible*. It does not apply to my life at all. Okay, my two signs say (I did not tell my colleague): "I want him back" and "I don't want him back". Sometimes, I go in one direction and sometimes I go the other way. Sometimes I turn my back on the signs and walk down the road towards "lost happy family". Sometimes I run right out on the green meadow beyond those two fucking signs that I did not put there. Who did that? Come on, and I will punch you in the face! I want my husband back because I miss being a happy coherent family, and I don't want him back because he does not contribute to a happy coherent family. I feel so betrayed. I know that lots of men and women betray their supposed loved ones. They fall in love with someone else; they cheat without falling in love with someone else; they overwork, they are mean or just ignorant. I may want him back, but the problem is that I am relieved every time he leaves the house. I miss him badly. Do I need to create a coherent narrative to move on? Does "move on" mean to choose one of the signs? I am sure that no one will support me walking down the road "I want him back", but I am not supposed to choose one sign or the other. These are not my signs. These are not my roads.

Yesterday, he was here cooking and dining for a few hours. Afterwards, Nina and I sit on the couch, each of us with our laptops. She says: "Mum, do you want to be a space sheriff or an intergalactic smuggler?"

After some thought, I decide on the intergalactic smuggler and that turns out to be a good choice: "You just have to keep prepared and when they make contact, you must transport contraband from one galaxy to the other. These are just things that people need elsewhere so your job is to make connections."

The next two days I do not need to work, because I am waiting for my space capsule to be built. Meanwhile, I work out and sign up for practising zero gravity.

"That space capsule really takes up a lot of space in the backyard," Nina says, and then interrupts herself: "Oh my, you can make prank calls."

While one of the other Simmers makes a prank call to her mum, I unobtrusively enter the space capsule, take off and disappear. "Oh no, you did not take your time to practice zero gravity," she says. "I hope you'll make it."

A LOVER

I once had a lover. He was a musician playing at my garden party with his band. He was handsome, the most handsome lover I've ever had, gentle, much older than me. On the edge of fame. He took me on gig trips. I felt like a groupie and it did not turn me on. He lived in a loft in the city. It was a spacious place and I loved hanging out there in the abundance of square metres and recording equipment. The remaining interior was basic: a dinner table, a microwave oven, and a twin bed. I was not in love. I was looking for something.

It did not last long but I found what I was looking for. So what was I looking for? Had you asked me back then, I would have said sex, adventure, maybe even indulgence. He took a photo of me across the table in a restaurant by the beach. I remember looking at that young girl in the photo: a stranger, tanned, messy hair, unrestricted. Why did he give me that photo? It is still somewhere in a box in the back of the cabinet, isn't it? It is no doubt the most seductive photo of me ever and I didn't do anything: I sat in that restaurant because he took me there; I ate because I was hungry; I did not dress up for dinner because I did not bring any change of clothing.

I still have that photo. It is somewhere in my cabinet or maybe it's lost just like that young girl is lost, was lost. And yet, it doesn't matter because he gave me something which I keep after all these years. He introduced me to Jennifer Warnes. I knew Leonard Cohen very well, but Warnes's album of Cohen's Song, *Famous Blue Raincoat* (1987), stole my heart and changed me forever.

I once had a lover. He gave me that album. I left him without a tear, but I kept Warnes's voice in my heart. It will never leave me: "I came so far for beauty. I left so much behind." I still don't know what it means but I know it is true.

I found what I was looking for.

ON BEING AN IDIOT, EVEN IN YOUR DREAMS

A few days ago, I gave a "member check" talk to the steering committee in my project. I had worked so hard to show the beauty of the data, used words like

choreography and movements in time and space, and expressed what I felt was due respect for the intimate knowledge that participants possess of their own work, while still emphasising what *I* saw and had analysed. After my trial talk for my consultant colleagues, they suggested we cut down the slide show and make my talk briefer, more on point. I know I have a tendency to explore and unfold details (I love the details! They often tell such important parts of the story). Against my better judgement, I agreed (why, oh why, did I agree?). Afterwards, as we left the meeting with the steering committee, my consultant colleague said: "You could do a bit better to own it more, to show all the data, the solidity of the knowledge base you are standing on. All the examples you told us came mostly to life in the talk afterwards." I got really hurt. And angry. I felt like she had changed the rules of game after we were done playing. Or as if she had taken out a bunch of measurement tools that we had not agreed upon using and had measured my performance and found it lacking.

Truthfully, I was angry because she was right. It was my talk, my results, and I had no business giving them authority to cut anything out of my slideshow. As I couldn't sleep that night, I read this book and came across a section I had written where I commit myself to being more badass, to not caring about what others think when I need to stand my own ground, and I was even more embarrassed about my self-betrayal. So now I know this and I am grateful for her comments, because it sparked this important learning: don't mess with how I tell my stories!

Last night, I had a dream. I was out to dinner with my kids, my husband, and my in-laws. In this strange dream, we have chosen to dine at a restaurant in a dodgy, club-like neighbourhood near a harbour. I am wearing a two-piece suit (skirt and jacket, like Jackie Kennedy) in bright, sun-coloured yellow. In real life, I would not wear this, even if you paid me. The dinner itself is insignificant; it quickly becomes just a frame for the dream. All the action happens in the corridors, the wardrobe, and the shared bathrooms. The restaurant, apparently, is located in a kind of sports facility along with a lot of clubs, so the halls are filled with drunk people and musicians. At one point, Ellen tells me I look like a banker in the yellow dress, and I ask my husband to help me change into something a bit more "me". In one of the bathrooms, he helps me put on a blue-green dress. The dress is made of a thick fabric; it is soft yet has its own structure. It has asymmetric markings/stitches that are supposed to be seen and they are placed in places where they highlight the female figure: the breasts, the waist, the curve of the back. However, the dress is too big; as he zips me up, there is leftover fabric all the way down my spine. I decide there is nothing to do about this, and we go back to the dinner. Here, everyone has started eating desserts: big cream-filled chocolates in all the flavours imaginable. I am late for this, but I manage to get hold of a few anyway.

The family fades away, and the next thing I remember is me trying desperately to find a free bathroom to pee in. At this point, I am drunk beyond anything appropriate for a family dinner. I stumble into the hallway and find a bathroom. There is a line in front of most of them, one is free, and I tumble in. I realise as I look down on the disgusting floor filled with urine and used toilet paper – almost curiously, as if I am

asking myself how this happened – that I am not wearing any shoes: I am in there only in nylon stockings. As I struggle to find two relatively clean spots of floor, my legs negotiating the slippery surface, squatting on the toilet, and trying to subdue the alcohol in my system to hold me relatively still, it dawns on me why there was no line to this bathroom: the door doesn't lock. In fact, it hardly closes, and I can see how people are looking to see what on earth it is I am doing in here. Then Ellen asks me from outside, in the hallway: "Why is your dress on backwards?" I look down, and to my utter surprise, she is right. My dress *is* on backwards! For the life of me, I have no recollection whatsoever as to how this might be, when I might have changed, and indeed under what circumstances. Did I do it in public? Did I ask some stranger for practical assistance? Perhaps, more importantly, *why* did I do it?

ON GETTING DRUNK, BEING AN IDIOT, EVEN IN YOUR DREAMS, PART TWO

A few days ago, I was so impatient about not recovering. I was not sick, but not well either, and it had lasted for almost two weeks. Together with the groceries, I bought a bottle of white wine, went home, and had a glass while cooking dinner. A voice in the back of my head said: "This feels weird. Take care, I think you have a fever."

But I did not listen and had another glass while setting the table and calling out for the kids. Over dinner, I asked Nina about the list of wishes for her communion. Did she finish it and send it out? She had problems, she replied; she found it hard to make a list. "What about a pet", I said, "maybe a puppy?" "Really?", she cried, "a puppy is the biggest wish in my life. I thought you'd say no." "Of course not", I said, "let's have a puppy".

The atmosphere was so enthusiastic: we were all excited. Even the big one promised to take part in the project. Later, alone in the kitchen, I managed to split my energy between cleaning up and signing up on a dating site. If I can have a dog, I can have a boyfriend too! The voice in the back of my head said: "Honey, I think you have a fever."

I sleep well and dream I am driving on the highway with an old colleague by my side. Instead of following the exit sign to our destination, I drive straight ahead and realise I need to continue. If I were to hit the exit road, I would need to drive across a brick bump that is there precisely to prevent people from doing that. So I continue along the highway and exit a little further to park in a multi-storey car park. We leave the car and I try to figure out what to do. I notice I am late and will not make it to my yoga class. I also notice that I forgot where I parked the car and I tell my colleague. She looks me right in the face and says, emotionless: "You are an idiot!"

I wake up with the worse moral hangover ever. I need to clean up this mess! But how? I don't have a life suitable for a dog: I travel, I get absorbed in work, I am pursuing freedom. I would never, ever run away from my promise to Nina. I get up and now the voice in my head is louder: "Honey, you are febrile. Admit you are ill. Take care, but you also have things to take care *of*."

I open my mailbox over breakfast. There are several emails from an unfamiliar address. One email welcomes me and encourages me to enjoy all the features; another one tells me I had ten users checking out my profile. A third informs me one user would like to get in contact. Panicking, I delete them all. What now? What if I receive more emails, what if they know who I am, what if they find out where I live? I take a deep breath, sign in to the site (I have to focus immensely while catching the password I chose at the periphery of my short-term memory). I delete my profile and instantly, I feel less febrile.

Having a puppy is not such a bad idea after all.

CHAPTER 8

SLEEP, PRETTY DARLING, DO NOT CRY

DELIBERATELY LETTING THINGS HAPPEN

You wrote about your mother's funeral and that you have always had a knack for organising events. I know it is from a sorrowful part of your writing and I should probably give you comfort by writing back to you about sorrow. Your account touched me and still does now when I reread it. I am so sorry for your loss and I did not reply. I do not really know what to say or do. I want to take you in my arms and sing you a lullaby. Someone who has a knack for organising is not easy to cradle in your arms. What I can think of today is writing about this talent for organising events. I don't know if I will succeed in making it into a lullaby, but I really want to because I like you so much. What is special about our relationship and our writing is that I am confident that even if I don't succeed, you will take some kind of comfort from what I do.

This talent for organising has always been a mystery to me. In a way, I envy it and at the same time, I admit I do not strive to acquire it. I don't even strive for mediocrity. I have never been the member of a party committee. I have never really planned a holiday. I have never redecorated a house or even a room. It's not that things do not happen due to something I do or say. It's not that I do not make decisions. But when it comes to parties, I often find myself with a mineral water at eleven pm, desperately thinking of polite ways to leave. I am happy to do the shopping, to cook, and clean up (in fact, dancing is the only activity that makes me want to stay, although I would never *promise* to stay for dancing). If I have a tiny talent for organising social events, it may be a narrow one for making an afterparty out of cleaning up, drinking the remaining wine from opened bottles, and preparing a tasty meal from the leftovers for the kids, sleepover guests, and people who happen to drop by. But that's not really organising, is it? To me, it feels like deliberately making things happen, inviting joy, taking the time needed. It may look chaotic, but it is not randomly messing around. It is like that Gauss quote that keeps following me: I have my solutions, but I don't know yet how to arrive at them. I don't *see* the steps, sometimes not even the first one, but I know where to arrive. The problem is that sometimes I doubt my destination because I can't find the path that leads me towards it. This seems to be the case in all areas of my life. This has costs, but also some advantages of which I try to make the most. I think a lot about it these days because I try to figure out how to work. I do work. I do take time off. I am looking for something (just like I did when I was involved in that love affair a long time ago). I don't know what is missing, but it has to do with motivation, inspiration, and

energy. I am disoriented. I know I have my solutions, but foggy weather destroys visibility.

I do not have a knack for organising, but I strive to have a knack for trusting the solution. Our friendship, our writing, and our unrestricted sharing of whimsical information show me what trust looks like. Maybe I succeeded in my lullaby ambition. The lyrics are about deliberately making things happen, inviting joy, and taking the time needed.

LEAN ON ME

Your text found me on my mother's birthday. This, I am sure, was no coincidence. What you don't know – cannot know – is that one of the songs we heard at her memorial service as we carried out the casket with her dead body was "Golden Slumbers" by The Beatles. If you don't remember it, it is worth a listen. While most of their songs can be found on the spectrum between playful or surreal, this song is sweet and full of sorrow. The lyrics, if I remember correctly, go something like this:

> Once there was a way to get back homeward.
> Once there was a way to get back home.
> Sleep, pretty darling, do not cry.
> And I will sing a lullaby.
> Golden slumbers fill your eyes.
> Smiles awake you when you rise.
> Sleep, pretty darling, do not cry.
> And I will sing a lullaby.

While we carried her out of the chapel, The Beatles sang: "Boy, you're gonna carry that weight. Carry that weight a long time." At the time, I was too busy carrying her casket and not looking at any of the sobbing people we walked by to be forewarned. As I read an article my sister sent me today, I realised they were actually quite right, The Beatles. The article was by David Ferguson, a journalist, for the *Guardian*, and it was called: "We don't 'Lose' our Mothers. The Reality is More Violent than That" (2016). Ferguson's argument is that our mothers are our first homes, our prime witnesses, where we come from, and that the term "losing" is inadequate – we didn't accidentally leave them at the shop or forget where we last had them. Instead, Ferguson argues, grief on this scale is like a physical object that the body must expel, not unlike shrapnel from a landmine, moving around in your body years after the incident itself, potentially damaging new areas as it works its way around your body over time.

The violence with which my mum's death hit my family and me, and the way I have to carry that weight around a long time (we all do, even my youngest child), do feel like being wounded by pieces of shrapnel. You don't know if today's events and the movements of your body will trigger movements of the shrapnel that might cause it to lodge into bone, nerve, blood vessels, or just muscle and fat. Indeed, it

might stay perfectly still for days, years even, and you might think everything is fine. The reality is that it has left you a bit broken and damaged in ways that are not visible to the unsuspecting onlooker. In the company of people in the know, fellow veterans of war, you can relax, joke even, and you can share the gruelling details of how you each got your wounds and how you manage daily life among whole people. In case you are wondering, the Book, writing with you, is an example of this kind of sharing for me.

For me, the most painful experience in all this was not her death. It wasn't even her memorial service: I was too busy making sure everyone was taken care of, that there was enough wine, and that my kids and my grandma were okay. No, the worst for me was *after* "Golden Slumbers", when Bill Withers's "Lean on Me" was playing, and everyone went to say goodbye and place their flowers on her casket in the mortician's car. One day, driving home from radiation therapy, while Janne is in the middle of a left turn, she suddenly says: "Lean on Me with Bill Withers. That's what I want playing at the funeral, girls." Stunned, we say: "Okay, Mum, sure. Whatever you want. We promise." And then she never brought up the subject again. She kept saying: "I just want to take it one day at a time."

Back in the chapel, I help my oldest children, Jacob and Ellen, give her their flowers. They each brought a lily, her favourite, and they place them on her casket in the hearse and walk over to my sisters and my dad. I go back into the chapel and sit down next to Jeppe, who is still sitting at his chair. Troels is next to him, stroking his back gently while Jeppe is crying. "Come on, Jeppe, let's go say goodbye and give her your lily," I say. He rises, I put my arm around his small body, and we start walking down the aisle. As we reach the chapel door and he sees all the people standing in a circle crying, and the black car with all the flowers on her casket, he turns around and clings to me, crying hard now. His legs can't carry him, so I lift him up, and while he is crying into my shoulder, I tell him in a soft voice: "Jeppe, its okay. I am giving her your flower now. Its okay. She loved you so much, its okay." As the car slowly drives away, I am left standing amidst all the people but feeling completely alone, with Jeppe wrapped around me, still crying hard. I don't want to let go, so I carry him to the car and we drive away.

I read a book this weekend. It's called *Smoke Gets in your Eyes* (Doughty, 2015) and it's about death and work at a crematorium. It was filled with all the details people usually really don't want to hear. I send you texts with tiny snippets: *did you know? Grinders in crematoria are too large for babies' bones? You have to grind these by hand!* You reply that it raises your quality of life to receive texts like that from me and I laugh, and next time I read a weird fact, I think: "Uhh, I have to show you this!" Then I remember that you are hosting Nina's confirmation party, and I wonder which behaviour is appropriate in such situation: is there a limit to how morbid your texts can be when you are texting someone who is celebrating an important step in life? My texts are a poor attempt to keep the lines of communication open during this busy time in your life, because what this book addresses, and what I look so much forward to talking to you about, is the absence of death in society and

the regulation/organisation of when/how/in which ways death is deemed appropriate in life. Her point, the crematorium lady, is that we actually perpetuate our fear and denial of our own mortality by erasing death as the inescapable, bodily experience that we know for certain will come for each and every one of us. The book unfolds as a story of how she grows through dealing with all aspects of dead bodies: decay, smell, all the colours of the rainbow (apparently dead bodies are very colourful), skin that peels off, bodies that bloat, bones that need raking and grinding, and how you go home in the end of the day covered in a thin layer of other people (*people dust*, she calls it). More importantly, she writes about how she stopped being afraid to die and how she finds her passion in the ambition to show the rest of us how there are so many better ways to deal with death.

I am so entertained: she is funny and a great storyteller and she is right. Having seen two people through dying, I am not afraid to die anymore. Having washed and dressed my dead mother, I am not afraid of corpses. Having seen my grandma die slowly, painfully, and in regret, what I fear most is not living the life I want. I know what I want and how I want it and I know that this is what will matter in the end. I wish I get to help my kids have the same relationship to death and dying when it is my time to go.

As you may imagine from how long it took me to write that little piece of text above, I am *not* saying that death is not violent, horrible, or that it will not damage you. I am just saying that I agree with her: the less prepared we are, the more of a shock it is going to be. I wish I had been more and better prepared, because her death came at such a high price for all of us: the ultimate price for her, but the rest of us also chipped in. The first couple of years, I didn't get that choice of song. "Lean on Me". How could she choose this? We didn't have the option of leaning on her anymore; she would be dead when we sang it. That was the whole point of this miserable situation. Now, I like to think of it as her way of saying: *keep thinking about me when I am gone, girls. Keep remembering what I taught you: how I mothered you, so you can do it yourselves from now on. Keep leaning on me even after I am dead.* In this light, the choice of song makes sense to me: I now see it as one last act of motherly love.

MOVING ON

This morning, I was sobbing over breakfast when I received a text message from you. My phone was on mute but I saw the notification light and immediately rushed for consolation. It was a newspaper article about art and what we're supposed to do with it, as you put it. Your text message says that you have just solved the work-life balance problem by defining everything as work. Exclamation mark. You also write that Brian Eno's answers in the article made that "click" sound and "now it is with you, my friend, let us see what you think". Let *us* see… what *you* think (is there a Weickian thing going on here? You know the quote about sensemaking (Weick, 1995, p. 18): "*how can I know what I think until I see what I say?*"). The

article is too big for my tiny screen, and I am not in an emotional state for reading, but I write a reply to your text message. I write that I have never understood the term "work-life balance" – does it mean that work and life are opposites and that work is not life, which means it is death? I also acknowledge that you are able to hear "my" click sound, because it has not been with me for quite a while. Then I tell you that your text message found me crying. I am revising my message several times and it occurs to me that what I am doing is not only *telling* you about the state I am in, but also *wording* that state. I can write the banal words that I miss him and all that crap, but this is not really the case and, more importantly, it is not helpful. Finally, I write that I am relieved that I am no longer in a relationship that makes me unhappy, but that I am not at all coming to terms with the loss. I write that despite the cliché, I am desperately longing to "Move On".

You call me immediately. I wonder why I did not anticipate your call, and yet it feels so right. Of course, you call me when you learn I am mourning. Before hanging up (after more crying and, eventually, heartfelt laughter), you encourage me to read our text from the start. I will learn that I *have* moved on, you reassure me.

This afternoon, I read part of it and subsequently, I return to some initial writings about my life and my grandmother that later transmuted into the Book. I want to share with you something I wrote more than two years ago. I am not sure if I have moved on, and yet we are now creating something I was frantically pursuing at that time. That is really something. In this excerpt, I am quoting from an interview with the three authors of *Bountiful Braid*, which had just been published:

Naja Marie Aidt:	You move away from your own tiresome voice. All that constant babble. The idea of yourself sitting in the ivory tower creating your own little poem is instantly torn apart.
Mette Mostrup:	We did not just write 'The joint book'. We have got some kind of a joint body. Some of us might think that they can feel what the other two feel on their skin, yet, you have to say: 'Actually, no, I do not feel that!'
Naja Marie Aidt:	But it is not symbiotic because we do not wipe out ourselves. We are still three individuals and, at the same time, we are something fourth or fifth.
Interviewer:	You say that the book is about gender and freedom. However, I see it more as a book about gender and fellowship?
Naja Marie Aidt:	Freedom is found in fellowship! The fellowship is a clearance.
Mette Mostrup:	Fellowship is liberating! We do not investigate the liberal ideology of freedom in which everyone makes his own luck and you go out to harvest your own success with your own little sickle. We are investigating this kind of freedom that emerges through fellowship. It concerns breaking norms

> and rules of where to orient your body. (The Weekend Newspaper, 2014)

Yes, this is all about the body. Towards which joint body can I orient mine? I feel like a compass with a quivering needle, disoriented, undecided. The needle has to place itself somewhere, and yet new corners of the world need to be located. The magnetic fields have moved and the needle turns and turns, awaiting a new North. I am longing for unaccountability and inebriation. I have seen that life strategy and felt its consequences. It is so tempting, and yet I know that my new North is the freedom that emerges through fellowship. When man and woman become a joint body, children are the fruits. When women become a joint body, texts are the fruits. Can I become entangled in a joint body across time and space?

In "Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts toward a Double(d) Science", Patti Lather (2007) writes about repetitions and returns. We need to go back to find things we missed the first time around (and, it makes me think, the second, and the third), "unfolding into a future that must always be folded back into its past" (p. 32). She also writes that this is a very different temporality than that of "successor regimes, end-isms, and apocalyptic breaks".

This was what I wrote more than two years ago, longing to merge myself into a joint body across generations. Back to the present: How to handle the desire for "Moving On" in these folds of time? Maybe the way "forward" is to accept the folds and even celebrate them. The desire to "Move On" may transform into a desire to "Be Moved". Creating space. Allowing fellowship to occur. I magnify the article you send me and read the first blurred line: "Brian Eno believes in coincidence, technique, and surrender to the fellowship of artistic creation – to where he is merely part of a sound."

MOVING *WITH*

In the first weeks of my mum's illness, I am still working part-time in the office for a few hours each week (we don't yet know what exactly is wrong with her and I am desperately clinging to normalcy). One day, while we are having lunch in the canteen, my colleague says: "I don't understand how you manage so well. If my mum was sick with cancer, I think I would be crying all the time." At the time, I didn't know how to explain to her that this is not what happens. You cry, yes, but then you stop. And you get up, wipe your eyes, and *move your body* through space, and in this fashion time goes by, bit by bit.

As I was slowly waking this morning, still in bed with my eyes closed, I realised I was "writing" to you in my head. I was forming sentences, trying them on for size, but discarding them one by one. None of them seemed to open this text in the fashion I preferred, until the situation above presented itself to me. I hadn't thought of this for years, but as it occurred to me in my bed twelve minutes ago, my body moved,

suddenly, as if I had received a small shock, and I knew – the certainty was crystal clear – this is how the story opens.

While Einstein was still working, thinking, and writing out of a patent office, he published papers that have taught us that space and time are not absolute: they are relative to the phenomenon observed and to the observer. They are *interwoven*, and when you move your body through the three observable dimensions of space, you alter your perception of time and space, albeit on a scale so immensely small it's unnoticeable to you.

To *you*. Herein lays my point. The metaphor of "Moving On" signifies a movement in time and space *away* from whatever it is you want to put behind you. Your text shows us that this linearity is not possible. Time is bound up, ever-changing, variable. So while it might at some points seem as if we can move on, time unfolds into itself through our bodily experiences of it, and we may have the distinct feeling it is circular and multiple, has shape and texture.

When I observe you and your movements through time and space over the years I have known you, I see movement. I see all the areas where your understanding of the world and sense of self is moving forward, sometimes at lightning speed, other times through movements back in time through examinations of your past or your grandmother's past. I *see* the landscape you've travelled all at once: it is there with you (the parts I know of, anyway), and it doesn't make sense for me to only see the tracks on the ground: when I stop to think about you and your movements, I need the landscape to understand it, retrospectively, so to speak. Even in this, you are not Moving On from something you have left on the ground somewhere back there in the landscape of your past. You are Moving *With* your luggage, and sometimes it is too heavy to carry and other times you don't even notice it as you push forward.

What my colleague didn't know is that even in the most horrible situations, you are still just a body in time and space: you *are*. This simple state of being is both frightening and liberating. I think it is what Milan Kundera (1991) describes in *Immortality*, as Agnes longs to just lie by a creek and hear the sounds of the water and the birds and just stop existing as *Agnes,* just be. I think it is what mystics have longed for and practised for generations: the ability to let go of all that is you and just *be you*. Just be. This is what art can do. It can suspend all the ego and identity crap and just allow us to be moved, jointly and together, as it creates a frame or a space for this movement. It can connect to the metaphysical experiences we all share: being born, being alone, being connected, experiencing loss, death, pain, sorrow, joy, and striving for freedom, to feel part of something bigger than ourselves. The way I read the Braid Ladies, this is what they have experienced in their book: that they could suspend of their individual identities and writings and somehow conjure a fourth or fifth joint body of being and writing. One where they could move *with* and move others with their simultaneously particular and universal experiences and stories, and perhaps this is where the freedom was: the move with the past alongside the present as the multitudes of experiences in time and space assert themselves and crave attention.

You've written a lot about allowing the events to occur. I have written about the life/death/life circles. I think it is time to merge the two and allow all the rage/love/sorrow to occur. It is time for linear notions of Moving On to die, so the notion of Moving With can live.

WHILE MY GUITAR GENTLY WEEPS

For weeks, we have been located in distant places but our communication is intense. We write emails, document our everyday life with photos through WhatsApp, and we talk on the phone. We are both deeply involved in raising our kids, intellectual growth, and playful experiments with the material we both love – words. It feels as if everything becomes our material in this mutual act of creation that does not really fit into any category I recognise. Is this research? Art? Biography? Until now, each piece we write has had some kind of theme, some kind of coherence, and main idea, but these days I receive (or see, feel, sense?) fragment upon fragment of material that does not reveal to me its application. Sentences, clusters of words, single words, and sensations that have not yet transformed into words, flow by. Some are fit for headlines, some for entries, and some are just threads suitable for weaving through our text. I have not heard that "click" sound for quite a while (but *you* write about clicking). I think this is because these fragments do not connect, *yet*. These fragments display themselves as peaks of substance from an abundant source, they flow into my field of view, flow by. They do not disappear, but they do not settle down either. Here are some of the threads:

The strength of vulnerability: I have coffee with my PhD student. He has read my blog post about recomposing from the sickbed (the first text in this book), and found it touching: he almost felt sad, he says, and tells me that my boldness inspires him. I almost regret I have put myself out in the world this way. There is no going back.

Jazz improvisation: On the phone, you tell me that you are rereading philosophy and ask me what I am reading these days. I answer that I have just watched a keynote speech with John Kao about jazz improvisation and innovation and that he plays the piano virtuously to make his points (Dominguez, 2010). It made me reconnect with my research subject. I was so bored with researching "innovation", but now I realise I need jazz music back in my life – and with jazz comes the lived experience of innovation. I am still an innovation researcher; it becomes worthwhile anew.

While My Guitar Gently Weeps: I receive a WhatsApp from you with a photo of your hairy, bearded, sun-glassed husband and the text: "Evening stroll with George Harrison". Prince has just died and a newspaper obituary mentions his blistering guitar solo in a concert tribute to Harrison. I watch it. These guys are so cool! I share the link with you, and write that we are going to kick ass.

Caretaking: In the final writing workshop this semester, my students are crying. They feel so frustrated that they must write their thesis before they have a feel of what they are doing, before they really *understand* anything. I give them chocolate and tell them I want to hug them. We talk about being slow, finding oases, sharing. Kao says that innovation is about purpose, practice, and going with the offer. What are we offered? The Word program says: "Passive voice (consider revising)". No way, this *is* about being passive. If we are to notice what we are offered, we need to step back and do nothing.

I want to be Umberto Eco: I am in Scotland. This is for real (not in my dreams). Over a gin and tonic late at night, I tell my travel companion that I want to be Umberto Eco. She asked me a question I do not remember. I did not reply that I am *inspired by* Eco. I reply that I want to *be* him. He has recently died and that makes it even more disturbing, but my reply keeps following me around. I want to *be* him. He made extraordinary good use of his talents until he was successful enough to do whatever he wanted. He wrote books, he played the flute. He followed his passions and he did not give a shit about other peoples' opinions about him. I want to be Umberto Eco.

Lucid dreaming: You tell me that two of your kids are lucid dreamers and that you envy them immensely. I have never heard of lucid dreaming. However, sometimes I have dreams in which I know that I am dreaming and thus start taking action. I know I can fly and thus, I fly. Things like that. Apparently, I have lucid dreams despite my ignorance about that category. What comes into my mind as you speak, however, is my nightly dream in which I know that a woman is going to commit suicide by setting herself on fire and jumping from a festival floodlight. I am responsible for the festival and I am not able to stop her jumping. I accept that. She will die, I am responsible, and that's the way it is. In lucid dreaming as in lucid living, we might be able to take action and, equally, be able to accept that we cannot control everything. The day after this dream, my eldest son drops by for lunch and asks me if I know about lucid dreaming. His girlfriend has lucid dreams and occasionally she experiences being awake while her body is asleep. This is frightening as hell because she wants to move her body but she cannot. Her body is asleep, but her mind is awake.

In Martin Scorsese's portrait of George Harrison, *Living in the Material World* (2011), Harrison says in a 1997 interview: *"You know, I get confused when I look at the world and I see everybody's running around."*

Our writing channels my confusion and keeps me from running around. My guitar is weeping but we keep playing.

CHAPTER 9

I'VE TOLD THE TRUTH, I DIDN'T COME TO FOOL YOU

DANGEROUSLY BIG HEARTS

I wake up at 5.33 am with thoughts of being a kid in my head. I keep longing for this kind of being: undisturbed, non-responsible, pure curiosity. I don't remember talking to the grownups much or interacting with siblings or friends. I remember being in the world, examining the physical world around me: the house, the garden.

In my experience, the garden was big, secluded, exciting. It was surrounded by a green wall made up of trees and bushes: lilacs, pears, beeches, and a strange, beautiful tree that carried white blossoms with the most intense, jasmine-like scent. I loved every plant in this garden and I can tell you even now where they stood and what they looked and smelled like. When you left the house through the terrace door, you were on an attached, rectangular terrace where bright-red poppies and soft pink sweet-smelling flowers sowed themselves year after year around the edges. At the back was a brick wall, about two-and-a-half metres tall, next to a Mirabelle plum tree that always produced enormous amounts of plums that we would struggle to eat and would make into jams and juice. Without fail, every summer one of the kittens would climb too high into the tree, call out for his mum, and she would arrive, tired and worn-out looking, but she would climb the tree, gently lift him by his neck, and get him down. The terrace was encased in yet another self-made flowerbed in which calendula flowers in all shades of orange grew, and this would fill up with seedlings of Mirabelle plums that had fallen off the tree and had desperately entered the race to become the next one. Every year I would marvel at the fact that a stone from a plum would produce a miniature tree without me doing anything but leaving it alone. I loved to pluck the little seedlings and see how the original stone was sometimes visible as the origin of the tree.

My favourite place was the old greenhouse. On warm summer days, the earth in there would smell fantastic in an overwhelming, almost nauseating way. It was draped in cobwebs and spiders and bugs lurked in every corner and under every item in there, but I couldn't resist it. The taste of tomatoes right off the plant or a warm, freshly picked cucumber would make up for the exciting anxiety of the possibility of being crawled on by a spider. (This never happened: they were terrified of me. If I ever encountered a spider, it would hurry out of my way.) Right outside the greenhouse and along all the edges of the garden, we would grow vegetables: green cabbage, corn, potatoes, onions, peas, leeks, courgettes, and tall plants carrying green beans which grew so fast it looked like they were hurrying towards the skies.

I was under strict instruction not to eat the peas before they were as thick as my fingers, and I remember how one of the adults showed me how to pick peas (you have to be careful and snap it off using your nails. If you just pull, you risk uprooting the whole plant). Sprinkled about the garden were the fruits. We grew blackberries, gooseberries, strawberries, blackcurrants, redcurrants, apples, pears, and Mirabelle plums.

In the backyard, they had permanently parked the old army green Volkswagen minibus with the huge "Nuclear power? No thanks!" label on the side. The minibus used to take us all on holidays to Norway, where they would rent an old cottage and we would spend the summer bathing in ice-cold mountain springs, reading books, and fighting off mosquitoes. The minibus stayed in the backyard under the big, old oak tree, until it was dangerously eroded and rust had eaten away at it from all corners. I remember thinking it was too bad that it had to end its days like this: kids playing in it, cats sleeping on it on hot days, and mice and all kinds of other small animals making homes everywhere.

Under the hedges, violets could be found in abundance. They were small and grew out of the way so no one paid much attention to them, but they smelled the best: like my great aunt's house and garden, a place of sheer mystery. She was a tall, lanky woman with short, curly hair who laughed a lot: a coarse, rough laugh from all the cigars that eventually killed her. She lived alone with a small, very obese dog in a house filled with plants and strange furniture, an organ in the living room and no food in her kitchen, as she always had all meals next door, with her sister, my maternal grandmother. Her garden was made for us kids: she had deliberately planted a large bed of raspberries for us to eat, and in her kitchen cabinet, she had only lemon soda and cream buns. I was intrigued: how did one manage this? To be a woman and yet live a life so free of responsibility? She never married, never had any kids. She lived by herself and taught porcelain painting to suburban homemakers for a living. She had such a big heart, so much love, and so much care to give (too much: there was always stories of how she let others take precedence over her needs). I sensed without asking that hers was not a life to be envied, and yet to me, it looked carefree and appealing. It was as if she had somehow managed to delegate all the boring parts of being an adult to her sister and I found this immensely fascinating. I later learned that she had sacrificed her place at the art academy to stay home and live with my great grandparents as a young woman. "But why would she do that?" I asked my mum. "If she hadn't, they would have torn each other's heads off", my mother replied, "and *my* mother couldn't have done it; she was just as dramatic as they were. No, she was the only one who could do it, just stay in that house, like a buffer between her parents."

Like a buffer. The words stay with me. I am practising not being a buffer or a mediator between family members. It is hard: my default setting is to offer myself as the buffer, the fixer, the one who naturally – without asking – steps in to translate feelings and words and soothe hurt and bruised egos. This summer, something changed. Writing with you changed me: I am done doing the hard

emotional labour of other people. Instead, I practise leaving the responsibility of others where it belongs: in their laps. It is hard: family members squirm, things are left unsaid, said too loud and too clumsily, and responses are not given. The old me would call: "Let me talk to her, I am sure she doesn't mean it this way" or "have you tried to tell her how you feel?" The old me would lay awake and think about this. The old me would feel responsible somehow, because I know *how* to do this; as if because I am qualified, everyone agrees it's best that *I* do this work – "then we know it's done properly and the conflict will be resolved and we will all be able to continue our lives and relationships as before, ripple free". Well, not anymore. Now I ignore the persistent silence of the phone insisting that I pick it up and initiate resolution. Now I practise the freedom inherent in caring by *not* caring too much.

RESONANCE

It's been almost two weeks since you wrote the account of your childhood and your big heart. It feels like so much longer. I search my mailbox to find the latest version of our text and, as always, it turns out to be a bad idea to type your name to find what I seek. An abundance of emails pops up from the search. Instead, I search "no preview available", because I remember that your message told me that you received *my* latest account with this automatically formatted information and that was almost poetic. No preview is available, in life or in writing. You just have to take one step after the other and it becomes your life. You just have to write one word after the other and it becomes a book. Scary and liberating.

You are travelling and we are in different time zones so I woke up to your text message about Hartmut Rosa's (2016) notion of resonance assisted by your words: a new book from the acceleration sociologist. Acceleration. Indeed, this summer has provided space-time themes to delve into, explore, talk and write about.

Before setting out to write an account, I increasingly experience that material for a pattern is floating in front of me and that I must turn it into a text. I sense threads of space-time material today: Rosa's idea of resonance, the garden of your childhood account, our trip to a remote island to revisit my grandparents' house, and the way it was all work and non-work, me and the puppy in the cocoon of my lover's garden, beyond time. Jeff Buckley's eminent voice reinterpreting the title song from the 1987 movie *Baghdad Café* while I, armed with an evaporator, remove layers and layers of wallpaper in the room formerly known as my kitchen. Buckley's version of "Calling You" is so cool, vulnerable, stripped down. His voice is whining, trapped, and yet yearning for freedom:

> A hot dry wind blows right through me.
> The baby's crying and I can't sleep,
> but we both know a change is coming,
> coming closer sweet release.

It is a live version recorded in 1993, four years before he drowned in the Mississippi River: young, intense, gorgeous, and wildly talented. He was/is/should have been my age. The audience applause is excited and scattered; there are so few people present that you can decipher almost every single handclap. It is an intimate concert recorded one afternoon and later turned into a cult album. I wish I had been there that afternoon and yet, each time I hear the songs and remove one more layer of wallpaper (1980s-red and then 1970s-brown), I am in that café that afternoon, just a tiny part of me.

I am sure that some atoms in my present body were in that café that afternoon in 1993. I am also in the history of this room, which is now transmuting into a twentieth-century white, streamlined kitchen from where my future meals, parties, and passionate conversations are going to flow. It has been the container of everyday family life, teenager pre-parties, mess, music, and grownup and lost love. I am in the cinema, 22-years-old and watching *Bagdad Café* (Adlon, 1987) with my friends; I am the mother of a crying baby, trapped. I am your friend reading Rosa, sensing the threads of the text I am going to write to you. We know a change is coming, but we never know what it will bring.

Rosa (2013) talks about tree time levels: the temporality of everyday life, the temporality of a lifetime (biographical time), and the temporality of one's epoch (historical time). What about the future? We know a change is coming, but we never know what it will bring. Every move we make, every decision we take or refuse to take, make futures possible and impossible: we hurt someone, please someone else, strive to avoid pain and fail. Coincidence strikes, willpower and stubbornness force through events. Still, we imagine that *this* will lead to *that*: we construe coherent narratives about everyday life, about our biography, and about past and present epochs, maybe even future ones. When narratives break down and *this* doesn't lead to *that*, we say that we have lost our sense of meaning. That life makes no sense. We mourn that no preview is available. Or just like my GPS said during our trip: "Roads change all the time." *All* the time? Laughing wildly, we imagined the road networks like the Hogwarts staircases going randomly up and down, ending nowhere, somewhere, and anywhere. What Rosa proposes is that when we experience resonance, we do not seek meaning – or maybe we just experience meaning without any concerns. It is a beautiful idea. He says that we need stable axes that allow for singular moments of resonance. That is what we are pursuing in our writing: we are creating an axis of resonance and we want to share it to amplify resonance in the world. Axes of resonance can be love and the family, work, but also nature, art, and religion, says Rosa. He is right. I need nothing more to be convinced. I don't even need to ask *why* Buckley's piece resonates with me. It is just because I have an axis of resonance from which a moment of resonance is enabled. Now I have written this moment and allowed it to make the axis even stronger.

SOUNDTRACKS

The carpenter is reflooring my kitchen today. It makes a lot of noise. I am here to keep an eye on the work and make decisions about painting the old door or putting in a new one, what to do with a water damage from a long gone bathtub in the adjacent bathroom, and (I can't help it) make plans for more renovations. I put on the noisiest Buckley and write. Such dark, disharmonic chords: "You and I" – "like he is singing from the grave", as one YouTube comment says. "Grace" is beautiful and then ugly: "I'm not afraid to go, but it goes so slow." These plain titles and suddenly, the depth of the lyrics and the voice. Why did he want to go? He wasn't even 30. In an interview, he is asked what he wants to be remembered for and, after some silence, he says he wants to be remembered for being a good friend. Then he says he doesn't want to be remembered whatsoever – he is not important, but he hopes people will remember the music. When you look at his performances, it feels like he is just allowing this; he makes himself available to the music and to the audience. He becomes a medium. A hot dry wind blows right through him. Everybody fell in love with him, everybody wanted something from him, and he had nothing, yet everything, to offer. Maybe I sense why he wanted to go.

I take a break from Buckley and listen to The Travelling Wilburys. I heard them repeatedly some years ago. Most of all, I remember doing the laundry and listening to "Handle me with Care", "Heading for the Light", and "End of the Line". What did I do at that time? I must have been writing (and reading and thinking), because I produced a dissertation; however, what I remember is doing the laundry, over and over. People who dirtied their clothes, kittens who dirtied the floor, hunger, homework, and convenient helplessness surrounded me. Under that clothesline with the voices of Harrison and his super cool companions in my ears, I was free.

I don't spend that much time under the clothesline anymore, and I need new songs. Along with the old ones. The Travelling Wilburys was the creation of a playground. It was five self-conscious, not-so-young guys, who temporarily suspended the ego to run out on that playground together. While writing my dissertation, it was the story that attracted me: the music is cool, some of it is great, but sensing how much fun they had, how free they felt, allowing themselves to be playful and silly, filled me with grateful envy. Roy Orbison died, and yet he stayed in the music they made, reappearing in the "End of the Line" video as a guitar in a wooden rocking chair. Even Bob Dylan is smiling in that video.

We all have to go someday: some just leave without a word, and some mourn that it goes so slow. Some are slowly dying, leaving their loved ones in pain. There is a soundtrack to it all, isn't there? Today I am writing to the soundtrack of noise and a voice from the grave, and yet it feels like a hot dry wind blows right through me. I wish you can feel that hot wind too.

CHAPTER 9

TELL THE TRUTH, AND LISTEN

There is something going on. Tiny movements, sensations, letting go, reaching out. We are beginning to review incoming manuscripts for our edited book about "detours" (Wegener, Meier, & Maslo, 2017), and we ask people to remove the filter and write about what is really going on behind all these references and neat sentences. Who are you as a researcher and a human being and what can I learn from you? This is what we encourage our contributors to respond to. We advertise for a doctoral candidate to our "Open Writing" project and the job postings brings forward words such as "bold", "playful" and "resonance". It is simple, and it is a revolution. We meet to catch up and drink coffee in the allotment garden you are babysitting, and we jump right into dialogue about axes of resonance and why nobody really seems to care about resonance in academic life and writing. It feels so obvious and important. We talk about the meaning of "axis" and find out it has mathematical, anatomical, and botanical meanings, as well as imaginary and artful ones. Axis of resonance. Yesterday, I was lecturing about innovation to a group of public managers. It is not completely correct to say that I was ill prepared, but I had difficulty preparing. The consultant who hired me had asked me to "give something to them": no group discussions and tasks, a classic academic lecture, as she put it. I wanted to create something *with* them. I prepared with a lot of Powerpoint slides to keep myself calm and I ended up displaying just a few of them. We talked about ambivalence, fear, feeling rushed, laziness, taking the time needed, being proud, and resonance.

It is possible.

I just received a newsletter with the headline: "Tell the truth". For the first time in my life, I listen to music when I work. Cohen sings: "I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you."

It is so simple, and yet a revolution when we succeed. Tell the truth, and listen.

Ernest Hemingway once said that most people never listen. We need to stop doing things all the time, pause the talking, refrain from achieving, and just listen. Then we become sounding boards that allow for resonance. Why is it so scary? To me, it is scary because I fear I will not perform, achieve. Time stands still. I listen to Buckley's version of "Hallelujah"; the puppy leaves the basket and moves a few inches to a sunny spot in the terrace doorway, I write this account, I add new songs to my "Writing" playlist, and plums are falling from the tree. It feels like every atom of the world is moving outwards a little, allowing for resonance. The axis is vibrating.

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