

Once upon a glowing rabbit story that leads home...

Deborah Green, Heleina Dalton, Wendy Lawson, Kathrin Marks, Angie Richardson and Hilary Tapper

Abstract

In this diffractively reflexive creative inquiry, a gaggle of creative arts therapists/educators/supervisors in Aotearoa New Zealand use arts-based research through autoethnography (abr+a) to tumble down the rabbit-hole of cognitive compromise caused by ongoing pandemic challenges. We render visible our variously manifested absences of the capacity to think clearly (a vital component when one's an academic within the tertiary sector facing adaptive upheavals into online delivery; a vital component when one's a therapist holding stable space within wobbly times; and possibly a vital component when one is oneself navigating uncharted experiences as a human during a global pandemic, widespread conflict and climate crisis). We ponder innate strategies we created to counter this cognitive-cramping. We therefore invite you into our meandering maze of trauma and neurobiological research, thick lived-experience descriptions and curated found-word poems, collages, mask-play, video-clips, photographs, and fabric and natural-materials artworks. These proliferating creative tangents initially jostled and skittered, before revealing an interconnecting theme of making-sense. Making-sense within abr+a is rhizomatic, entangling reflexive and diffractive practices. Each scholarartist maps their own tunnel back to cognitive-sense, carved using embodied, ensouled, expressive-material and/or ethnographic-sym sense-making. The cumulative felt-destination of these journeys echoes beyond a simple 'return to...' tale. Thrumming through the bedrock of this topsy-turvy account is the call to whatever glowing sense-of-home we each yearn for.

Keywords

Trauma, cognitive-compromise, making-sense, sympoiesis, collaboration, reflexivity, diffraction

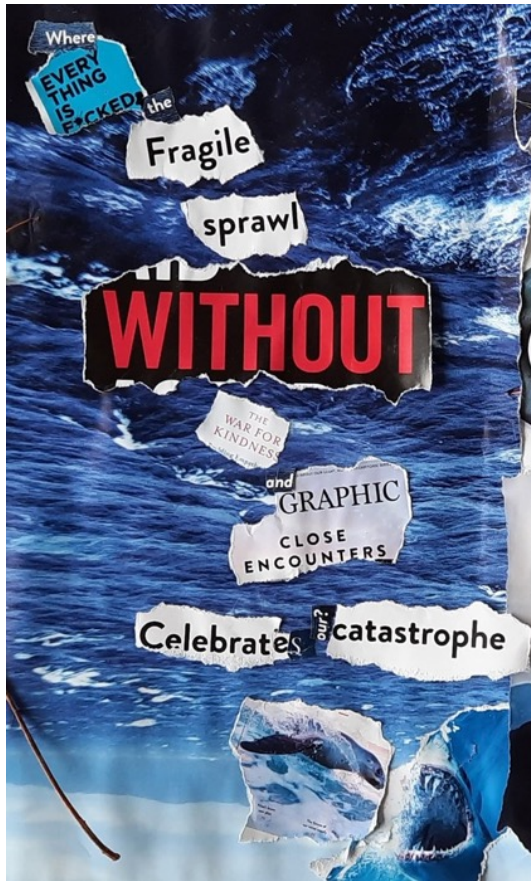


Figure 1. Deborah Green, *Where everything is f*cked* (detail), 2021, collage, 594 x 420mm.

Welcome to this diffractive creative reflexion. This “**rabbit story**” [1] may resemble Alice’s plummet into a labyrinthine warren, but before you drop in, please remember to don your mask, use the hand sanitiser provided, and scan the tracer app. We’ve tried to reduce “**graphic close encounters**” and insist upon one-metre distancing between the characters, critters and creative-works within this rhizomatic warren, but they tend towards a mycelial “**fragile sprawl**”. We therefore ask you to assume response-ability for your own well-being. Once you’ve negotiated the safe-entry shenanigans, we (a gaggle of creative arts therapists/educators/supervisors using arts-based research through autoethnography [abr+a]) invite you on a tunnel-trawl. This jumbled journey “**celebrates our? catastrophe**”: we express experiences of Covid-cognitive-collapse and, by re-mem-bering ways we’ve tried to make-sense of these, we each craft a “**glowing rabbit story that [attempts to] lead... home**”.

But first, some orienting history and cartography: My name is Deborah Green. My grapple with intermittent cognitive shut-down, as the world slid into a shadowy Covid-19 maze, was captured in a creative response. This winged its way to *JoCAT* in 2021. *JoCAT* batted it back, inviting amplification. I fuddled about, floundering like Alice crying, “How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual” (Carroll, 2022, p.11). Realising I needed companions to meaningfully embrace the queering of this inquiry, I cooed to my creative arts therapy (CAT) colleagues. They read and muddled over my scribblings, collages and scraps of found-word poetry. Five reverberated and crafted aesthetic vignettes feeling-into their own pandemic tussles. When I communed with these creations, things became ‘curiouser and curiouser!’ (Carroll, 2022, p.10). I was bamboozled by the alluring tangential passageways each opened. I tried to corral them this way and that, rearranging, seeking logically ordered sequences, harbouring visions of a neat London-Underground-esque map...

But alas. A form of subterranean terra incognita it is. We are, as Burke (1941) suggests, offering ‘perspective by incongruity’, an entanglement of self-focused reflexivity [2] and collective, creative diffraction [3]. Each vignette burrows into richly-layered personal worlding and these won’t top-and-tail neatly. So, please be prepared for a coll-abr+a of meandering, fumbling and looping-back...

We’re not, however, completely without navigational aids. As the works cosied and clattered and crunched against each other (and I puzzled, found edges, tramped thoughts into the hills, and was showered by the queerness of it all), constellations of twinkling glow-worms appeared. Making-sense. The wandering burrows carved by our creative-contributions inter-connect via glittering sparkles of ways to make-sense. The collaborating-CATs weren’t prepped with this delicate coherence when I invited their participation. Its emergence thus seems deliciously serendipitous while simultaneously a bit ‘duh!’ They’d found their own variegated ways to make-sense. A sort-of ‘lose your mind and come to your senses’ [4] type of sense-making that’s not head-led. Within abr+a, making-sense disrupts and diffracts beyond cognition alone. Nascent knowing grows from and is created by appreciative attention to diverse senses. Attention is paid to *embodiment* – our five physical senses as well as our senses of interoception, exteroception, and proprioception. Awareness awakens regarding *ensoulment* – our heart-sense, the tacitly implicit sixth intuitive-sense, emotional and felt-sense, sense that we are more-than. The *expressive-materiality* of arts modalities/mediums/processes/products expands sense-making into the creative and aesthetic realms (Green, 2015; 2020). And now, in the wake of this collective escapade, sense tentacles further. I celebrate the presence of *ethnographic-sym-sense*. My use of ‘sym’ (a prefix meaning connected-to/together-with) seeks links between sympoiesis (making-with) (Haraway, 2016) and ethnographic curiosity around our connections with what has formed us, where we belong, what connects us to land, culture, other beings, stories, arts-making and such like. And reflexively attending to all these diffractive sense-making processes reveals our quest to restore our ‘life-forward’ ‘sens’ of direction (from the French word) (Levine, 2009; Rappaport, 2008). This (re)turn to a sense of life-vitality throbs through the bedrock of this jumbled account and, listening close, I hear the call to whatever “**glowing**” sense of “**home**” each of us yearns for.

I shan’t be too heavy handed in pointing to these glowing moments of nexus through making-sense, so bring your imagination along. This is a rumpty cluster of creative exhibits that embraces Alice’s suggestion that a book is of no use without pictures or conversations (Carroll, 2022). Therefore, our ‘book’ is thick with conversations, descriptions, and pictures. Welcome into our rhizomatic-maze of trauma and neurobiological research, layered lived-experience creative-writings and curated found-word poems, collaged artworks, mask-play, video clips, photographs, and fabric and natural-materials artworks.

Before we get to the personal pieces, however, let’s unearth some core strata regarding distress and trauma running through all. When we encounter and respond to stress, extra oxygen is sent to our brains, increasing the alertness of our physical senses (Harvard Health Publishing, 2020). If the stress is too extreme, ongoing, and/or activates past trauma, activity moves away from the pre-frontal cortex or cognitive-thinking-and-reasoning regions of the brain and into the more action-orientated/instinctual parts (van der Kolk, 2014). This colours the ‘alertness’ – it’s not located in sparky cognition but, as our experiences below will show and tell, is shadowed by brain-fog pierced through with flashes of heightened sensory activation and/or shut-down.

Deborah and her quivery rabbit-heart

The incursion of Covid-19 into our world abrades scabs from old trauma, awakening my rabbit-heart. The work piles up as I'm called to respond with fleet-minded alacrity to emergent needs. Yet, I'm not fleet-anything-ed. Although compelled to read emergent texts to hop-scotch through sudden labyrinths of lockdown-induced curriculum redevelopment, I'm clumsy, frozen, internally aquiver. My capacity to read and retain dense texts has scarpered down into the dark recesses of my internal trauma-dug warren.

This isn't new, this tumble into the dim tunnels of historical trauma. I know this place. It's a now-familiar liminal twilight. I rustle up my PhD (Green, 2015), created to process my CAT experiences during the Christchurch earthquakes (2010 onwards). Here I find some useful reminders of how my quake-woundedness seemed to privilege my survival-orientated lizard brain regions over my so-called higher logical thought, problem-solving, reading and language processes (Godin, 2010; Kass & Trantham, 2014). This numbing of the pre-frontal cortex – that many of us quake survivors called 'mental liquefaction' – is well documented in those who feel trapped in their struggles with trauma (Kass & Trantham, 2014; Malchiodi, 2020; van der Kolk, 2014) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Deborah Green, *Trapped* (detail), 2020, collage and natural materials, 420 x 594mm.

This cognitive-compromise challenged my CAT practice during the quakes... and it's jangling again in me now. During the quakes, I struggled to read and absorb much-needed new learning about trauma therapy. While I was pointy and dark-ringed from ragged sleep and nightly was woken if not by quakes themselves then by dreams of quakes or fear of quakes; when I walked the middle of streets to avoid high cornices that may fall, and watched the bays for tsunami-infused risings – I was crap at reading. My reptilian-brain flashed sharp teeth at my quivery rabbit-heart. This primal lizard had little use for the sitting-stillness required by the small page-bound black-and-white squiggles that make meaning blossom in my higher-brain. My mental-crocodile was crouched and frozen, awaiting the slightest rumble, hungrily drawing energy away from higher brain functions while my heart-rabbit, ready to flee.

This urge to flee is a well-documented member of the survival response cluster we muster when we feel threatened. Flight, fight, fawn/feign and freeze responses may be rallied in various ways when we encounter experiences we deem (potentially) harmful to life and limb. Contemporary trauma research suggests experiences that activate the freeze response and/or enforced immobilisation – thereby rendering us unable to act with some sense of self-preservatory agency in our own self-defence/protection/rescue by running, fighting or befriending – are the most likely to result in entrenched long-term suffering (see works by Fisher, Lanius, P. Levine, Malchiodi; Perry; Porges; and van der Kolk).

Wendy Lawson waits with the dust and the darkness

My response to the arrival of Covid-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand was a physical one. When the national lock-down strategies were put in place, the boundary line of my home became a kind of barricade. Inside the enclosure, my body was vigilant to the impending threat. Unable to push beyond what was demarcated as *mine* I felt my world getting smaller and smaller.

As the reality of a lengthy time in lockdown became apparent, our creative arts therapy faculty flocked to Zoom, where through the pixelated versions of ourselves we began to work out how we might navigate this thing; for us and for our students. From my makeshift office/spare room, I held my perch, feeling much like the caged budgie my Aunt Sally used to keep in her living room: banging its beak at a clouded mirror, trying to find some semblance of *other*. I leaned in close, as if the screen might offer me a way into the vortex: shoulders tight, neck stooped, I nodded with my estranged reflection.

When I think about the physical tension and angular shape of my body during these early days of the pandemic, I realise that I had lost touch with my sensory moving body. My bones were aching, my jaw was sore from night-time grinding and my head throbbed from lack of sleep and too much coffee. I had found comfort in the *nothing*, where silence and stillness eased my joints. My fleshy supple body that once moved freely through time-space had slipped under the bed and was waiting with the dust and darkness.

In order to retrieve my vital body I had to drop down to the floor, roll beneath the bed and breathe in the stale scent of inactivity. I needed to awaken my senses and become present to my everyday existence, to connect in new ways with the *vibrant matter* (Bennett, 2010) of things and materials in my immediate surroundings.

To Piece (2021) (Figures 3 and 4) was made on my living room floor just after Aotearoa New Zealand's first round of Covid-19 lockdowns in March 2020. The materials used were tea-stained raw canvas and school glue, which were readily available to me, in my home, at the time of making. I was drawn to use raw canvas for its malleable skin-like qualities: permeable and protective. I soaked the canvas in chamomile tea to relax the fibres, which also manifested for me the stain of contagion. To motivate my body, I wrote physical actions on one side of the canvas: to reach, to spin, to grab, to poke, to push, to dance. The pencil in relationship with the canvas roused my senses with its audible scratching – I was busy, purposeful and alive.



Figure 3. Wendy Lawson, *To Piece* (in process), 2021, raw canvas and school glue.

My material investigation continued as I moved with the canvas getting to know its weight, texture and limitations. Allowing my body to be led, I moved into physical enactments of transitive verbs such as: to scrunch, to stretch, to twist, and to tear. These physical prompts led to tearing the canvas into strips before cutting the strips into smaller pieces (at a ratio of my body size). The resultant finger-long canvas pieces felt manageable, their bandage-like qualities presenting me with an opportunity to realign, reset, and rediscover my animated shape. Implicating my body in the work's duration and size by setting my arm-span to be the work's completed diameter, I became physically entangled in the making of this patchwork piece. First soaking the canvas pieces in glue, I applied a casting technique whereby I co-opted the rings from the base of a laundry basket: pressing the fibrous dressings onto the domestic object's workable face. Making in a circular fashion, piece by piece I made my way from the centre of the work to the perimeter of my physical world. Once the work was dry, like a cicada releasing its shell, I peeled the canvas membrane from its base.



Figure 4. Wendy Lawson, *To Piece*, 2021, raw canvas and school glue, diameter 1760mm.

I ache as Wendy relates how her “fleshy supple body that once moved freely through time-space had slipped under the bed and was waiting with the dust and darkness.” Loss of vivid contact with our embodiment and numbing of our sense of soul/élan vital/chi/wiarua [5] are experiences shared by many wandering this warren of unsettlement. For me, as for others, such happenings also prise open dark internal body-and-soul caverns containing previous trauma.

Deborah, mis-read without nestling intimacy

I pursue my curiosity about this stress-related reading-block I encounter. It calls me backward and I drop into grottos I carved out during previous research. I find the following passage:

To be honest, I say to my dead mother, this degradation of my reading-concentration goes further back. I used to be quite the reader. Remember how weekends found you and me, warm with unspoken intimacy, ensconced in large armchairs nestled deep in books... You even died with your hand on a book. ‘Reading by osmosis,’ I called it.

... since that day I’ve found my love of reading compromised. As I commit these thoughts to words a deep-burning scuffs my throat, these almost-tears suggesting in this sorrow, in my past losses, lies a knowing about myself, about... my ambivalent relationship with reading now I can’t do it in the safety of your couch with you opposite...

(*Conversations with my dead mother*, May 2013)
(Green, 2015, p.118)



Figure 5. Deborah Green, *Where everything is f*cked*, 2020, collage and natural materials, on 420 x 594mm sheet.

I return to this current couch-less warren from these words written six years ago about earthquakes that happened 11 years ago and that reference my mother’s death 26 years ago. I agree and disagree with Alice’s statement that there’s no use in returning to

yesterday, because we were different people then (Carroll, 2022). I contemplate my now, my me-now, different to me-then and yet again experiencing the return of my enduring crocodile–rabbit dyad – the symbolic animation of my survival-orientated lizard brain and my rabbiting anxious heart mentioned above. I notice, however, this time rather than feeling that **“everything is f*cked”** as I grind against the re-animation of these inner critters, I’m hospitable. I lean into creative solutions. Collages and found-word poems become a restorative practice (Figures 1, 2, 5-7, 19, 20).



Figure 6. Deborah Green, *After Armageddon* (detail), 2020, collage and natural materials, 420 x 594mm.



Figure 7. Deborah Green, *After Armageddon*, 2020, collage and natural materials, 420 x 594mm.

This riddlesome upending of our taken-for-granted sense-of-self has many of us relating to Alice as she muses over the great puzzle of who in the world we are (Carroll, 2022). Covid-induced upheavals have again-and-again torn asunder our worlding-maps, leaving us wandering. Who are we in the shadows cast by this ongoing uncertainty? Where do we belong? Although the questions might better be: Who are we and where do we belong in the gloom resulting from the *revelation* of this uncertainty?... After all, beneath the quest-to-control often associated with the so-called Western worldview, Papatūānuku/Gaia [6] ‘tut-tuts’ at our arrogance and disconnection. Countering this, Haraway (2016) invites us to contemplate possibilities for collective multispecies sym- and ecopoiesis (McNiff, 2021): How are we ‘becoming with’ each other in these troubling times on an earth beset with Covid-19, climate crisis and conflict? How may we invite **“surprising” “sensory odes”** as, **“after armageddon”**, we commune with a **“comforting earth”** to puzzle through this ‘enduring liminality’? (Green, 2020).

Kathrin Marks breathes, puzzles, walks, and reflects

I am finding myself sitting here in my whare [7], enveloped (or rather entrapped?) by Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. There are books next to me, freshly bought, smelling deliciously new.

They stare at me, eyeing me up, daring me to open them, read them, digest them.

I find myself unable to do so.
I can't focus for long times.
I can't process new material as easily as I used to.
I can't do this.
Can't do any of it.

I am feeling trapped and useless.
Guilt arises, trapping me even further.
These books are of interest to me, they support my growth as a therapist, as an educator, why am I incapable of engaging with them?

Holding this anger at myself, I am coming back to breath.
Soft breath.
Hā ki roto, hā ki waho. Breathe in, breathe out.
Soft deep breath.

Leaning in, I am inviting gentle curiosity to come along as I witness myself.
I witness my brain, wrapped in fear, in survival, convoluted in and around itself.
Covid-19, the lockdowns, the associated anxiety has taken it hostage.

I breathe again. Softly. Deeply.
I am surrendering to my brain's current limitations.
And I breathe once more.

As I do, my eyes come across a puzzle, waiting to be opened.
I look at my partner. "Shall we?"
We decide it's time.

We sort pieces.
Border and non-border.
Words.
Colours.
There are reds, blues, greens.
There are patterns.
As we sort, we make piles,
This goes here, this goes there.
We're sorting through the pieces, creating order from chaos.

And while we puzzle, we listen to webinars. To podcasts.
We listen and pause.
We pause and reflect together.
We reflect together as we walk the paths of our locked-down, ever calm valley.

We walk her paths, new and old. Mainly old.
We stop often, stop to breathe in
the scent of donkey's old fur,
the lemony aroma of magnolia flowers,
the earth-rainy smell of Papatūānuku.



Figure 8. Kathrin Marks, *Walking her paths*, 2022, digital photograph.

We listen and pause and process and reflect and walk and listen once more.
And we puzzle.
Over and over again.

Puzzling and walking and reflecting together, my brain, distracted from fear, distracted from survival, is able to process again.
Able to focus.
Able to breathe.
Hā ki roto, hā ki waho.

In these wayward worry-warrens, it seems wise to heed the Dodo's sage advice that the best way to explain it is to do it (Carroll, 2022). Doing-ways encourage letting-be of muddled-cognition while embracing being-in and becoming-with the puzzle of stressed body and soul. The gentle holding offered by Kathrin's doing-action of sorting jigsaw pieces into "border and non-border" evokes the vitality of 'doing' as a way to establish suitable containment during these baffling times. In our vignettes, we each make-sense of containment in enacted ways. And these holding-ways all involve sympoietic and sensory relationships: with self; others; the expressive-materiality of art; our ethno-connectivity to culture and land; and to soul and vitality. These help us hold space for ourselves and our students/clients/supervisees as we navigate this muddled maze – which leads me to ponder a particular container I've crafted to help myself and clients return to embodiment in these dislocating times.

Deborah seeks edges to hold the muddle

The pandemic has we therapists/educators/supervisors navigating uncertainty alongside our clients/students/supervisees. My stressed-brain fizz means I struggle to hold in mind the ever-

expanding plethora of appropriate body-based, bottom-up, trauma-informed, neurobiologically-researched, polyvagally-savvy, somatic-experiencing-sourced, neurosequentially-sussed, sensorymotor-psychotherapy-grounded, body-keeping-the-score-esque approaches to working with trauma (see Malchiodi, Herman, Fisher, Porges, P. Levine, Perry, Ogden and van der Kolk). I've therefore crafted a wee acronym as a crutch for myself and clients, as we hobble through the betwixt-and-between together. The acronym BRATS helps us remember several evidence-based, body-first, self-soothing activities. The letters decode into the broad categories of: B – breath; R – rhythm; A – activity; T – temperature; S – senses. I work creatively through these with clients who speak of troublesome anxiety, stress, and trauma-shaped (re)experiencings. Of course, not all the elements identified in BRATS suit each person. For example, I'm pushed into hyper-arousal by focusing too much on my breathing as this (re)activates sensations of a near-drowning I endured. And, several years ago, I worked with a client diagnosed with Complex-PTSD and we discovered that dedicated attention using her senses to check in with her body triggered implicit-memories of a surgical misadventure/near-death experience. This dropped her into a deeply dissociative, mute, hypo-aroused state from which she required gentle extraction. (See Siegel for more about working with the Window of Tolerance alluded to here, and for an expanded arts-informed version, see Malchiodi's Circle of Capacity.) Playing with the components of this acronym in a safe creative therapy studio-space allows us to feel into, strengthen and render bespoke those elements that suit.

While BRATS components glow-worm from each creative contribution, I notice them particularly in Hilary's use of Temperature and Senses in her *Jasmine* video (see the link below). She gravitates intuitively towards water, running from warm to cold over naked skin, to entice herself from tangled-jungle into presence. Medical research supports the use of hot and cold water to induce state-change. In their study 'The temperature of emotions', Barbosa Escobar et al. (2021) identified that a majority of humans associate warm temperatures with comfort and safety: cold is correlated with low-arousal, hot with high-arousal. And several clinical studies have identified that water bathing decreases stress hormones (like cortisol), may balance the feel-good neurotransmitter serotonin, help our sympathetic nervous system to calm, and significantly reduce distress and anxiety (Marazziti et al., 2007; Rapoliené et al., 2015; Toda et al., 2006).

Hilary Tapper, awash with jasmine

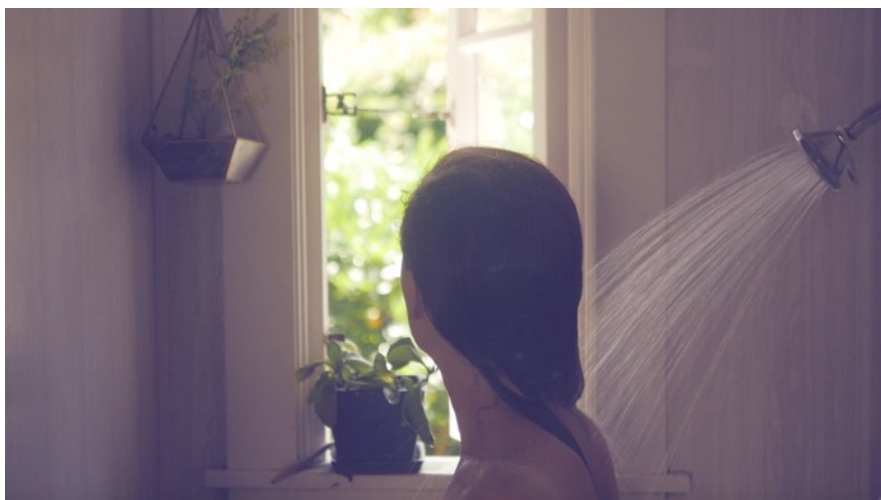


Figure 9. Hilary Tapper, still from *Jasmine*, 2022, digital photograph.

I breathe in Hilary's jasmine... and expand my wonderings to consider another quake memory that involved a sensory-stretch into the quivering darkness left behind when cognitive-clarity withdraws.

Deborah breathes a smorgasbord of aromas

What is it about the Canterbury earthquakes that heightens my nasal acuity? From taking my sense of smell pretty much for granted, I become – often rudely – assailed by a rich smorgasbord of aromas, scents, whiffs and pongs. This continues for years before settling into a less vivid olfactory assault – possibly entrained with settling of the quake-shaken earth beneath my feet and the rabbit-heart within my chest. Curious, at the time, I fall upon a snippet that appears in the newspaper (I can't find it now, ten years later) that suggests individuals identified as having antisocial personality disorder tend to have a diminished sense of smell. This is touted as a possible addition to testing regimes used to recognise those with this potentially harmful disorder. Fact or fabrication, I know not, but it gets me wandering a wondering-warren. This smell-thing connects to our mammalian-ness (the furry critters I co-habit with all use their noses to navigate their worlds and relationships). Can I interpret a stunted sense of smell as stymying capacity to connect, empathise and 'feel' others? And maybe, conversely, my expanded olfaction is warm-blooded compensation for the all-encompassing brain-boggle I'm hosting? I am, after all, wrangling quake-shakiness alongside my clients and therefore need acute attunement to forage out beyond the cloying of my own distress to 'find' and 'feel-into' my clients' wobbly-worldings.

I Google-fossick and am reminded that our olfactory sense links directly into our limbic system – the ancient, original part of the mammalian brain associated with emotion and memory. This renders smell important in our relationships with others – allowing us, however unconsciously, to respond to the hormonal scents emanating from our fellow beings. Anosmia sufferers, beset by a complete loss of smell, often experience emotional 'blunting' and cut-off-ness from the world which can affect their ability to form and maintain personal relationships and lead to a sense of isolation and depression (Fifthsense, 2022). Previously an often-underrated sense, smell has recently risen to prominence with the arrival of Covid-19 and the temporary or more enduring loss of smell it may cause (American Psychological Association, 2022).

My quake-awoken smell-acuity tallies with the quirky ways we 'scholartists' (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2017) have not only experienced our senses awakening, but have creatively embraced this, discovering "**rarer than gold**" many "**a delightful surprise and a surprising delight**".

Deborah leans into listening deeply

As this Covid-induced sense of liminal betwixt-and-between lingers (Turner, 1969), I find to my great relief that I've resources I'd previously taken for granted. While the quakes amplified my sense of smell, the pandemic has emphasised my sense of hearing. I celebrate ways I accept and then bypass my reading-block by fossicking about online and finding speaking-books, videos and podcasts addressing relevant themes. And I learn to listen deeply. I walk my dogs and listen. I cook dinner and listen. I clean the house and listen. But mostly, I create collages and listen. Poiesis – responding to what is given, shaping what is already within my reach, allowing, willing-to-not-will – invites my creative process to (re)birth itself in new ways. My head and heart are awash with spoken voices offering insights, notions, words of wisdom and encouragement. Alongside this useful content, I awaken to the

importance of prosody – the tone, pitch and cadence of the human voice – in helping soothe jangled nerves and forge connections (Malchiodi, 2020). And my eyes seek patterns, pleasing shapes, intriguing symbols, provoking dissonances, snippets of words. I find pockets of calm. The sensory and embodied act of listening and creating returns me again and again to these ‘refuges for recovery’ (Haraway, 2016) where I feel something-more arouse, that ever-open-edge of soul (Gendlin, 1997).

The orientation that we’re always in partial darkness and therefore “not a task to be solved but [a] ‘mystery’” to be curiously pursued (Mølbak, 2013, p.463) is a theme woven into the work of several psychotherapists, such as Jung, Brach, Hillman, S.K. Levine, Gendlin and Mølbak. Embracing ourselves and our fellow humans as more-than, especially when we’re surrounded by life-altering events beyond our control, opens an approach in which “artistic creativity can itself be understood as a form of soul-making which aims to restore sense to the world” (Levine, 2009, p.45). Heleina magnifies the importance of how this sympoietic-soul-making interweaves with our sense of wellbeing. From within misty-clouds of disconnection, she illuminates considerations of ethno-sym-sense, our iho matua [8] /sense of being inter-connected with what’s formed us, where we belong, what entangles us meaningfully with land, culture, other beings (visible and unseen-but-felt), stories and such like.

Heleina Dalton reconnects through pūrākau/tinana/wairua expression

More emails appear in my inbox. Notification boxes appear as looming grey rectangular clouds on my screen. I ‘x’ them away, only to lose my focus.

I’d rather those clouds were rain clouds, offering a moment to feel the sensation of water falling on me from Ranginui... his tears, he tohu aroha ki a Papatūānuku [9]. She was forced apart from him. They did not have a choice. They were separated by others without consultation.



Figure 10. Heleina Dalton, *Clouds in my screen*, 2022, digital photograph.

There's so much more to do. I am swept into torrents of overwhelm and mists of brain fog. 'What was that thing I was doing?' My expansive world reduced to the screen in front of me. I am detached from the physical. Te Taiao [10], my solace, a place I go to more often in my mind now than in actuality. My hands rub my thighs in efforts to come home to myself. There's more mass to me now, expanding the skin of me, stretching to accommodate the 20-plus kilograms I've accumulated. How is that even possible? I've been eating to fill a void. Separated from my family, from my ancestral lands that tell my bones I am home. I try to be kind to myself. I try to be accepting and acknowledge this is a trauma response. I feel shame. At least that's a feeling. Oft times I feel te kore/the void or in contrast, I feel Rūaumoko [11].

News of more mandates are announced. Heat generates out from my solar plexus – my control centre. I track it back to beyond my days. It feels old. My tūpuna [12] knew this. Different circumstances... and yet my cells remember.

I actively chose to move to Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland to live with my husband instead of in the North where I'm from. I chose to be double vaccinated well before the vaccination targets were set, as a conscious choice of familial and social responsibility. My own sovereignty engaged. But now every time I hear the word 'mandate' I quake. When I consider it's been months since I walked beneath the tōtara trees at my ūkaipo [13] or since I have held any of my children or mokopuna [14] or swam in waters that connect me to my identity, the heat rises in me and Rūaumoko rumbles therein.

My body activation requires a body-based solution... my story entwined with ancient pūrākau [15], through the histories of my ancestors engraved into my iho matua and expressed in the physical. Physical expression releases the pressure.



Figure 11. Heleina Dalton, *Entwined*, 2022, digital photograph.

My yoga mat, the lounge floor, companioned with imagery-rich meditation, yoke my mind, heart, spirit, and body. I find reprieve again. Standing in mountain pose I whisper “ko au te maunga, ko te maunga ko au. I am the mountain and the mountain is me” (Figures 10-12).

Ok, where was I?



Figure 12. Heleina Dalton, *Here I am*, 2022, digital photograph.

Heleina's sense of "te kore/the void" echoes around me. Experiencing ongoing uncertainty and stress while being separated from loved ones has created a pandemic of aloneness that's being widely researched (type 'research into pandemic loneliness' into your search engine and go journeying...). Each of our creative-contributions reverberates with this sense of absence and the repeated riff of using our senses to again-and-again (re)turn to connection with self, with soul, with others, with the "**comforting earth**" of Papatūānuku, with something-more. In essence, maybe we CATs are seeking and sensing-into whatever 'home' means for each of us? I follow this possible interpretation along yet another tangential-tunnel where I encounter a piece I created using Focusing-Orientated Arts Therapy (Rappaport, 2008) during my quake inquiry. It feels very alive still. I rework it, as a reminder to lean into respect, graciousness and complexity.

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

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

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

The waiting rides on the swelling back of deep sadness.

I am waiting to go Home.

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

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

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

I miss this place.

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

... and suddenly I'm back in the waiting space, in the dim sterility. Vertigo gives way to thick sorrow. I encourage myself to stay with and wonder about these sensations and my life-narratives of which they speak. It comes to me that, while this waiting space initially took shape as I hovered, a frightened and confused child, on the fringes of my mother's first battle with cancer, it became more fully realised when my parents and first-husband died, and has further deepened during the uncertainty of the quakes and the pandemic. I now know, while a sizeable portion of me – after initial struggles with denial and anger and bargaining – dropped deeply into the footless grief of my losses and crawled across the shards-of-mourning towards acceptance, healing and growth, another part simultaneously refused to accept and engage, and this self has taken herself off into this an-aesthetic waiting space.

Here she stays still, trying not to move or breathe lest she scare off the return of her Home. She's lonely and alone, dislocated, unwilling to interact as this may distract her and she may miss the fleeting moment when the small crack opens between this paused-space and her place-of-belonging, a home-place she believes must be just on the other side of that mist. She's certain movement away from this space is giving in; that she's the torch-song; she's

keeping the faith. She's an embodiment of my sense of disconnection, dissociation, numbness, of looking-in-from-the-outside.

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

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

What's your name? I ask.

I am your Threshold Orphan.

–Adapted from *Diary of the Threshold Orphan*, March, 2014
(Green, 2015, pp.48-50)



Figure 13. Deborah Green, *Threshold Orphan*, 2021, digital collage.

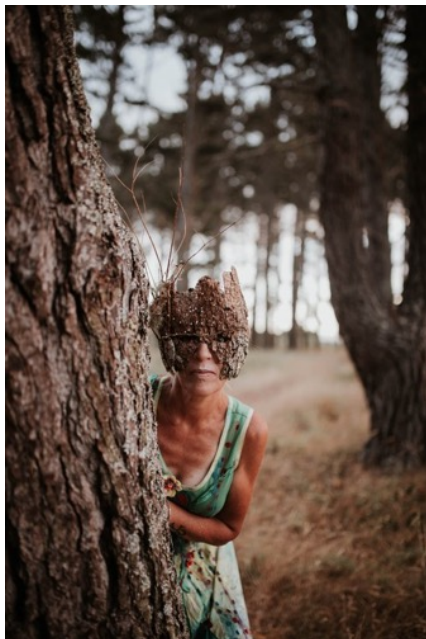
My *Threshold Orphan* (Figure 13) appears to symbolise our shared sense of “disconnection, dissociation, numbness, of looking-in-from-the-outside”. And yet simultaneously, throughout our vignettes, runs our glowing navigational use of myriad ways of making-sense to turn towards connection – even when the relationality we offer is rebuffed or stalled or needs reconfiguration and we're “not allowed too close – so [must] look in quietly, respectfully.” In these dim, confusing tunnels, we learn to practise patience and grace, to take time and give spaciousness, recognising that making-sense and sensing-home, while shared, are also granulated and personal. And as we commune with this ‘enduring liminality’ (Green, 2020), Heleina reminds us that being present in poiesis invites us to “give blessings and gratitude” as we “gather the pieces” and transform our overwhelm by playing with what is given.

Angie Richardson comes home to self and Gaia through sensual connection

I am huddled over in the street sobbing, I can feel pain in my heart-space, I am intensely lonely, missing my whānau [16] and friends. The untimely and abrupt arrival of Covid-19 for the second time in Aotearoa New Zealand last year had a twofold effect. My pen captures a sense of this:

Time slides between the folds
I am held hostage in my own home
This delta jumping hop skipping racing
At top speed to spread itself about mercilessly
Has separated me from my nearest and dearest
I am entrapped on this land
I walk
I am resentful, lonely...

Unable to leave Te Tai Tokerau, my sanctuary feels like a prison of sorts and my solitary existence in this circumstance triggers painful feelings of loneliness. Tentacles of dejection worm their way into my being, interrupting the sacred exploration I was involved in with Gaia, which had me feeling enchanted with life for the most part (Mackinnon, 2019). A brisk walk after a storm takes me across a wee bridge and I happen upon a tree that has fallen to the ground, lying naked with its bark peeled off right up the middle exposing its trunk. I give blessings and gratitude as I gather the pieces... and create...



Figures 14 and 15. KWH Photography, *Tree-spirit mask*, 2022, digital photographs.

The deliciousness of crafting something from a natural source that so aesthetically pleases me lifts my spirits. Whitehead (2003) suggests this relationship between the sensory embodiment of art-making and poiesis gives rise to what needs to be uncovered. Instinctively I realise this Tree-spirit mask (Figures 14 and 15) is symbolic of the element Earth, and the other three elements of Gaia are seeking to come into existence also. I am taken on a journey to birth these creations and in doing so I am self-soothed. There is a sensual connection with the land, with my hands in the Earth and clay, my own sense of being in touch with my body is heightened as I craft the masks (Figures 16, 17, 18). Pike (2021) supports the notion of nature-based resources providing a pleasurable experience as the act of creation directly taps into the senses. Creating the masks calms me, delights me, frustrates me at times, but I come to know I can turn to this activity when feeling overwhelmed and burdened by my aloneness. Indeed, in their own way they become my companions...



Figure 16. KWH Photography, *Fire mask*, 2022, digital photograph.

Jennings (1994) describes ‘artistic authenticity’ as when there is creation through the experiencing of the transformative process. The mask-making took on a ritualistic feel of exploring the metaphysical world through representing my relationship with the elements. When wearing them I could sense other realms and the shamanic potential that they could evoke for dramatic action. The creation process has been a potent exercise for me that supported and held me during the Covid-19 lockdown when I experienced intense isolation and loneliness. I was truly gratified by the artistic process of creating something that felt akin to my experiencing AND that I was truly proud of. “We can heal and be healed through integration by using our innate gift of imagination and our ability to create” (Mitchell, 2013, para.14).



Figure 17. KWH Photography, *Air mask*, 2022, digital photograph.



Figure 18. KWH Photography, *Water mask*, 2022, digital photograph.

The sun rises in the sky
And here I am
I see Gaia
And Gaia sees me
I am significant
I incorporate the elements into my being
I am inter-connected with it all...

Where divergent tunnels inter-connect

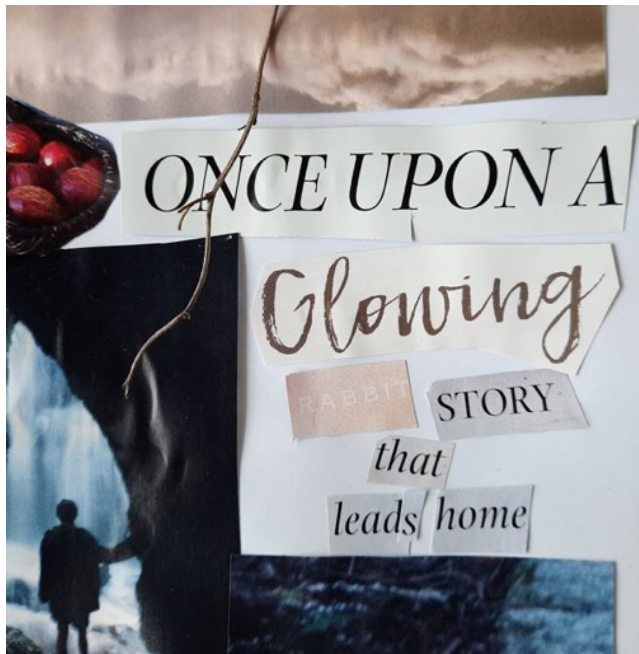


Figure 19. Deborah Green, *Rabbit story, lead me home* (detail), 2020, collage and natural materials.

It is now time to slow, to breathe in, to toy with ways to softly pencil-in a pause to this tentacular journey. And thus, I still our wonderful-wondering in the wide-reaching warrens opened by our Covid-contemplations. I peer into the many tunnels traversed. We each lived-into what we already knew, however hidden, and came to know this and ourselves more deeply. We also, individually and collectively, opened different and unexpected tunnels. These emergent byways of sense-making render this a queered inquiry in which we appear to have entangled reflexivity *and* diffraction – two research approaches that are often held in contention. Reflexivity is alive in our autoethnographic, recursive loops into communing-with-self. And diffractivity infuses the divergent perspectives of difference opened by communing with/through the arts and each other.

I'm reminded of the Dormouse from Alice's similarly convoluted jaunt down the rabbit-hole. Considering the phrase, 'much of a muchness', the Dormouse asks if anyone has actually seen a drawing of a 'muchness' (Carroll, 2022, p.56). In this compilation of complementary and contrary cognitive-collapse-tales, it seems we've expressed the knotted co-existence of 'too-muchness' and 'not-enoughness' that arises when familiar everyday muchness is uprooted. Unlike Alice, we won't awaken from this pandemic, blinking in daylight and returned home to our previous-muchnesses. Rather we're called to endurance as we simultaneously reflex upon our previous muchnesses, diffract within our current too-much-/not-enoughnesses, and create new tunnels home by being response-able with however-much is here now. My companion-CATs and I are thus intuitively making-sense in embodied, ensouled, expressively-material, and ethnographically-sympoietic ways. And as we're puzzling and walking, listening and smelling, touching and tasting, moving and creating, and being with nature, we've again and again (re)stor(i)ed our various senses of muchness.

These repeated (re)turns from absence to presence in oh so many ways now become learning. The learning becomes teaching, therapy, supervision and living. And slowly softly, we're crafting our own "**glowing rabbit story that leads**" to the muchful-medley of whatever this

yearned-for “**home**” means for us each. And so, finally, we invite ‘home’ into poems. Kathrin, Wendy, Hilary, Heleina, Angie and I each coax our waywardly nascent-knowings into verse. These are di-verse. Again, I grapple with the tangled task of corralling these diffractive divergences into the container of one (hopefully) coherent piece. Or maybe not... I share the poems and ask my co-authors if we should simply insert them all as is. Wendy is feeling playful. She feeds our words into an algorithm that pulls the poems apart and settles the phrases into perplexing configurations. She shares several versions. This unleashes a thrilled flurry – we relish the randomness, the intervention of technology, the way this mirrors our loss of control, the invitation for happenstance to birth new possibilities. Kathrin voices a shared felt-sense of this, saying: it’s delightful in how well it fits (at times) and how jarring it is (at times). In this (dis)comfort, it holds the reality of living with/through/despite Covid-19 and honours the disrupted/-ing dis/harmony of our collaborative kupu [17].

Making-home of sense

Which too turned me out
Like a worm in the soil
Enfold me in your woven quilt of sticks, earth and flax, Papatūānuku
I've searched for so long
Turning me out
is in the turning
The threads which once held me
Engraved into a compass of spirit and water
Weathered and windswept
What has been shelter
With stories to tell
Settle and ground me in my being
My home
I come home to my body
I turn to my past
My belonging churned
From my partner’s warm embrace
My home has been turned
Home is her(e)
My home is not one place
A voyager by ancestry
What am I home-less?
Haere Mai
Turning, turning, turning
An expansive stillness
As I come home to my maunga, my place of birth
Now loose at my feet
I'm returning to home as turning
Nourish this gypsy
For I wish to be swaddled and cradled in your loving embrace
Homes I thought would be forever
To find my way back home
A oneness with the hum
For a place to belong
And land, weary and satisfied

A mirage, playing tricks with my mind
Which I turned out
The rising and setting of the sun
(Re)turning home
The place I was born
I am turning home
There's no where to "return" to
Your luscious curves I know so well
No longer has room
Maybe
Navigation by the stars
From our whare in the trees
Where do I go?
Home was but a place in a far-away land
I thought here was surely it
The moon
Which always returned me to myself
The place I always returned to
I feel welcomed home
Once upon a time home didn't exist
Home now calls to me from the whenua around me
Wairua
Through the dermis of my making
To me



Figure 20. Deborah Green, *Rabbit story, lead me home*, 2020, collage and natural materials, on 420 x 594mm sheet.

Endnotes

[1] All text presented **like this** is quoted from the collaged found-word poems by Deborah Green (2020).

[2] *Reflexivity* involves critically examining the impact of the researcher's/therapist's worlding (taken-for-granted values, assumptions, and behavioural patterns and practices) upon research/therapeutic processes. Reflexivity may also include feedback loops that explore the reciprocal influence of these processes upon the researcher's/therapist's worlding (Finlay, 1998; Hedges, 2010).

[3] *Diffraction* is used metaphorically and methodologically within feminist and new materialist research to indicate a critical and difference-attentive approach in which emergent ideas overlap, interfere with, and co-establish one another and divergences are encouraged (Geerts & van der Tuin, 2016). There is some contention between reflexivity and diffraction, which are often seen as opposing.

[4] This statement is widely attributed to Fritz Perls, but a direct quotation could not be sourced.

[5] The spirit or soul (all footnotes henceforth are English interpretations of te reo Māori words and phrases).

[6] Mother earth in Māori and Greek mythology.

[7] House.

[8] An umbilical cord of spirit energy which links through ancestral lines to Io or the Source (Mataira, 2008).

[9] A symbol of love for Papatūānuku.

[10] The natural environment.

[11] Personification of volcanoes.

[12] Ancestors.

[13] Place of nourishment likened to the breast of one's mother during the night.

[14] Grandchild/grandchildren.

[15] Narratives which hold esoteric knowledge and history.

[16] Extended family.

[17] Welcoming words.

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Wendy is an artist, educator, and Whitecliffe trained creative arts therapist. She has an eclectic, multi-modal studio-based practice, drawing experience from working in a variety of private, education and community settings and with people of all ages and abilities. As a researcher, Wendy fosters an ongoing inquiry into the materiality of the creative arts therapies. She is an avid arts-maker, and recently extended her arts practice by completing Whitecliffe's MFA programme.

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Kathrin currently works at Whitecliffe as a lecturer and coordinator for the PGDip in Creative Arts Therapy as well as a Creative Arts Therapist at Hospice West Auckland. In the past, she has worked primarily in the trauma field with various ages and group sizes: Tamariki (children), rangatahi (adolescents), and adults in individual and group settings. She utilises a multi-modal approach to her mahi (work), holding deep compassion for the people she finds herself journeying alongside and infused with a lot of curiosity and playfulness. Kathrin loves all things nature and animals and delights in the magic of story-telling.

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MAAT(Clinical), BEd, DipTchnng, ATCL, AThR

Angie has a private practice 'Creative Harmony' where she has worked with children/teens/adults using a multi modal approach that includes drama/play therapy, creative visual arts, sandtray, drumming and movement. Through her business she contracts to a variety of organisations including schools. She offers supervision and professional development and has a chapter in an international dramatherapy book coming out this year. Angie believes in the alchemy and magic of the expressive arts to empower people to find their soul medicine. She is a dreamer, a crafty project maker, an improviser and loves floating in the oceans of Tangaroa like a starfish!

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