

# Intra-active identity stories: How a storm, pine-needle basket, waterfall, and satellite entangle and trouble a creative arts therapist's ecological and professional identity

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## Abstract

This article uses critical autoethnographic and arts-based methods to wonder about how identities are entangled. It introduces the notion of intra-action to enact this formation, particularly concerning ecological and professional identities. The writer introduces new materialist philosophical and theoretical orientations and identifies how these same philosophies may be woven through creative arts therapy practice. The writer introduces what a shifted notion of professional identity may look like in light of these philosophies and intra-actions. The article then moves into the second section, where the researcher's phenomenological lived experiences of her intra-active identities are explored through four stories related to a storm, a pine-needle basket, a waterfall, and a satellite.

## Keywords

Ecological identity, professional identity, intra-action, arts-based research, critical autoethnography

## Introduction | Grounding

What is it to be human at this time, when we entangle with the lived and tangible realities of climate change? What is it to be an ecological, creative, professional being on this planet now? How are our identities formed through all of this?

My questions come from my doctoral work and are in a middling, unfolding process. Yet this positionality feels appropriate, as everything begins in the middle. The middle is not the space between things, it is the world in its ongoing practice of worlding itself (Akomolafe, 2017).

In this writing, I use the term intra-action, conceived of by Karen Barad (2007), to articulate my philosophical orientation to professional and ecological identity formation and enactment.

Intra-action, as I am coming to know it, means considering how we exist in a web of relationships that is constantly moving, growing, and changing. These relationships include

human and more-than-human phenomena (Abram, 1997). I use the term intra-action to denote how these relationships are entangled, energetic, and responsive as we move through our lives. If we are intra-active beings, then this intra-activity exists in our professional-ness, ecological-ness, creative-ness, destructive-ness, and human-ness. In this writing, I am noticing and attending to intra-actions in the world around me. I am troubling and teasing apart notions of identities to wonder how living phenomena meet us in different ways and how we are co-creating worlds with these phenomena.

This article begins by outlining key theoretical and philosophical ideas underpinning this orientation, and how these philosophies could weave with creative arts therapy (CAT) practice. I then introduce the reader to my positionality in this research before wondering whether we can imagine a shifted and expanded ‘definition’ of professional identity for creative arts therapists (CATs), in light of intra-action.

Towards the second half of this article, I outline the critical autoethnographic and arts-based methodologies I used to play with these sticky questions. I demonstrate how I am learning more about, and troubling, ecological and professional identities through four stories. These four stories illustrate my intra-activity with material phenomena through a storm, pine needles, a waterfall, and a satellite.

The stories tell of destruction, creation, dismay, hope, and honesty about living in the here-and-now-ness of our planet’s evolution. These stories share how the little things matter greatly, through thick descriptions of my reflexive experience (Leavy, 2016). I ground myself in the centre of a landscape and capture something about what happens when you notice the happenings around you. As Haraway (2016b) puts it, we relate, know, think, world, and tell stories through and with other stories, worlds, knowledges, thinkings, and yearnings.

## **Philosophical and theoretical orientations | Percolating**

We exist in the time of the Anthropocene, an epoch in which humans are the major geological force shaping the earth at a global scale (Macfarlane, 2019). Given this, recognition is mounting for research that disrupts and makes taken-for-granted constructs visible (Green, 2022). My research sits in this intersection, asking what it is to be a professional, an ecological being, and a human during the time in which we live. What entangles our identities?

This writing draws on new materialist thinking. New materialism is a turn from post-modernism to consider materiality, its agentic effects, and how ontology and epistemology are intimately entangled (Barad, 2003). New materialism is a philosophy that is ‘part of the world’ (Braidotti, 2013), embracing interdisciplinary work enquiring into how culture and nature can no longer be seen as separate (Haraway, 2016a), how identity is material and

discursive (Barad, 2007), and how concepts and meaning are material too (Akomolafe, 2017).

My writing intends to sit in these intersections and consider the material world and the intra-active way we move through it as phenomenological, living beings (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). This idea of ‘being’ a phenomenal being puts language to the idea that our bodies think and know in ways that precede cognition. We *feel* the material, intra-active world, and through this feeling, we come to know something about it. We are temporally entangled with these knowings, whether or not we are cognitively aware of them.

Intra-action, instead of inter-action, argues for the intra-dependence of things rather than a linear ‘cause and effect’ of independent objects (Barad, 2014). Intra-action denotes how relationships precede the objects and how objects only come to gain their ‘thingness’ in the context of a relationship through entanglement, rupture, and congealment (Brown et al., 2020).

I consider how new materialist thinking conceptualises ‘events’ rather than structures, systems, or mechanisms enacted upon our lives (Barad, 2014). This writing details four ‘events’ through stories to illustrate intra-action and how I am being formed, as an ecological and professional being, through them.

The orientation of new materialism honours the place of obstacles, not as things to overcome but as curious spaces of being stuck. My stories illustrate stuckness, and I am comforted by Akomolafe’s (2017, p.102) noticing that obstacles are the richest, thickest, densest places in the universe, bursting with activity, generativity, experiments into dis/continuity, and alchemical shifts.

## **Philosophies and theories weaving with CAT practice | Embodying**

Haraway (2016b) challenges us to consider that it matters what thoughts think thoughts. What this means, in practice, is interrogating and troubling the assumptions, deeply held beliefs and internalised philosophies that form our worldviews and, thus, vocabularies in the world. How our thoughts are formed extrapolates into considering the intra-actions of our behaviours, communication, and decision making with the world. This matters when considering how we embody our professional and ecological identities (Næss, 1989) and how individual stories connect to a web of other stories. This is important for CATs who work at intersecting spaces of caring for deep wounds, inviting and considering new ways of living, and bringing creativity into our clients’ worlds.

Challenging our thoughts, assumptions, beliefs and practices of being in the world is an iterative and ongoing process that therapists are invited into. In many ways, it is required in order to practice ethically. Staying grounded in lived experience and being available to

practise compassion, acceptance, and open-heartedness to the people we work with in vulnerable spaces requires this.

In this work as CATs, we encounter daily the intra-active-ness of being human. We cannot ignore that we are beings entangled in the material environments in which we live and practice. We work intimately with the materiality of the arts and entangle with them in relational, surprising, compelling, paradigm-shifting ways. We know what it is to *feel*, *engage*, and *be moved by* this practice. This is intra-action.

When I write about and consider the word ‘ecological’ in this piece, I do so in a way that moves beyond the static, binary idea of ‘beings’ interacting with their ‘environment’. I use the term in a layered way, considering the ethical and axiological quality of what it is to *be* ecological. I sit with curiosity about the flux and continual becoming-with that Haraway (2016b) speaks about. I am considering what it means to challenge anthro-centric notions and begin learning to live and die well with/on this earth. How might we think with different thoughts? How might we think ourselves out of particular anthro-centric shapes and into other more ecological shapes? Moreover, how does this entangle our work and who we are in professional therapeutic spaces as CATs?

This matters because research repeatedly acknowledges that for all the different therapeutic modalities, training, and therapeutic labels out there, what it comes down to, at the most basic level, is the human-to-human connection we foster in therapy (Yalom, 2003). The quality and nature of the therapeutic relationship generate trust, vulnerability, and transformation for clients, and the therapeutic learning we practise always comes secondary to that (Rappaport, 2014).

If we consider the identities we embody, our presence and positionality, and how this influences the meeting place and alchemical space of a therapeutic encounter, then it *deeply matters* what thoughts are thinking our thoughts. It profoundly matters how we understand intra-actions (Dernikos et al., 2020). What we believe about our ecological place on this earth when offering ourselves in therapeutic encounters *matters* because we are constantly entangling with what thoughts our clients think, too, and how they experience us in our being-ness (Kopytin, 2021).

## **My positionality | Temporal**

My positionality in this inquiry comes from nine years of living and being in Aotearoa New Zealand’s CAT world with clients, colleagues, and students, and a lifetime of wondering about belonging to and being on this earth. From this position, I resonate with Macfarlane’s reminder that the first law of ecology is that everything is connected to everything else (2015, p.69). I want to acknowledge my positionality, in time as space, as a being who grew up disconnected from my ancestral land in Scotland but also the lands I inhabited in towns and

cities in Aotearoa. I want to acknowledge how Indigenous Māori grow up in relation with and connected to this land. I am a first-generation immigrant who was invited to know the natural world through invitations from the natural world itself.

In my master's research, I considered how art-making in CAT might be gentler for the planet by collecting and creating environmentally sensitive art materials. Reflecting on this project now, I notice that perhaps there was a deeper question underneath my master's research question. That question is not so much about the 'practice' of environmental sustainability in our field but something about the *being-ness* and *intra-connectedness* of ecology and our *professional-ness* as therapists.

## **An expanded notion of professional identity | Entangling**

I am curious about the notion that CATs consciously and unconsciously think about identity as they go about their day-to-day (Borowsky Junge, 2014). 'Professionalism' as a construct is very Euro-/Western-centric. As well as this, professional identity, as a human-centric concept, seems to be understood predominantly in the present tense, by whom and how you are now. It seems to be shaped by categorisation, by who is in and who is out. It seems to be conceptualised in hierarchical, comparative, and binary ways, and is entangled with ideas about being an expert who is educated in a certain way to perform a certain type of task (Cruss et al., 2019). The ontological position of these dimensions fundamentally differs from the epistemologically driven positions informing intra-action. There is an entire raft of literature about professional identity in CAT and adjunct fields, yet, in light of the Anthropocene, I challenge this to consider how we extend this identity to include the ecological identity of being a human intra-connected with the living world.

If we consider the ways we are entangled with the world around us, then the sense-making we engage with around professional identity needs to move beyond a human-centric definition to consider a post-human (Braidotti, 2013) lens that imagines our identities as ecological, in the sense of being spatially, geographically, and temporarily formed too. I consider this ecological entanglement literally, as I think with the landscape of Aotearoa; philosophically, as I notice the entanglement (Barad, 2003) of human life with other agential forms on this earth; and metaphorically, as I tell narratives in the next section that are rich and layered and earthy. What we know and how we know it is intra-active, relational, and grounded in our lived experience of being in the world and engaging with the things of the world.

In preparation for my doctoral enquiry, I have come to wonder about, encounter, and notice how many CATs in Aotearoa New Zealand appear to already have a woven-ness to their professional and ecological identities, at least in material ways. I notice how many CATs use nature and aspects of the living world as metaphors, stories, art material, and symbols in their

work with clients. Furthermore, nature-connected CAT is taught and woven into the Master of Arts in creative arts therapy at Whitecliffe College. Many students every year research therapeutic nature connections, as I did.

Therapists embracing and students researching nature-connected CAT suggest a core quest by many to live socially and ecologically well in place (Kasper, 2009). Therefore, my inquiry sits in this space, and I intend to dig into this phenomenon and consider the intra-active nature of these identity formations in our CAT worlding.

## **Methodologies | Enacting**

In the following sections of this writing, I capture, through critical autoethnography and arts-based methods, four stories, or ‘events’, of how these complex ideas, questions, and philosophies intra-act in my lived reality.

Ellis (2016) notes that autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world. It has become a way of being in the world that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively. Autoethnography, as a methodology, asks that we examine our lives and consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. It means starting with lived experience and investigating the ‘culture of self’ and the multiplicity of identities to examine and critique broader cultural beliefs and experiences (Gray, 2011; Levine, 2019; Ricci, 2003). To help facilitate understanding of their experiences, autoethnographers use personal stories to create nuanced and detailed thick descriptions of their cultural experience (Leavy, 2016). Autoethnography privileges subjectivity, personal voice, and emotional experience, challenging traditional norms of scholarship that silence the complexity and fragility of life (Ellis, 2016).

The criticality of autoethnography comes when we observe ourselves observing, interrogating what we think and believe, challenging our assumptions, and asking if we have penetrated as many layers of our defences, fears, and insecurities (Ellis, 2016). Autoethnography is vulnerability with a purpose (Holman Jones et al., 2016), which, unlike more traditional research methods, invites secrets, disclosures, and histories to be made known with the purpose of identifying the systems that constrict, disrupt, and inform both the story and the storyteller. A lens of criticality engages the researcher to consider and more fully articulate the complex decision-making processes involved in conducting their work.

Autoethnography aims to write prose readable by general audiences, to challenge the elitism of most scholarship, and contribute to the flow of discussion around their topic. Holman Jones et al. (2016) note that autoethnographic writing is most successful when evocative and emotionally compelling. There is little point to autoethnographic writing that does not break your heart (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016).

This writing utilises arts-based methods woven throughout the critical autoethnography. Arts-based methods are simultaneously a practice, a process, and a product of research, and are not simply used to discover or uncover what is already there, but are performative and generative by both creating and transforming the research and the researcher (Adams St. Pierre, 2014; Greenwood, 2012; Haseman, 2006).

At their best, the arts can move people to see things in new ways. The arts connect with people through their senses and, in research, can promote dialogue, cultivate understanding, and problematise dominant ideologies (Leavy, 2016). Images can make us pay attention to things in new ways, capture hard-to-put-into-words ideas, communicate layered and holistic nuances, evoke strong questions, and carry theory elegantly and eloquently through metaphor (Levine, 2005; Weber, 2008).

An essential purpose of engaging in arts-based methods in this inquiry is to ‘surround’ the questions rather than ‘solve’ them (O’Sullivan, 2006). This aligns with new materialist thinking about complexity and entanglement. It is a shift towards staying with the troubles and moving towards ideas and images that enhance, challenge, and diffract each other’s meanings (Allen, 1995; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016b; Undurraga, 2021; Yardley, 2008).

The heart of arts-based research and critical autoethnography is that knowledge of the world cannot and should not be reduced to words and numbers alone, which ties in with a fundamental tenet of CAT, that there is a myriad of ways to communicate stories (Levine, 2019; O’Connor & Anderson, 2015).

## **Stories | Being**

To ground these slippery ideas in something tangible, what follows are four stories, from the summer of 2023, that illustrate tangible, material moments about what I mean when I speak to all of this. These are personal stories. There is the story of a storm, a pine-needle basket, a waterfall, and a satellite dish. Each story attempts to demonstrate, through entangled lived experiences, how this inquiry can and does look in a critical autoethnographic, arts-based process.

### **Story one: The arrival of a storm, 27 January**

The rain began two nights ago. In an eerie serendipitous premonition, as the rains began, I watched the movie about the 13 Thai boys trapped in a cave when the floodwaters rose. I remember the story’s mythic quality at the time, the world holding its breath as it unfolded, watching, waiting, wondering if they would all get out alive.

When I woke, the rain was still falling. It became torrential and stayed torrential all day, relentless in its power. In the afternoon, I watched through my kitchen window as the

neighbour's hill paddock began running with rivers. I watched as these rivers began to turn into waterfalls as they hit banks and cascaded off. I watched as the water gathered in the pond at the bottom of the gully. The pond burst its banks, and the water level rose rapidly. I put on a jacket and was instantly saturated as I moved around my property, trying to assess what was happening, the water sheet making it hard to see. I needed to know if I was going to be safe. The drainage trench that runs around two sides of my house, at the bottom of a bank (which slumped and slipped), had turned into a river. I was an island for a while. Yet the water in the moat kept moving and draining, and none reached my house.

That evening the news started pouring in, people checking up on each other, images of houses and cars submerged, families evacuating, animals separated from their owners, and casualties. Missing persons. Total destruction. The tears started flowing.

Our weather service recorded that, in 24 hours, the Auckland region had 249mm of rain. Shattering the records. We live on a restless earth (Macfarlane, 2019).

The rain eased overnight but still threatened. Today, I watch the horizon constantly, noticing how the clouds form and preparing myself. The airport is still closed, so I suspect I may be alone for a while longer if my husband, working away from home, cannot land. My mother-in-law checked in, sending me photos of my village underwater. My sister-in-law said it was like Atlantis.



Figure 1. Naomi Pears-Scown, *sodden rupturing earth*, 2023, digital photograph, 302 × 403mm.

I look in the bare cupboards, inventing creative meals for the next few days in case my car cannot get through the floodwaters to the supermarket. My father-in-law tells me he will



attempt to ride to me on his motorbike with some groceries. I hear sirens on the roads around me and helicopters above me. Many people have fared much worse than I have.

Clark (2004) notes that where we live and the forces that shape the land around us – the earth’s restlessness and the vagaries of weather – are part of the context of our everyday lives. These are part of the way we view ourselves and the world. I and my home are safe, but other contexts were less privileged. My best friend’s house is ankle-deep in water. Another friend’s house is shoulder-deep.

This morning, after the storm, I collected the pine needles filling up the drainage trench. I scooped up the fine clay particles that had washed down the bank and filled the trench, too. Pine needles. Clay. Materials for making. This morning, I felt relief flooding my body. I feel my senses acutely. My body is my anchor to the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).



Figure 2. Naomi Pears-Scown, *materials for making: clay*, 2023, digital photograph, 302 × 403mm.



Figure 3. Naomi Pears-Scown, *materials for making: pine needles*, 2023, digital photograph, 403 × 302mm.

Last night, when the rain was falling and the water was rising, I remembered reading Jessie Greengrass's (2021) novel *The High House* last summer. This beautiful story is set in the not-too-distant future when water levels rise, and people are forced to evacuate as climate-change refugees. The house is an island amongst floodwaters. I was an island too, for a while, but I was safe. I reflect on the notion of psychogeography, a science of relations and ambience that examines the specific effects of a geographical environment on an individual's emotions and behaviours (O'Rourke, 2016). Psychogeography positions itself to believe that humans have an opinion about spaces when we step into them, which has as much to do with the space as with our hardwired instincts to determine whether it is safe.

Today, I am grateful to be living off-grid. I have clean, safe water, and my power is running. However, I am not an island. I am thankful for the community checking in on me and for family bringing me food. The best of humanity comes out at times like this. And, sometimes, the worst. While my experience is subjective, I also know that human subjectivity is not, in essence, a private 'inner world' divorced from the outer material world or other beings. Subjectivities live in the worldly praxes of sensuous, embodied beings and are inherently intersubjective (Crossley, 1996). As Akomolafe (2017) puts it, the inside and the outside are

not easily divided. How is this experience entangling with my ecological identity? My humanness?

What do I do today? What can I do but breathe, watch, prepare, write, and make?

What can I make from this? Pine needles and clay. Materials for making.

I acknowledge that there are potential entanglements with toxicity in this particular kind of making. Floodwaters bring contaminants. I am fortunate to live in a landscape that did not suffer from contamination, and I felt safe to make with these earth-bound materials.

However, that was not the case for most flood-damaged areas. Being an ecological being also means entangling with toxicity, pollution, and environmental degradation. I acknowledge that my making from this place is privileged in that sense. The flood brought many things into the ecological dynamic.

Making artworks and images is a way of breaking boundaries, loosening ideas, and making way for the new (Allen, 1995). To make, in the aftermath of destruction, is to loosen those wound-up, tight, fearful parts inside of us that keep us tucked in and alert when each moment requires attention. To make, in the space of ‘after’, is to release, breathe out, and tell ourselves it is okay, we made it, we are here. Making, using materials from the earth, is also a means of dialoguing with my sense of place, with the natural world, with the physicality of what I can find to make with. It is, in that sense, an enactment of co-creative intra-action. I ask the clay, what form will you take in my hands? I ask the pine needles, how will you entangle together?

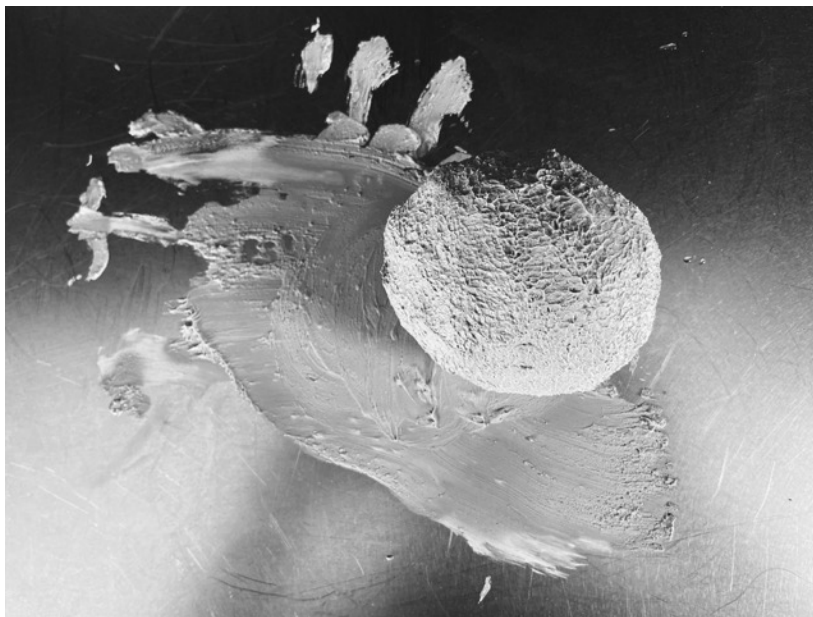


Figure 4. Naomi Pears-Scown, *clay ball*, 2023, digital photograph, 302 × 403mm.



Figure 5. Naomi Pears-Scown, *clay textures*, 2023, digital photograph, 302 × 403mm.

### **Story two: Making a pine-needle basket, 28 January**

During my master's project, I learned how to weave pine-needle baskets and created a tiny one that fitted in the palm of my hand. I have been weaving a bigger pine-needle basket for my PhD. I use the pine needles that drop onto and soften my driveway, gifted from the trees at the fence line, finding their way into crevices for collection. These same pine needles are the ones that tormented around the moat. Weaving pine-needle baskets is cartography in motion. I go around and around, tucking in, tightening, layering on top, mapping, creating lines, and giving structure and shape to my thoughts and wonderings. I am using found objects from the space and place I inhabit. I am weaving-making-creating to say I am here, I made this from here, the trees live here, I live here.

I am in intra-active relationship with these material objects. I am not only using them and shaping them for my creative purpose, but they also configure and move me in a particular way. I notice them, commune with them, watch how they change form, and listen as they tell me about the enactment of strong relationships, interdependence, and positionality. We dialogue, the pine needles and I, in the weaving.

The trees shed their needles, and I am grateful to cohabitate with them. Weaving is an ancient art form practised all over the earth to collect, gather, hold, clothe, fold and tuck in the things we need as humans to survive. Indigenous cultures have always used whatever was around them to weave, looking to the natural world for fibres that can be brought together and strengthened to make a vessel for holding. Threading, twisting and knotting of fibres were amongst the most ancient human arts, from which all else was derived (Ingold, 2007).

I moved onto this land and had not woven a pine-needle basket in years. Then I saw the needles again, dropping into my awareness, and I was reminded of this practice. I began collecting them, a nudge to use what I have, to start where I am from, which is also a core value in autoethnographic work. Begin with your voice and experiences. So each day I collect new needles, and each night, as the day settles down and the light fades, I weave and commune. I light candles and weave. I go around and around. The form does not matter so much. I feel satisfied purely in the growing of it, the practice of it.



Figure 6. Naomi Pears-Scown, *basket in progress*, 2023, digital photograph, 302 × 403mm.

As I have been making and wondering about this ancient and rhythmic practice deeply connected to place and people, I notice the basket is communicating the practice and intersection of my CAT and ecological identities.

The basket is a multiplicity of woven being-ness, each piece entangling and strengthening the other. I resonate with Macfarlane's (2019) idea that, sometimes, the talent to make art accompanies the need for that art. Basket-making came to me very quickly, naturally, and unlocked a part of myself, perhaps an ancient intergenerational part that was invited, from the pine needles themselves, with this inquiry. I was invited to know the pine needles differently through my sensorial body, perception, and curiosity. Indeed, we have come to know each other intimately. I have learned something of woven being-ness, of each piece impacting and strengthening other pieces, of using the right amount of resistance, gentleness and pressure, and of holding and becoming.

The pine needles capture something of my ecological-ness in relation to this land I call home. My 'professional-ness' translates into my weaving skills, knowing how to do something, having been taught by skilled teachers. I know how to form the shape with my hands and

apply the right pressure to coax the basket to hold and become. My CAT-ness comes through in the vision of what this is, the bigger story and enactment of intra-action for the basket, the research, and the story I am telling.

The basket represents a beautiful Venn diagram, a living, growing Venn diagram of meeting places. A vessel to hold a new story and wonder about a new theory and language for how CATs inhabit spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand, as ‘professionals’, as ecological humans. Moreover, while in practice and communion with the pine needles, I am rhythmic and am reminded of Bayo Akomolafe’s exhortation; times are urgent, and we must slow down (2017).

What can I do but weave?

Especially now, as floodwaters recede and I am homebound.

The beginning and end of a basket cannot necessarily be predetermined. A basket’s form, size, and shape have as much to do with the amount of light left in the fading sky or sinking candle, how many needles are left to weave with, or the ache in the hands as with anything else. Ingold (2013) notes that there is no obvious point when a basket is finished; sometimes, it is just a sense that each additional strand is somehow becoming superfluous. I begin and end a basket by feeling the entanglements of all the elements at play and my creative drive to perform the woven dance.



Figure 7. Naomi Pears-Scown, *pine-needle baskets*, 2023, digital photograph, 302 × 403mm.

### Story three: Visiting a waterfall, 29 January

Five minutes' drive from my house, I have discovered a bush walk. I have been going there this summer and discovered it after being housebound for days from another deluge. A sparse map at the beginning of the walkway shows the outline of a historic pā site (a Māori village or defensive settlement) and three waterfalls. I venture on, intrigued to encounter bush and the Waitangi river in a primarily pastoral landscape. My dog and I descend into a small valley and are transported. There is indeed a pā site, rising above me, and sunken kūmara (sweet potato) pits to the left. It is all grown over now, but I can see it and imagine it as a thriving community.

Following the trail, we pass the first two waterfalls, ascend and descend a small hill, and discover the third. It is a majestic being. A torrent of water cascades off a cliff that must be about ten times my height, splashing and swirling into a pool at the bottom.

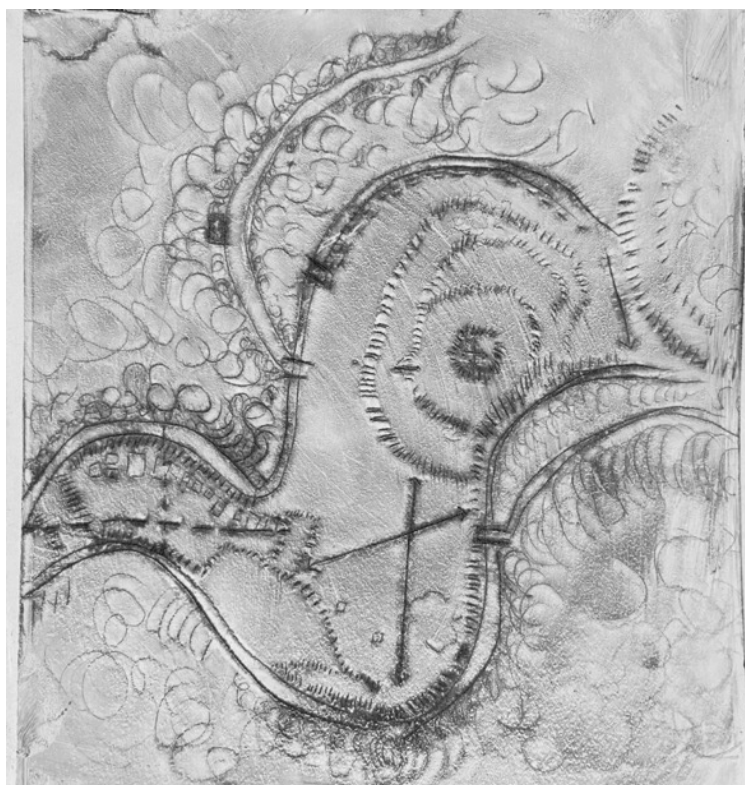


Figure 8. Naomi Pears-Scown, *mapping of the pā site*, 2023, dry-point etching, 286 × 274mm.

On either side of the waterfall is a cliff face thrumming with life – mosses, ferns, vines, shrubs, and lichen carpeting the rock, flourishing. I step into the cool water, deeply grateful for this sanctuary I have discovered so close to my new home, cleansing my feet. I sprinkle some water on my dog, too. On the way back to the car, I notice mosses and lichen growing on the boulders. They, too, are flourishing and bursting with colour. They are sponges that thrive in cool, damp places.



Figure 9. Naomi Pears-Scown, *Waitangi Falls*, 2023, dry-point etching, 325 × 260mm.

I am more attuned to these micro-forests after recently reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Gathering moss* (2003). I am transported to another memory, another forest laden with mossy carpets in the highlands of Scotland, where I am from, in the loch-side village of Dalavich, where I was visiting. I was there in the winter of 2017 and woke to dense fog rolling off the loch each day.

I walked and re-connected with the land and stepped off the path into an ancient ecosystem. The forest floor was a thick carpet of moss. A shallow pool of clear water gathered beside a fallen tree. A little hollow formed at the base of a trunk. It was hushed, all sound absorbed by the carpet, moist, vibrating, alive.





Figure 10. Naomi Pears-Scown, *a study of moss*, 2023, dry-point etching, 281 × 221mm.



Figure 11. Naomi Pears-Scown, *the moss of Dalavich*, 2023, dry-point etching, 286 × 260mm.

I think of that place when I see the mossy rocks at Waitangi Falls and the trees dripping with lichen. *And* I see the boot-cleaning stations – there to reduce the risk of spreading kauri-

dieback disease – and sense how this forest is precariously balanced, threatened by a micro-intruder, and how walkers like me are perhaps its greatest threat. We carry the seeds of its destruction right on the soles of our feet.

What is it to love the forest, be cleansed by its waters, inspired by its mosses, grateful for the shade, *and* be the one who may harm it? Macfarlane (2015) reminds me that while writing about landscape often begins with the aesthetic, it must always tend to the ethical. We inhabit our environment, we are part of it, and through this practice of habitation, it becomes part of us, too (Ingold, 2011).

What is it to be privileged to visit the land ‘gifted’ by Sir Basil Orr in 1971 as a recreational area when it was land Indigenous Māori whakapapa (belong) to before that? The land tells the story of habitation, but no one is too sure about when it was built or by whom. I read that the tangata whenua (people of the land) are Ngāti Rango, a hapū (sub-tribe) of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei iwi (tribe), who continue to exercise their kaitiakitanga (guardianship) regarding the pā site, archaeological sites, waterways, native bush and ancestral trails.

I am curious about my positionality and footsteps as a first-generation immigrant. I am reminded of ‘home’ in this landscape by the mosses, which serve as a portal. Through this memory, I consider Macfarlane’s (2003) idea that our responses to landscapes are largely culturally devised. Looking at a landscape, we do not see what is there but primarily what we think is there. We read landscapes and interpret their forms in light of our experiences and memory.

We tend to think of landscapes as affecting us powerfully when we are in them. However, there are the landscapes we bear in us in absentia, those places that live on in memory long after they have withdrawn in actuality. We often retreat to such places when we are the most remote from them. These are among the most important landscapes that we know, and we live in these the longest (Macfarlane, 2012).

The waterfall looks different now, after the flood.

The mosses are dripping.

I have been invited to learn a few things through my intra-actions with the waterfall, the mosses, my memories, and the layered complexity of land ownership and positionality. These things entangle my professional identity and becomingness.

I have wondered about the deep history of a place and how we look into or shy away from this looking. I have come to experience the strong, ongoing effects of place in memory and how this can be a gift. I have noticed how landscapes offer sanctuaries to people, plants, animals, rocks, and water. My awareness of my footprints on places, spaces, and inhabitants

matters. My journey to the waterfall taught me all this, and I weave it into who I am and how I am as a CAT professional. These understandings are not fixed but dynamic, and continue to grow as I intra-act with the place of the waterfall again and again.

I was drawn to capture something of this dynamic intra-action and footprints on spaces through dry-point etching, an ancient printmaking technique. You use a very fine needle-like tool to etch/mark/draw into a surface, creating channels that hold the ink. Then, when pressure is applied by the printing press, the ink transfers to the paper, forming an image. There is alignment between cartography and the mark-making technique of dry-point etching. It is cartography in motion, like the weaving of pine-needle baskets. Tim Ingold (2007) states that a person's life is the sum of their tracks, and I was curious about the tracks I carved in my etching plates to tell my story of becoming in this place.

#### **Story four: Troubling a satellite, 30 January**

Last summer, I wrote a journal entry one evening expressing my disdain and perplexity towards Elon Musk. I was staying in a small town in rural Wairarapa. The night was dark and clear. I went outside one evening, looked at the stars, and saw the Starlink satellite chain threading itself across the night sky. Starlink is an invention of Elon Musk's SpaceX and is a high-speed broadband internet system designed for remote and rural locations across the globe.

I noted that, while this is a remarkable feat of human invention for the ongoing digital connectivity of the planet, I also thought, my gosh, is this the beginning of the end? Will our night sky become increasingly full of satellites, obscuring natural starlight? A year ago, I discovered that astronomers find it increasingly difficult to get clear images of space, with satellites obscuring their telescope visions and mappings (Zhang, 2020). I also discovered that some migratory birds navigate and migrate by starlight. Satellite chains like Starlink may confuse them, throw them off course, and ultimately kill them (Resnick, 2021). How can we put things in the sky without considering the delicate balance of life and the potential toppling domino effect in the ecosystem? Furthermore, the increased number of items in orbit means there is an increased risk of something going wrong; for example, satellite and space-junk collisions. GPS and global communications could get damaged and knocked out of orbit, resulting in humans being hurtled back to analogue times (Wei-Hass, 2019).

A year ago, I pendulated between deeply wanting to know and deeply not wanting not to know the domino effect of satellites. A year on, I live in a rural, off-grid house, and do you know what the best (and really, only) option for my internet was? Starlink. I can work on my PhD, write this article, and connect with my clients through it. This highlighted my binary thinking of moral and amoral choices (O'Sullivan, 2006). *And* it leads me now to consider the entanglements of living on this planet and how positionality, perspective, and privilege

matter. It is not a matter of balancing an equation, such as living off-grid cancelling out using Starlink and the resulting confusion for migratory birds.

Though... the balance tips further through another story.



Figure 12. Naomi Pears-Scown, *deepening into the darkness*, 2023, soft pastels, 297 × 188mm.

A whistleblower has emerged from the cobalt mines in the Congo basin. Siddhartha Kara is an activist and expert on modern-day slavery and human-rights issues, and has published what he knows about cobalt mining (Kara, 2023). Cobalt is a mineral used in every rechargeable device I own – my phone, laptop, tablet, and solar panel batteries. Despite the companies who sell us these electronic products declaring zero tolerance for enslaving people and using child labour, at every level of their supply chain, this is precisely what is happening in the Congo basin, the most significant mineable vein of cobalt globally (Kara, 2023).

Haraway (2016b) would say that Kara is ‘earthbound’. He tells Gaia stories, or geo-stories. He is the first outsider to visit these mines and record the conditions. The mine he videoed, just one of the dozens he visited, showed a deep pit swarming with humans without masks,

gloves, or closed shoes, digging and hacking the earth by hand to extract cobalt, an extremely toxic chemical, for \$1 a day. I heard this and cried. There is no ethical cobalt mining on the production scale needed for all our devices.

There are entanglements between off-grid living, rechargeable batteries, Starlink, migratory birds, enslaved people in cobalt mines, and myself. There are transformations here *urging* us to learn how to be less deadly, more response-able, and more attuned to living on this damaged planet (Haraway, 2016b).

Wall Kimmerer (2020) and Macfarlane (2019) have spoken to the philosophical term ‘species loneliness’, coined to try to language the intense solitude we are fashioning for ourselves as we strip the earth of other life with which we have cohabited. As living beings, there is a profound, deep, unnamed sadness that stems from estrangement from the rest of creation, through our own doing.

I tell this story not to speak defeatism but to highlight how sticky, interwoven, and complex the notion of an ecological identity is. As CATs, we are being asked to look, listen, consider, and uncover the layers of this identity in our own stories because it *matters* what thoughts think our thoughts. It matters how we *are* in our worlds, what we notice, and how we understand the happenings or think our intersubjectivities (O’Sullivan, 2006). It matters to how we practise and how we are with our clients. It matters because we are phenomenological beings, not objective beings, and we live and move through our phenomenal bodies in contact and entanglements with other phenomenal bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

## **To deeply notice is to notice the weaving | Reflection**

I tell these stories from my summer to highlight something of the co-creative ‘intra’ and being-with that we are invited to enter into and become aware of as humans. As creative, sensitive, here-and-now beings, we are invited to witness, capture, respond, make, hold, cry, be, rest, and become in the unfolding intra-action of the human and more-than-human world.

There is a gifting of pine needles for weaving *and* the same pine needles block my drain after a storm. There is off-grid living, stored water, solar panel, and an internet connection to the outside world while I wait for floodwaters to recede. *And* there is human enslavement and migratory birds that may never make it. There is native bush and waterfalls, reminding me of home *and* what more of this land may have looked like before I inhabited it. There is the water flow we delight in as humans, cascading off a cliff and swirling in deep pools, *and* there is the water flow that scares us, floods us, kills us, and reminds us that we are not in control. These stories entangle me, and my identities entangle with the human and more-than-human phenomena in these stories.

These are not moral stories, but stories capturing what it is to live and witness our intra-active identities and wonder what this means for the enactment, embodiment, and performance of our CAT identities.

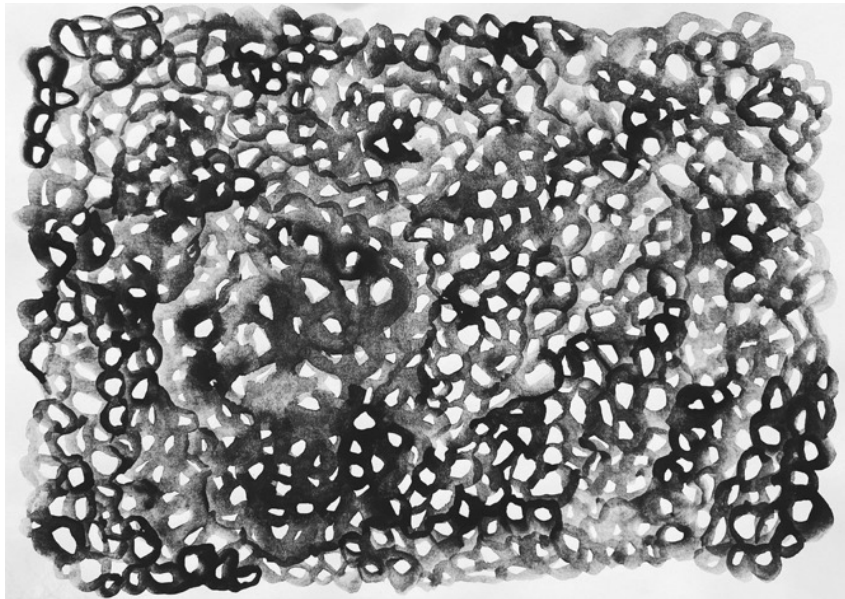


Figure 13. Naomi Pears-Scown, *we are interwoven*, 2023, soft pastels, 255 × 362mm.

## Conclusion | Beginnings

I end this writing with a piece from Haraway, which captures the essence of what I have attempted to communicate. She writes:

Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent responses to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places. Staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations or places, times, matters, meanings. (Haraway, 2016b, p.1)

This is the positioning I am sitting with as a CAT to respond to devastating events, to rebuild quiet places, to learn to be truly present, to be a moral critter, and to dwell in the unfinished configurations that entangle me. It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas with. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. *And* an essential step in getting to know our ecological identity is to fall in love with a sense of place. This is our feeling of belonging in the world (Parker, 2008). We are entangled by our sense of place and our ongoing intra-actions with it.

The ‘I’ is a story of entanglements and intra-actions (Butler, 2005; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). When we give an account of ourselves, as critical autoethnography invites us to do, the account must include the conditions of one’s emergence. I have learned that ‘knowing’ and

'truth' are deeply contextual to place and space. I have learned the value of being with complexity. I have come to know, through invitations from the natural world, that our professional and ecological identities are not fixed in time and place but are moving and changing in intra-action with the world around us, with human and more-than-human beings. I have come to value intra-action deeply. My ongoing noticing of it has indicated how connected we are to the living world and how our actions and thoughts matter. I have learned that we do not move through the world with an objective body but with a phenomenal body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). I have learned that it deeply matters what we notice and how we position ourselves as humans in the unfolding. This matters for CATs as we hold a great capacity to care, listen, sit in complexity, make, dwell, and transform. So suppose we can know ourselves differently in entanglements of geographic, historic, political, and spatial phenomena. I came to 'know' through the materiality of a storm, pine needles, waterfall, satellite, clay, weaving, etching, pastel, and photography. Suppose, in our material entanglement, like these, we can learn to live well on this earth, and support others to do so too.

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