Cruel Promises of Survival

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Abstract:

This thesis is a love letter to the challenges we face in academia – in searching for meaning in a world we see as cruel. Cruel Promises of Survival is an exploratory work that through political events aims to reflect on what it means to be human. Survival, loss and grief are some of the foundational pillars that make up this work, they are used to uncover the humanness within wider crisis events. This thesis uses storytelling to challenge what is considered 'political enough to survive in academia'. This thesis aims to challenge some of the boundaries laid out in the discipline and the role of the university in research that lives and breaths alongside the reader and writer.

Abstract:

Cruel Promises of Survival - towards a creation of loss

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How to read this research:

> *"Whether the earth or the sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference. To tell the truth, it is a futile question. On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions"*
>
> (Camus 1955/1975, pp. 11-12).

This research is an open letter to life and death. It is not only about grief, loss, and survival, but about the way we exist in a world that we often believe to be cruel. A world in which we are expected to follow certain social commitments, while we live alongside the knowledge of the tragedies that take place every single day. This research has taken place through the different seasons, and through this process I have found great comfort through the trying times of life-building and being. I hope you do too.

I wish to make clear the language I have chosen to use in this research. The word *stories* – it has a certain gentleness to it. It is the sharing of lived experiences – it is how something happened in a way that is more than the black and white regurgitation of facts in an exam paper. Storytelling is everywhere – we are born storytellers: the oral tradition is in our blood: it is our history. When we put mass crisis events into the context of stories, from the beginning it changes the way that we engage with the event. Storytelling, it is a word I have grown to love for many reasons. There are times when some of the most important stories go untold due to the heavily traditional, westernised, and patriarchal systems in which the world was built. I choose the word stories because these events are not just historical milestones: they are not just facts to revise for an assignment; they are lived experiences which happen to people, some of whom I shall never know, apart from knowing that each of their lives are just as rich and real as my own. They are not just statistics and facts to share that is why I wish to tell these stories and tell the story of those stories. I do not wish to give you a history lesson or convince you of the nature of evil – that work has already been done and undone for generations.

I give credit to other thinkers for their expressions within their journals or books, which continue to remind me to stay true to the thinking and writing that best reflects me. There have been a few stylistic devices which continue to shape the way I think about reading and writing. There comes a freedom of choice in what counts as politics and how much of what one loves and believes in can be included. Something that has been reiterated in this thesis-writing process is about finding out what 'politics' means to myself and others, especially in terms of research-based learning. To find poetry, to find personal stories, to find different thinking that still wraps around and winds through the world of International Relations has been the first of many steps in slowly uncovering what *'is'* and *'isn't'* political writing.

Through this research, there are the italicised comments and quotes – they speak in the background of this research. This is a nod to Tuhiwai Smith (2020) who wrote on the COVID-19 Pandemic, her work telling two different stories alongside each other. The use of these italicised sections functions to support how this story gets told. Throughout Tuhiwai Smith's work, it feels as though the parallelism of her storytelling allows we readers to experience the process in which her story became.

This research tells stories, both public and private. Using wider historical events as well as stories from the everyday life, this research lives and breathes in the ordinary. It captures moments we all find ourselves in – the good and the bad. There are stories that belong to others, and some that belong to me. I find this research everywhere I go, in conversations of loss, survival – of life and death. One of the threads that I often find myself tangled in is the human dilemma of 'the meaning of life.'

Strausz (2018) begins by addressing the reader, as if she were writing directly to you: 'Dear Reader', she begins. This captures this idea of how when we engage in discourse – even on the academic level – what we are really doing is telling a story. We are telling someone's story, or in some cases, if the world permits it, our own. The storytelling of politics, and Strausz' (2018) journey of exploring the possibilities of creative methods in academia. The softness and the excitement that comes with her research is reflected in the soft language she uses. On multiple occasions Kierkegaard also speaks to his reader in such a way: "Dear Reader, I wonder if you may not sometimes have felt inclined to doubt a little the correctness of the philosophical maxim that the external is the internal and the internal the external" (Strawser, 2006, p.59). He says later in 'The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air', "I

hope to bring the same recollection to: That single individual whom I with joy and gratitude call my Dear Reader" (Kierkegaard, 2016).

The final stylistic device is the inclusion of poetry: it is the slowing down, the stepping out of the dark: it is witnessing writing as something that lives and breathes with us. On many accounts through this process have I witnessed a recurring motif of language surrounding breathing and water; this is where the idea of living breathing texts was born. Some examples of such texts: Helen Cixous' 'White Ink,' Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's 'The Hundreds' and Alexis Pauline Gumb's 'Spill.' The texts continue to spark inspiration on life building and in challenging the normal traditional form of reading and writing. Elizabeth Dauphinee's 'The Politics of Exile,' Clarice Lispector's 'Agua Viva' (English translation: 'The Stream of Life') and Kathleen Stewart's 'Ordinary Affects' also fit into this category of academic works written using poetic language. There are words that ring in my ears as I read and write, phrases that pop up everywhere, connecting everything together in a beautiful and complex web.

This research is the beginning, middle and ends of grief and loss and survival – I hope you enjoy the journey as much I have. Pull up a seat, for I am about to tell you a story, dear reader. A story that goes something like this …

The beginning

Everything started with Berlant …

It started with cruel optimism, the good life, and the desire to be in the proximity of okayness. It started with the intention to look at writing as a living thing, something that breathes, something that dies, something that is more than words on a page. It was all the of the thinkiest thoughts which culminated their way into what I now understand the discipline of politics to be. Reading and writing – the sharing of stories – are like water: they have a somewhat constant flow, one with nuances that often surpass our understanding (Beauchamps, 2021). It is the stories that get told, as well as those that don't, that reflect this journey of the search for okayness, the search for healing, the search for understanding how to exist in a world we see as bad. We are taught by Carol Hanisch that the personal is political, and by Lauren Berlant that we need to save politics from the political – where does this leave us? In the world of academic writing, in the discipline of politics – where can we draw the line about what counts as political?

So here is a story, dear reader: because what are we if not born story tellers? This is a story of survival – of loss, healing, and creation. This story is about surviving in academia through the politicisation of loss and the mourning and melancholia that follows. It is about the way that the academy is structured so that it limits the possibilities of telling stories. In the academy, perhaps there is more room than is let on to push boundaries. It becomes about how we challenge it by pushing the boundaries and testing the limits of what writing and reading can be. The ultimate double-bind of writing for the 'right' reasons is about holding onto our creative integrity but still accepting the realities of what it takes to be a part of the academic world. This is when my research project became about survival. This research has become about what happens when people are made to actively survive. What do they lose, and yet what is gained, what is created? What is it that still inspires people to create – to carry on?

To me, politics seems to exist in many worlds. The first world is one that is dominated by conflict and loss; it feels as though it is the more traditional understanding of the discipline. This is the space where debate happens; it is where people throw around certain phrases and names; it is grounded in opinion. The other world is the bureaucratic 'admin' world. This is the behind-the-scenes space of policies and law making; it is the processes that governments follow. It is facts, numbers, and statistics. The final space is the one that I feel most comfortable in; this is the space of critical theory and conceptual thinking. It is different to what I would call the traditional politics, as it takes the heat out from the debate and allows us to slow down. This is the space where this thesis was born; it is the space I strive to write in. It is the reason that when people ask me what I 'do,' I hardly start with politics. It is an ongoing struggle of finding the best language to share my research. Elizabeth Dauphinee's 'The Politics of Exile' captures this space I find myself in:

> *"It would be too hard to follow my own threads. I would leave too many things out and forget so many important elements that it would fail to make any sense at all"*
>
> (Dauphinee, 2013a, p.9).

So, I ask you again, what counts as politics? We are taught about the interdisciplinary relationships that exist among the social sciences and the importance of considering different ideas and methods of thinking. However, there is still this line in the sand that separates disciplines from each other. There are different approaches – further along in my research I found that I have never really been alone in this thinking. Berlant (2011) teaches us that we are already there emotionally to bring the world into place as we see fit. We have the ability

to look at the past, the present and the future – we tell stories in attempts to better understand the way the world works, or the way we want it to be. At its core, life can be looked at as a series of small beginnings and ends – like a spiral, or a mobius strip, it folds in on itself. Rather than a linear path, each of these small beginnings, middles and ends function as constant cycles. Like the seasons and tides there is no real end – whatever end we believe we may reach there shall always be what remains: embers which await a spark to reignite them. Loss is the same: it's hard to know where it begins and when it ends, like the way we grieve. In loss there are the choices we make and the choices that are made for us. Our attachments to the process of loss, the melancholia, and mourning reflect that double bind that we put ourselves or find ourselves in, in which we hold on to the grief in order to keep some part of the lost thing alive. In the politics of living and dying, we also face a politicisation of loss, where the most personal stories, and levels of pain and grief, become part of a public narrative which fuels the call for revenge, or resolution – which in the political or public sphere often leads to conflict (Roy, 2002).

This research is a love-letter to a discipline that appears to be limiting, and yet a discipline I continue to have hope for. This research aims to push the boundaries as far as they can stretch, and then hopefully go even further. It takes a certain ownership, as Strausz (2018) would say, to claim our personal stories and more importantly, their worth. There is a divide between the way that we read and write and more importantly, the way that we engage with different types of writing. 'Different' is not to say 'another'- 'different' is to say 'challenging,' as in to be creative. Fiction and nonfiction, according to Roy (2002), "are only different techniques of storytelling… The public narrative, the private narrative - they colonize us…They commission us…They insist on being told" (Roy, 2002).

This story is more than conflict- it is more than government processes- it is a space of exploring what it means to be human – what it means to co-exist together, to lose and heal over and over. For too long I have felt bound by the epistemological commitments that come with being a politics student- I hope that this research reflects the journey of loosening the boundaries that the discipline sets itself.

Towards the end of research, I found a delightful term for this, where Dauphinee (2018) referred to disciplines as 'sealed containers.'

I hope that this reflects the very human journey of trying to do more than just survive. The politics of storytelling is where stories get exploited for gain- it is the space between myth

and fact – it is about the boundary between personal stories and public narratives. In experiences of loss there is a felt need to share lived experiences – to tell stories. These stories connect us to each other, and play an intrinsic role in healing, mourning, and letting go.

This is the story of why I stuck around a little longer.

Methodology

> *"The university will use me alive and use me dead. The university does not intend to love me. The university does not know how to love me. The university in fact, does not love me. But the universe does."* (Gumbs, 2012)

Despite my best intentions to push boundaries, there are still rules that I have to follow. Considering one of the key parts of this research is about the academic boundaries and epistemological commitments, this research's methodology has been grounded in weaving together different conversations and ideas into one cohesive conversation. There have been times I have stumbled across certain texts and found ways to tie together the thinking. This research is one big conversation, with smaller conversations existing within it.

That is where the term 'storytelling' has become a foundational pillar of this work – as when we enter a discourse, when we are in 'conversation,' aren't we just telling stories? When we need to talk about the big ideas – and I don't mean to say of considerable size or extent; as in the conversations that rattle you to your core, the quiet conversations on a warm evening, that are had late at night over a cup of tea. The ones that feel as though they will continue to live in that space, floating about.

This is survival: it is loss, grief, and creation, living and breathing with life – with writing and reading. This research aims to answer where there is room in politics for stories of grief and loss. Where would this space exist and what would it look like? I don't think it would be in a stuffy (in current days somewhat empty) lecture theatre, learning about the governmental systems off a presentation pulled straight from a textbook. Unfortunately, the best of discussions cannot be forced – I believe that is one the great struggles of surviving academia. Many a time have I sat in a room and felt lost in the conversation – for a while I doubted my worth and the worth of my writing. To this day I still feel somewhat disengaged from many political platforms – you cannot force people to think.

There is a scene in the 2013 film '*Hannah Arendt'*, where her lecturer tells the class "Thinking does not endow us with the power to act…we live because we are alive, we are thinking beings… thinking does not solve the riddles of the universe, it gives us usable wisdom" (Trotta, 2013). I know well enough that historical movies are not 100% accurate about who said what; I'm sure there was some embellishing or creative licence, but that does not change how much I enjoyed the thought of a class which encouraged students to think. More accurately, it does not change how much I enjoyed how this story was told about Hannah Arendt's life.

There is a gradual wearing down that we face as we go about our worlds; there is a way that we are undone by other people (Berlant, 2011). We are undone by each other's stories. Moving out of a small hometown where we all lived through the same stories, meeting new people, you realise just how much these stories meant. There are cultures of family, of small towns, of different schools, of certain social circles – you do not need to tell the stories to the people who were part of those stories. I suppose that is what reminiscing is for. This is where there is a sense of knowing and being known – sometimes what people really need is to feel that they are *known* without having to prove it. These stories become a way to say 'hey, this is who I am, and this is why it's important to me.' I realise whilst sitting around the table with newfound friends the kind of stories that get told. Maybe it's because we feel the need to be defined by our pasts – or more especially by our traumas. Enough time passes, when do these stories no longer matter? Is there a 'statute of limitations' on life events and when we are able to tell stories?

Berlant's 'Cruel Optimism' (2011) remains the foundational text to my research; her work has continued to inspire me in the beautiful meandering journey of my academic career. There is some very important advice I was given– don't let Berlant eat you, instead eat Berlant. It still perplexes me to read her work: over and over again I am reminded that alongside having some profoundly beautiful thoughts and breakdowns of big ideas, she still comes back to us – the reader – with delightful phrases such as 'thinkiest thoughts' and 'middling'. There is a certain audacity to coming up with a certain language – terms in order to break the world down – some of which I feel stand out in Berlant's ways of writing. The first time reading Berlant there was a bittersweet feeling of connection to her writing, mixed with a sense of dread of the need to understand every word. It was like reading the best type of poetry or art, where there is a silence that somehow resonates in the presence of it. In this silence I find the times where it feels as though Berlant is holding her breath, gasping for air.

It feels as if she has tried to fit everything that she has left to say into this one book. It is a bittersweet journey of being swept up by the writing and the ideas, and finding footing in the rare moments where you feel Berlant pauses. There are times where I am afraid, despite my best intentions, that Berlant has swallowed me whole. Her words take us on a journey in exploring some of the 'thinkiest thoughts,' where you read and think, and ask questions, and Berlant somehow responds to you in the following passage. I used to think that Berlant has this fear of slowing down – of the ordinary – and that despite her writing on these ideas, it felt as though she would hold her breath as she tried to get all the words out, bursting at the seams. Now I realise that in all my critiques of her avoiding the idea that maybe life just *is* ordinary – that my research in a sense is doing the same. Where the idea of the infinite cycles of small beginnings and ends is in itself a cruel attempt at putting off an inevitable end.

> *"A humble word like "wandering" really is the right way to put it, since humble is what is close to the earth — humus — and bespeaks the humility of writing. I think that anyone who's writing in a particular direction, who experiences writing as a search, feels like they are on a journey"* (Cixous, 2008, pg. 3).

This research has been inspired by writers such as Elizabeth Dauphinee, Marie Beauchamp, and Ersebet Strausz. The incorporating of poetry into 'academic' articles and the use of ideas that were creative triggered a visceral response that awoke the academic in me. Mixing methods of writing by incorporating creative writing and creative non-fiction present ideas of politics as more than just the 'cold,' 'dry,' or intimidating world of traditional, patriarchal politics. The world of politics can come off as one that is out of reach, elitist even. There is this 'real voice' that talks me through the moments where research is not this beautiful, glorified experience that sometimes I make it out to be in my head. It speaks to me and reminds me not get sucked into the daunting world of conferences and journal submissions. This voice sometimes yes, is a little quiet. Sometimes barely a whisper. But it's there. To borrow some of my favourite words of Strausz, it reminds me that despite all of the challenges of surviving in academia, of surviving in the world, maybe "I think I should stick around for a bit longer" (Strausz, 2018, p. 53). Strausz talks directly to the reader as she tells her story, a way of writing that has inspired me to do the same.

This research aims to begin a conversation about the role of the public and private narratives to better understand crisis events. It is about putting humans back into the conversation of humanity. Through understanding the different discourses around events such as genocide,

war, the 9/11,war on terror, and survival, this research aims to take an exploratory journey through understanding loss and grief. The personal is political – this is already true – however, there has been some sort of glitch, some kind of impasse in which we are stuck between a rock and a hard place if you will. What counts as political becomes a limited space; if the private is to enter the space, it is only when it is convenient or beneficial to 'politics'.

It has been inspiring to read 'political texts' that have been more than cold, patriarchal, western narratives or arguments. This research was never meant to be a box ticking exercise that went over the same discourses that have been made in the past. The purpose and intention of this research is to go on a journey, to stick around a little longer in trying to understand the process of loss and grief as both a personal and public-political experience. When we speak of foreign policy, or crisis events – there is something more than the statistics and debates which too often create the image of what politics is.

Literature review:

> *"I want to go with the flow and drift with the words to places, real, alive, and full of feeling. I am hoping to embrace not knowing, and as I go along, I will try to keep both 'knowledge' and 'subjectivity' fluid and flexible, always in transition"*
>
> (Strausz, 2018).

For the purpose of this literature review, this research is separated into three parts. Rooted in ideas about the limitations of what politics is, each section creates a foundation for the discussion of life building and storytelling in the present. For the remainder of this research these sections will expand to the tell different stories of reading, writing, living, losing, and loss.

The first part of this research is on reading and writing. It will provide the understanding of the limitations of academic writing and the boundaries that are currently in place. This section uses Beauchamps, Strausz, Haraway, and Dauphinee as key thinkers to explore the different ways that we read and write. This section acts as a foundation to understand the way that we engage with texts. It sets the scene for thinking about thinking, and opening doors to other forms of writing. This section is about what stories are conceptually. It has grown to include the methods of reading and writing, and the importance of certain semantics within academic writing. It has become more than breaking boundaries or trying to survive the cold

dark academic world. It has instead become a somewhat tribute to all the thinkers who came before me within politics, critical theory, and international relations.

The second section of this research is on creation and loss. This is another foundation to the research that will explore cases of creation and loss using texts such as David Kazanjian, David Eng's 'Loss', Arundhati Roy's 'Not Again', Judith Butler's 'Precarious Life', and Irme Kertesz' 'Kaddish for the Unborn Child'. Another important work is Hannah Arendt's 'Eichmann in Jerusalem – The Banality of Evil.' In this section there are also stories from Ester Perel, in two separate interviews where she breaks down her experience as a first-generation Holocaust survivor. These are the texts which will help in discussing the events which will be examples of public and private loss. These are case studies to breakdown the humanness of crisis events and surviving in politics.

The third section will be on art and this idea of living and breathing texts. This section ties reading and writing to creation and loss through various texts, promoting the visceral connection to art as part of the human experience. This section will centre around the way that people act in the world and uses philosophical thinking to look at how we talk about crisis events. Through this section – and throughout this research – there are undertones of exploring the value of life and death and its meanings. The first time I found myself encouraged to write differently – where I was allowed to use language that moved away from cold regurgitated essays – I noticed a recurring motif of writing about breathing, about cycles, and silence and loss. This is where 'Spill' and 'The Hundreds' fit into this section as examples of works that push boundaries and use poetry in the academic discipline of politics.

Literature review section one - reading and writing

> *'I want to write to you like someone learning.'*
>
> *'I write to you because I don't understand myself.'*
>
> *'I write with the flow of the words.'*
>
> *'Read the energy that is in my silence'* *(Lispector, 2014)*

Strausz (2018) in her book *'Writing the Self and Transforming Knowledge in International Relations - Towards a Politics of Liminality'* writes about the space where we read and write. Strausz's book is a reminder of the fluidity and transition that comes with knowledge

building and story building. Where, in embracing precarity, we embrace stories or methods of storytelling that would possibly go untold - and unheard. This text takes a step back from academic conventions and reminds us of why we started this journey in the first place. It is a reminder of the way that leisure can get stripped from the act of learning. In politics and international relations (IR) there are certain narratives which are pushed. There are patterns and associations of events and how those events took place. It becomes easy to tell a story in the space of the familiar. The critiques of the world we live in are whittled down to catchy phrases, vague opinions; there is comfort in a narrative we believe to be true. I feel it important to preface this research with an analysis on our process of reading and writing, and knowledge building and knowledge communication.

Marie Beauchamp's 'Doing Academia Differently: Loosing the Boundaries of Our Disciplinary Writing Practices' reminded me what I love so much about politics. My tattered copy, with highlighter and pen all through it still sits on my desk nearly a year later, and I still find new joy in it. She reminded me of this world that exists in the discipline that often gets lost to the dominant political narrative of heated debates. She reminded me to nurture my creativity; it reminded me that there was more in academia than what I was letting myself access. I had let myself forget the beauty in academia and in the politics discipline, I had let myself get lost in the same arguments and conversations about 'politics.' The platform for talking about 'politics' became one where I would grit my teeth as I listened to my peers speak in circles. I was reminded of not only the interdisciplinary relationship that exists in politics – but about the different methods that exist in academia.

> *"Be it in telling the forgotten stories of unknown citizens. Be it in highlighting the affective. technologies of government lodged in institutional rules, showing paths* ***where emotions flow like water****, connecting the personal with the public, the rational with the affective, the juridical with the political, the poetic with the scientific."*
>
> (Beauchamps, 2021, p. 14).

Arundhati Roy (2002) in her piece 'Not Again' writes on the stories of loss in the context of 9/11. She captures the very essence of loss within foreign policy and a theoretical approach to war and conflict, "where the grief is still deep…The rage still sharp...The tears have not dried" (Roy, 2002, p.3). These stories can feel as they exist in different worlds: one world dictated by conflict, justice, and violence, the other dictated by human kindness and healing.

Roy's short piece captures and supports the ideal of the way that we tell stories in the face of loss and grief, and more importantly within the space of political writing.

Elizabeth Dauphinee, Marysia Zalewski and Jenny Edkins take part in this conversation on the nature of research and the role of self. They discuss pushing boundaries each in their own way and discipline and have such a gentle approach to the work they do. Unintentionally as I read, I found that these works not only fit together well, but they are already talking to each other in their own way. These works support the case for reading and writing differently and for an inclusion of the personal voice and creative thinking. Elizabeth Dauphinee captures the way that we write and the narrative format – she touches on the importance of the self in writing and surviving IR. Zalewski writes on feminism within IR - her text includes a variety of thinkers including Helene Cixous, whose work contains a beautiful story of sex, writing and politics.

Literature review section two - loss and creation – thinking is a lonely business.

> *"What I would really love to talk to you about is loss. Loss and losing. Grief, failure, brokenness, numbness, uncertainty, fear, the death of feeling, the death of dreaming. The absolute, relentless, endless, habitual unfairness of the world. What does loss mean to individuals? What does it mean to whole cultures, whole peoples who have learned to live with it as a constant companion?"* (Roy, 2002).

Eng and Kazanjian (2003) in their book '*Loss'* tell different stories of loss through a Freudian analysis of melancholia and mourning. Their work aligns with the work of Lauren Berlant in its psychanalytic discussion of melancholia, and our attachment to grief. Their introduction offers a comprehensive understanding of the stages of melancholia and mourning and the way that we engage with it on both the public and private scale. This introduction sets the scene for more specific case studies of mourning and loss. One chapter from this text is 'Catastrophic Mourning' written by Marc Nichacian (2003), which concentrates on the pogroms of the late 1800s and early 1900s in Armenia.

David Eng's (2002) 'The Value of Silence' also talks about 9/11, a time of what Butler calls national mourning. The pain and loss were felt worldwide. The study of 9/11 is something that I could spend a lifetime researching, so again, my engagement here is less about the event and instead is about the reaction. When we are faced with a vulnerable state of living and safety, when it is no longer in our hands to have that choice of if we are actively or

passively surviving, what is it we do? This is where Eng's 'The Value of Silence' is particularly interesting in how it captures the divide between not creating and creating where hope evaporates into dread and dread turns into grief (Eng, 2002).

Judith Butler (2004, p.21) in 'Precarious Life' focuses on the transformative process that occurs in crisis – she points out that we not only have to submit to the transformation but submit to the unknown. There is faith in the process of mourning - there is hope in the search for justice and solution. Butler (2004) uses 9/11 to talk about the justification of violence and the War on Terror as a response. It brings into question this idea of what we do with loss – and when loss is politicised, how the state can use that to push certain narratives. It can come from both a place of fear, and a place of justice, but also a sense of nationalism and patriotism where we wish to defend the state and its actions.

Hannah Arendt's (2006) 'Eichmann in Jerusalem – The Banality of Evil' is another prominent text on loss, and on thinking. Her critical thinking has created a sort of framework which has continued to shape the way that we think about 'evil.' Hannah Arendt's life is truly fascinating in how the world responded to her thinking, which is now celebrated for its critical analysis on the trial of Adolf Eichmann who was one of the bureaucrats responsible for which of the Jewish populations of Europe would be shipped to the concentration camps. Hannah Arendt's life reflects her ongoing search for knowledge and dedication to thinking. This text tells a complicated story of loss where the trial of Adolf Eichmann became a symbol for the atrocities against the Jewish people and the demand for justice. It is a story that could have gone untold, especially due to her 'excommunication' from her academic circles. This is one story of the search for justice and understanding. The telling of this story and the way Arendt chose to tell it reflects one of the challenges within surviving in academia and the choice that comes with taking risks in ways of writing, when they go against the status quo of the academy. Arendt's approach to politics, and to the act of thinking, remains a vital resource for "those in search of guidance not in what to think but how to think about the world of politics" (Owens, 2009, p.40). There are more instances where the thinking or critiques of Hannah Arendt have found themselves in this research.

'Precarious Life' by Judith Butler functions as story of critiques of the way we look at terrorism within the post 9/11 world. Butler makes clear the point of the way that stories get used for the political gain and for the war on terror. The text captures a certain 'fascination' that people have with violence and our inherent connection to it. Butler is keenly aware of the

vulnerability of humans, that we can be injured, that others can be injured – the way that we are subject to death at the whim of another. She calls these the reasons for both fear and grief (Butler, 2004).

'The Politics of Exile' by Dauphinee is far from the standard theoretical academic text, it is no ethnography, nor a historiography, it is in fact a story. The book is praised for being thought provoking and a refreshing take on the partition of Bosnia, as well as being a text that challenged the academic norms of writing. This text uncovers the speculation that came from her book because of the unpopular opinions at the time.

Interviews with Ester Perel, and 'Kaddish for the Unborn Child' written by Imre Kertesz, offer up different stories of surviving the Holocaust and about what remains within that survival. These stories are part of a wider philosophical debate amongst Holocaust survivors about to have or not to have children. In a paradoxical way they are both in themselves cases of healing from trauma – both are what remains in the face of the loss suffered. Viktor Frankl's memoir and tribute from the Holocaust also plays a role in the search for hope and meaning during and after the Holocaust - it reads as a story your grandparents would tell you after dinner over a cup of tea, and then at times Frankl's psychiatric background shines through as he offers little bits of wisdom about the nature of humanity.

Literature review section three - living breathing texts and stories.

> *"We do continue to breathe with and for as we think and write, breathing is never restricted to the words on a page"* (Beauchamps, 2021).

'Gasp', written by Merlene Nourbese Phillips (2020) is featured in Beauchamp's (2021) work on loosening boundaries. Where reading and writing is breathing, and where breathing is living, as we read and write we continue to bring to life our stories. Marlene Nourbese Phillips (2020) writes about the space where reading gives us an invitation to slow down and breathe with our work and alongside the work of others. Slowing down creates a movement of thinking. Breathing with the texture of language that is presented on the page. There is a common thread that I now feel I search for in my reading, where storytelling in all its forms is like water, it is like breathing – it is alive, it flows within us and through us. This visceral connection to art that began with a phrase as simple as:

"I just like it."

This section acts as a melting pot – this section is about life, breathing; it is about living. Albert Camus and Soren Kierkegaard are other thinkers who fit into this realm of conversation on thinking and living, breathing, and writing. This research is rooted in philosophical thinking, and critical thinking within politics and IR. It promotes the process of slowing down and allowing a movement of thinking where we breathe with the texture of language - "Perhaps a bit counterintuitively to a philosophy where life is like water, carrying us from one moment to the next" (Strausz, 2018, p.161)

'Reading Sedgwick' is a collaboration of great thinkers- notable chapters are written by Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, and Lauren Berlant (Berlant and Edelman, 2019). This collection discusses concepts by Eve Sedgwick and is a tribute to the work she has done. Throughout this work I have found a culmination of the ideas and thinking done in my research. An affirming place to sit and enjoy the process of reading – and writing. Lauren Berlant and Lee Edleman write on the nature of loss and losing. They talk about the human experience alongside other essays- notable 'Proust at the End' by Judith Butler (2019), and the Introduction by Ramzi Fawaz (2019). Finding this book was a delightful combination of all the thinkers I wished to put in conversation with each other.

'Spill,' written by Alexis Pauline Gumbs and the works 'The Hundreds' by Kathleen Stewart and Lauren Berlant are examples of academic texts which I would consider reflecting the beauty that can exist in creative nonfiction and the writing of it. It is a collection of small pieces and presents a creative and innovative way to write on political issues. In a sense these texts also fit into the earlier category of writing and reading, for they are fantastic examples of writing that is both political and creative. Other authors that fit into this section would be Clarice Lispector and Helene Cixous, who have a certain audacity to their writing where they are able to tell stories in such a way that captures the melancholy of human life – as well as the beauty.

'Cruel Optimism' by Lauren Berlant, as previously mentioned is an integral part on this research for many reasons. Its language and discussions continue to shape the underlying thinking as I enter conversations with other academics on this journey of exploring loss and grief. Each chapter uses films to break down wider ideas. My research in a sense gives tribute to this, by using poetry, theatre, and other forms of art to talk about cases of loss and survival. In various texts there is a mix of methods; be that in photography, poetry, creative nonfiction, theatre, art, or music.

The story of the public and the private – the stories that are untold, or unheard, and the search for political enough.

Once upon a time there lived a girl who was trapped in a tower of isolation. From the tower she would look down and watch the world burn. She felt small up in her tower, that her life was meaningless to the stories unfolding beneath her. So, she would sit in her tower, waiting to be rescued, waiting for something big enough to happen that made her life feel as worthy as the one that was happening just below her.

To put it simply, 'private' is the intimate stories that take place behind closed doors, and 'public' is the space in which traditional politics is seen to take place. We compartmentalise events, facts, the game, its players, and rules into whichever of the categories we feel it belongs. I am not sure why we still try to break things down as such – it's a certain comfort – because the world is not always black and white, no matter how hard we try, there will always be grey.

Some of the foundational language throughout this research is the language of parallels. There is a process in which we split ideas and events into binary thinking. Despite the best efforts this can be limiting in how we better understand the world - the world is not black and white. But it is a story building technique that is prominent through many analyses of the world. In the paradigm of public and private, it makes for the clear division of a space that is dictated by a wider or more national scale, and then the more intimate scale. The public represents an open space where discourses take place. Historically this space is dominated by a prominent white, patriarchal narrative. This space is like my earlier definition of the traditional politics. The private represents the personal space where often stories get untold – or unheard for being 'not political enough' or for not taking place in the 'right space.'

In feminist discourse the private and the public is the space where conversations and disputations of unpaid labour, gender division of labour in the household, and the glass ceiling live and breathe. Berlant has a feminist critique of the way we talk about the private and public space. Traditionally the public was the male dominated space, and the private was the space for woman – the home makers. But Berlant takes this a step further in talking about the space that exists within the public – the intimate public. In this intimate public, there is a sense of 'active survival' that is at stake, where we try to find our ways out of the impasse, and what Berlant calls the struggle of the present (Berlant, 2011). See we, as humans, are hooked on progress. We see women enter the public and think that we have succeeded, we

have beaten sexism, because see, women get to live in public now – when they are not busy being homemakers of course. But see, within the public exists its own mini paradigm – within the public exists the intimate public, the space where often people and stories get lost, where just when they think they have busted through the glass ceiling, they are simply met with another one.

When you get through the glass ceiling, you are still met with another that lies just above. It may appear on the surface that this is it, you made it, but it is still a separate space, where the words don't quite matter enough. The process in which these stories are categorised into the public vs private sphere is based on the way that we are 'allowed' to tell stories. The voices that get heard, and the stories that are deemed to 'matter' are reflected in the types of narratives that survive in the heavily traditional, patriarchal, male dominated public space. It is the same as that in academia there are limitations for the processes of reading and writing. Too much noise shakes up the public space and causes a disruption to a system that is far too set in its ways. But there are cracks in this system, as it begins to burst at its seams, ready for change.

Using a binary paradigm of thinking reflects an important foundational concept in the idea of different stories and whether stories can survive in this world. This is where the term 'the politics of storytelling' came from. Stories can have sentimental value to individuals, the sharing of them reflecting shared experiences. The process where some stories are given credit based on this binary division of public and private reflects the oppression and silencing of voices. It reflects the limitations within academia on sharing creatively. When on an institutional level some people are told their voices don't matter – there is a degree of vulnerability in sharing something personal. The public sphere feels so hard to reach that it feels as though only 'the best' stories are worth writing.

There is a concept of 'cruel optimism' offered by Lauren Berlant (2011) that is an important thread through the thinking of this research. It reminds us of the natures of our attachments, be they to a person, an object, or a lifestyle. It is a reminder of this process of 'middling', where sometimes we would rather stay in the middle then take the step forward. In the five-year plans, and in the goal setting, in laying out the process of healing and plotting milestones on a map – sometimes we don't want to get there. We don't want to be healed, for sometimes there is more comfort in that pain than in the unknown of what comes next. We fear what comes next. This part of cruel optimism is one that remains a prominent thread through this

research in which not only do we think about grief and loss, and healing and hope – we need to think about the things we tell ourselves (the lies) to continue world building. We can tell ourselves that we hate the middle and that we are just waiting to hit our check points we lay out for the life that we think we want, but the middle – or as Berlant sometimes calls it, the ordinary – is really a place where, somehow, we feel the most content, and yet sad. For grief and mourning is the only thing keeping our attachments alive, and to us that can be better than moving on. It can be easier than the acceptance that after each milestone, we are just middling once more until the next one and so forth. 'Cruel' is the word that rings in my ears as I write.

The world is only a cruel place, until is not.

The world that we try and survive in, in a state that is often passive, reflects the wider questions of not only life building, but meaning. We, as self-aware creatures, are blessed and plagued with the understanding of the somehow both tangible and intangible universe. We can look at the passing of time, the past, present, future – and everything that comes before, after, or in-between those states. What remains? What remains, in life, in death, in mourning and loss? Is it just creation? Is it just loss? What remains is one of the bigger questions that this research will trying to tackle in its unpacking of stories of trauma, of stories of hate and love. In the research I have done so far, my ideas of what comes first, or last, or in between already have changed the more that I get to unpack them. It is our attachments to this splitting into linear categories that I find most interesting as it reflects our attempts to turn something we don't understand into something tangible – even when that's a difficult feat.

This division of spaces shows the way we wish to keep things in different spaces – like the private and public, and the academic and creative. Though, I think that the longer we think about it, the more we realise the intertwining of all of these into multi-coloured fabric that makes up our understanding of the world. Time passes in cycles, cycles that have no pinpointed start or end. Like summer, into autumn, into winter into spring, there is no real way to choose where this cycle starts. It appears to be the same for the cycle of loss, grief, and creation. That accepting these cycles, and middling, is a thing most need to learn.

To learn from nature, it does not ask impatiently when the seasons will change, for instead it knows that it will come at the appointed time, at the right 'moment.' It knows that there is no benefit to be able to tell the seasons or time of year, how long or short, if there is or isn't

enough rain – instead, it keeps still and waits ... The bird keeps silent and waits it knows, or rather it fully and firmly believes, that everything takes place at its appointed time"

(Kierkegaard, 2016, p.23).

I think, really, all that so-called waiting was a denial of the ordinary, or life happening. It was this space that although I hated, there is always going to be comfort in looking ahead for the next thing. I think that is where loss has begun to intrigue me so much within this discourse, as loss and grief hurt like a bitch – and yet sometimes it's easier to think, "well I'm just healing, I'm just waiting for the pain to go away, I'm waiting for the day I'm not sad anymore" – instead of actually thinking about how to get there; more importantly how it's going to feel. There is a bitter journey that comes with thinking about what grief and loss represent. What hope represents – it's when we start to see how we keep ourselves in loss and grief, because feeling that pain is better than realising it's time to say goodbye. This is where melancholia fits into cruel optimism, for it is that space that we keep ourselves longing in. We poke at our bruises full well knowing they will hurt. We rub salt into the wounds just to make sure that we can still feel something.

In grief, letting go and moving on does not feel right, looking ahead to a time where we get to move on with our lives feels heartless and yet – the world is not designed to be spent grieving. It often feels as though it does the object (the thing you are mourning) a disservice. If you can let go, then did it really matter? But at the same time, if you don't let go, all you are going to do is continue to poke at bruises. This space is what is best described, to use Berlant's method of thinking, as 'the middle,' or the 'impasse.' It is this space where we sometimes knowingly keep ourselves, an acknowledgement of keeping yourself in a state of denial to, well, survive.

so,

dear reader

let me tell you a story.

once upon a time there was a woman who believed the world was cruel. but in all the cruelty of the world she found solace in reading and writing - in stories and how they were told. she found that in these stories - in creation, reflected a sense of hope. so, she breathed to life a story of her own. a story of loss, living, loving, and doing it over and over again.

The story of Learning to read and write – the case for creative reading and writing within academia.

> *"When faced with the challenge of studying a world to which we are linked by all sorts of specific investments inextricably intellectual and "temporal", our first automatic thought is to escape… But '[t]here is not escaping the work of constructing the object, and the responsibility that this entails. There is no object that does not imply a viewpoint, even if it is an object produced with the intention of abolishing one's viewpoint (that is, one's bias) …"*
>
> Bourdieu 1988 (Quoted in Dauphinee, 2019)

When we frame these events as stories, it changes the way that we engage with the subject. In telling stories, we invoke a reader, a listener, and an audience, but stories themselves do more. Stories draw out a kind of ambiguity of the self and the other, of the past and the present, of person and place (Edkins et al., 2021). Stories are a bridge to the gap between academic analytic texts and novels. I love the word stories, it is gentle, it is real. Stories are not intimidating; they allow us to relate to one another. In the realm of politics, why wouldn't we tell the stories of people? These different forms of writing, according to Edkins (2021) can be called autobiography, or part of the 'narrative' or the 'aesthetic turn in IR'. To some it is autoethnography, or the ethnography of the self, but I would agree with Edkins that storytelling is a far better term. She understands an issue I have found with this term, where the terms stories are often full of falsehood, with lies, they are fictitious. People start to think that stories are reserved for tales of dragons, and princesses trapped in castles – not war crimes and people trapping other people.

There are different types of reading and writing, these differences are grounded in intention. When we talk about crisis events – are we telling the story of the losing, the being lost, and the healing – the living with loss? In political thought and philosophy, there is room to explore attachments to our personal life and the life that happens around us. There is the individual and the collective, separated by what can feel like an imaginary line creating a boundary separating the two based on 'worthiness.' It is who determines this 'worthiness' that changes the nature of our analysis of said lives. When we choose whose story gets told, and how to do it, it opens a door for speculation. We enter the academic world and are met with a challenge of determining a fundamental belief within a world of fact mixed up with points of view and opinions.

It does not feel a stretch to say that most academics reach a point where they stop and ask themselves, 'why am I still here?' There comes a point where reading and writing is a process that sees the text as dead (Strausz, 2018). Where reading becomes searching a text for what we need, rather than reading for the enjoyment, or for the sake of reading. Strausz reminds us of the benefit of re-reading texts out of the academic process. She goes on to encourage the way that we engage with subjectivity – to "re-connect with that life that we habitually write and read out of our texts." When we push back against texts and our habits of reading and writing, there is this fine line between control and letting go. When we do this, when we strike back against this space, and when we push back against reading and writing, what will happen? Will we survive?

Even Strausz (2018) acknowledges that she is still in the middle of this journey of exploring the way that we tend to write ourselves out of our texts. Throughout the process of secondary school and my undergraduate studies, it became clear to me the way to succeed was to write work that ticked all the boxes. I would write essays which hit certain ideas, and that now I see were regurgitations of the same argument that has already been made over and over. These essays were formulaic - as the words came out, they felt forced, the sentences felt like fluff. Only in the final semester of undergrad was I was inspired to write essays which I felt had meaning. It was the beginning of the research project that I get to write now that explores the different ways to engage with academic work. "Maybe I should stick around a little longer." These words of Strausz live within me and speak to the challenges of writing work that both speaks to me the individual and tells the right story for the political collective.

How am I supposed to survive in the world of academia and politics, when it feels as though politics is killing itself with its rules and boundaries?

Now, Hannah Arendt has argued against the insertion of the self into the public politics. According to Arendt, to make issues of the self and the life processes or life building central to politics would have disastrous effects. She said that "the linkage of political life results in an inner contradiction that cancels and destroys what is specifically political about politics" (Owens, 2009, p.28). It appears that to Arendt, the public and the private exist as something clear and tangible. I wonder if this was a form of preservation and protecting what 'politics' would mean – by making what is and isn't politics black and white, it means the world could be fit into that framework, rather than the other way around. If to her politics was the man-made laws and conventions "fragile and historically contingent as well as spatially bound"

(Owens, 2009, p.39), what does that say about the autonomy of politics that Arendt so believed in? If Arendt was able to accept the plurality and many perspectives and voices that constituted the political world – what does that say about the role of the everyday man and its stories? The breaking down and the rules about what is and isn't political space through the eyes of Arendt offers a counter narrative to the idea that humans and life are political. However, her acknowledgement of plurality, and the freedom to act with plural others to bring other plurals to the world shows that the way Arendt broke down politics is not as removed from the private as she thinks. She acknowledges the space in between where speech and action meet – where people learn about themselves. To her the world is "the space of politics and it is for the sake of this world...those with public spirit act" (Owens, 2009, p. 28).

Throughout history, 'events' happen, and a narrative is told. There is the fact, the statistics, the 'players,' the causes and the consequences. Put it together and you have a 'box ticking essay.' Talk about it to the cows come home, and then do it over and over. What changes? What purpose does this serve? Sit around the table and talk about what you heard in the news, throw around the right political language and you create a politically active façade for yourself. What purpose does that serve? Have the same conversation over and over and over again, make the same argument, write the same essay question about structure and agency, think critically but oh, not like that, that's too 'different'. Sit in a room of friends and listen to them jest and jeer at certain vague political groups, listen to them talk in circles and feel lost – stupid even – for not following along because what are they even really talking about? Do that and you have a university student, stuck in this world of politics staring at the blue lit screen wondering, why am I even here?

Its early 2022 and a man I know, he starts to tell me about the latest headlines in the Ukraine war. Quickly he gets into debate mode, there is this look in his eye, a fierce gleam if you will. But quickly, the sound of his voice fades. I feel like I'm underwater looking at the words which like bubbles float above me, disappearing as I try to reach out and grab them. "But what do you think?" I say. The man he starts talking again, talking 'shop' throwing me nothing but buzz words and names and phrases, that in all honesty, mean very little to me. "No. Tell me what, YOU think. As a human being, you, the individual, sitting here in this room, how does it make you feel?" And for the first time the man is silent.

There is a certain hopelessness that comes from a crude awareness of the world – there is only so much 'we' the individual can do – actively. What is there to do to create enough noise to bring about change – revolution? According to Arendt, the role of political action gained a new dignity – a new kind of power – after the change from a more traditional idea of what of authority and morality was (Owens, 2019). When we tell a story, we are putting ourselves at the centre – we are the subject. The way that we are in the world matters for how we write in our disciplines and how we choose our subjects (Dauphinee, 2019). In writing on history and politics – traditionally you seek the facts. You say "this event took place on this date because these reasons." This is the argument we have about this issue; these are the players; this is the game. However, when we take the personal – we are using our lives as this foundation. There is a sense in which, in foreign policy we are warned against telling accounts which involve "the narrative I" (Butler, 2004, p.7). How is the personal to stand against the global history? There are two ways to answer this. The first is to comment on and critique the way that personal stories get untold, for we are taught that they are less important. The second is to question how stories are created. This research aims to do both.

"It matters whose stories get told, and it matters whose stories tell stories"

(Haraway, 2019).

As we struggle for the rights of our own bodies – to make our bodies our own we are reminded that the body is part of its own "invariably public dimension" (Butler, 2004, p. 26). There is a social phenomenon in the public sphere, that with social life, from the start we give over our imprint – untill eventually, possibly with some uncertainty that we "lay claim" to our bodies (Butler, 2004, p.26). Through the process of world building and middling, is it that we begin to lay claim to our stories? If our bodies and stories are inherently part of the public sphere – do we need to actively claim them in their privateness – or instead claim their publicness? Can private mourning and loss be so dramatic so that the perspective of national mourning and the public become a way to apprehend the contemporary global and public sphere of crisis events?

Mourning, fear, anxiety, rage. In the United States, we have been surrounded with violence, having perpetrated it and perpetrating it still, having suffered it, living in fear of it, planning more of it, if not an open future of infinite war in the name of a 'war on terrorism.'

(Butler, 2004, p. 29).

Donna Haraway writes about 'sympoiesis' in stories, saying that nothing makes itself, "syms live and die in the wake of history" (Haraway, 2019, p.566). The language she uses about stories centres around the idea of living and dying, where Haraway 'composts' stories. This is to say, the way that that stories are born. This term is coined as a replacement term for 'autopoiesis'- she objects that 'no thing makes itself.' It is about making with what we already have. There are different ideas on where these stories come from (Haraway, 2019). Haraway's thought process is about composting stories – sympoieseis. If we are to believe that stories tell themselves – that they demand to be told (Roy, 2002) – we then can think about ownership of stories. Strausz write that in reading and writing it is important to understand or at least venture into the unknown of who owns said story and more importantly how these stories are born. All writing is born from something else – creation exists in a weave of the binary, of plurality – the "weaving relation with different peoples and natures" (Stengers, 2018, p.141).

> *Such a weaving might indeed make a difference as it brings with it the possibility of sharing and cooperating – which, while certainly not sufficient, is perhaps a necessary condition for reclaiming a future worth living"*
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> (Stengers, 2018, p.156).

To put it simply the world is not perfect: some stories get lost, some get told wrong. We are complicated beings – we wear down on each other and so do our stories. On the writing and reading of stories – no matter how big or small – an important lesson that rings true throughout these texts is the extent to which you can rewrite your own story for the better. For the better … what does that mean? You begin to talk of storytelling and politics and the common conversation that begins is about 'the media' and the way that they tell stories. I do not wish to talk of the corruption of stories; instead I wish to talk of creation. I wish to talk of the ways that we rewrite our own stories for the future generations to create a sense of 'something' – a guide to life, a platform for one to jump off when ready into the big pool of the world and all its trials and tribulations. I guess it is not simply being able to read or write well, but to be able to live well. What can we say about the nature of stories and how we tell them? Roy (2002) tells us that stories commission us, they demand to get told. Strausz (2018) tells us that our stories belong to us, they are sovereign. Haraway (2019) writes that stories do not come from nothing – like compost, they take living and dying things – stories are not just pulled out of thin air.

Strausz (2018) talks about the way that we pull work apart to get it to answer the questions we are trying to solve – I believe that we are all guilty of this. Picking and pulling at different threads and texts to "get it." It is like – in a sense the compost writing that Haraway discusses, and this idea that everything comes from something – nothing makes itself. It is just as important to question why we write as it is to question why we read. Dauphinee (2019) writes about the way we are taught the 'rules' to this 'game', where we are taught how to position ourselves in relation to authors, as opposed to having a good understanding of them. Dauphine (2019) calls this her impasse; she talks about uncovering "the intellectual archives lurking in the spaces we choose not to illuminate" (Dauphinee, 2019). Similar to the thinking of Berlant she encourages us to embrace the impasse, embrace precarity. Reading with the intention to 'get something' is a twisted and paradoxical feat. For yes, the search for knowledge and understanding is a wonderful thing, but what does 'getting it' mean? It becomes easy to get caught up in reading for a purpose – instead of reading a text for what it is, the reader gets caught up in stopping to take notes, to remember each word. Does it mean that you can present a three-part essay outlining the themes and imagery? Or is it something a little simpler – a feeling? I think about the way that we get taught to read and write, not to understand the author but to dissect the text for gain. Dauphinee (2019) talks about this point, in how we place ourselves in position to the text. This is common thinking within thinkers such as Strausz and Edkins and Dauhpinee about approaches to reading and writing. The first time I encountered Berlant, I was told to read her work like poetry. To me this meant to slow down – I will get to that later. It meant to sit somewhere nice, and read it aloud, read it at face value where there is this sweet spot in understanding; even if you can't intellectually validate your feelings – there is a certain essence to reading where it just makes sense. To read like poetry meant to read aloud – how often is it that people find themselves in a space to read something aloud? There are times that I feel I am missing out on the experience of reading, for every so often I must stop to take notes, and page numbers and add to my little book of which my thesis was born. I wish to hold onto every word, to hold it close and forever engrain it my brain. But see, that often removes the magic of reading. I shall ask again – why do we read?

According to Strawser (2006), "Kierkegaard admonishes his dear reader to read aloud, so that "you will gain the strongest impression that you have only yourself to consider" – there is that 'dear reader' again. The placement of the self into the text or writing ourselves back into our texts (Strausz, 2018), do we need to also, in a sense, write the reader back into the text?

There is an extent to which one's identity strengthens the work they do – the narrative – and yet when the personal becomes too 'heavily' a part of the work it can take away the level of seriousness it is given in the academic world. Halberstam writes that "we have to untrain ourselves so that we can read the struggles and debates back into questions that seem settled and resolved" (Halberstam, 2011).

> *"Writers imagine that they cull stories from the world. I'm beginning to believe that vanity makes them think so. That it's actually the other way around. Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the private narrative - they colonize us. They commission us. They insist on being told"*
>
> (Roy, 2002).

To Dauphinee (2009) stories and storytelling are ways of illuminating a kind of split – a brokenness, not of consolidating identity. When we think about academic research – where does that place the self in the narrative? There is a difference between the role of the person in the story as opposed to the person telling the story – I supposed this is where the conflicts begin around speaking for others or issues of unheard voices. This may also be where we begin to question a place in the narrative for heroes and villains. Early in historiography, there has been this sense, as we are reminded, that the victors write history. It becomes an interesting issue of placing the 'self' in alignment to western narratives. There are some people, who when they speak of the west, or the United States, tend to say "we." I have begun to question these people. Dauphinee (2019) discusses storytelling through this lens of identity – that there is an "expressive form of making sense of lived experiences and communicating that for others" (Dauphinee, 2019). Where does responsibility lie in cases such as this? Is it a matter of guilt? Is it a division of good and bad – us versus them?

Stories of surviving academia - slowing down and "stepping out of the dark."

Some stories are unknown. Some stories cannot be told. Some stories have yet to be told. Some stories are crying out to be told. Some stories have already been told but no one listened. When the time is right you will remember having been told some stories. You will pass stories on, and you had better be careful (Shilliam, n.d).

Isabelle Stengers (2018) in her book *Another Science Is Possible* discusses the way we can slow down in academia. She takes the arguments of leisure learning and makes the case for

what she calls the slow sciences. Where in slowing down in learning, it means we have to learn all over again, encouraging thinking and imagining (Stengers, 2018). Slow Sciences refers to the space of creative, more lenient academia – rather than the analytical statistical world of highly revered sciences, slow sciences are where conversations like this research take place. Stengers (2018) discusses the way that in the competition of research, there is a certain betrayal (there is that word again) that comes from the ways academics need to survive (Stengers, 2018). Her own journey has met its own critiques: that her case is overstated, that the constraints set in the academy are there to 'weed out the lazy,' that if scientists know how to adapt to constraints, why shouldn't she? One of these constraints that academics are faced is the issue of citations. Stengers (2018) goes on to discuss the issue of the politics of citation by saying that the worth of a work is measured by its citation count. There is a pressure to publish into a rigid imperative.

Stengers goes on to discuss the circles where philosophers only publish for each other – "with abundant cross-referencing as they discuss, critique, complicate, complete and modify each other's arguments" (Stengers, 2018, p.56). I notice this in certain discourses within the academic writing world of politics and philosophy – or even in conversations with academics and peers. There is this need to name drop certain 'big names,' and the prestige that comes with citing the right texts. Although it makes sense to bring in certain thinkers when discussing a topic that they specialise in, there is an extent to which the citation itself carries more value than the way that the work is used.

In the arts and humanities, there is already a certain tension between other disciplines and schools. There is different worth that is placed on each, where is some circles the arts and humanities become something for leisure. The classic response from family members over Christmas dinner asking, 'well what will that degree get you?" At a point, university and education did come from a place of leisure, whereas now research and study come from a place of gain and financial stability. A degree is the steppingstone into the workplace of your dreams – if you are lucky. Despite this being needed, especially entering even more precarious times where the cost of living continues to rise, and ongoing cuts are made within the very academic institution that was supposed to raise and protect us. The university who holds all the cards.

"The university does not love me…" (Gumbs, 2012).

Stengers is right to discuss how we are to survive as academics as well as survive within the institutions of the university. If we slowed down, what value would be placed on education, on thinking – on learning for more reasons than to tick boxes? The space of the arts, yes it may come with some luxuries. I hear tales from peers far and wide, to ones that just hover on the outside of the space I like to think I live and grow in.

Sandra Harding writes on the funding of research – where most research projects can get funded because of how the work aligns with the values and interests of powerful institutions (Harding, 2015). Within the world of political theory, what was counted as the political became the things men engaged with in statehouses, courthouses, and diplomatic circles. She focuses in this chapter on the division between female and male dominated spaces, capturing the essence of the way that political space grows and develops based on their fundamental values of academia. Where frameworks were constructed in the interests of dominant male group, this reflected the social policy instilled in social life. Her work captures this frame of objectivity in a legal system which had come to mean the male point of view. This comes full circle to the way that the patriarchal state shapes what counts as interesting or important, or how the more objective a claim appeared to the judicial system, the less it represented women's point of view (Harding, 2015. p.4).

Within the "theatre of human life" exists a type of darkness that is not all together black, and that instead is one that is in charge of us; it is where all humans live, it is there behind the door (Cixous, 2008). Writing is something that we are given – it is ours, and the worlds, there is a conditional ownership to our stories and how we tell them. Stories , if not nourished and cared for, if not interrogated and nurtured – they die (Cixous, 2008). If a story is given to us; it means that it can also be taken away. But what can't be taken away from us is our lived experiences, our memories – even if what remains are mere fragments of the past. However, in the fragility of life and of stories, does the message sometimes get lost? In undocumented moments of history, what is it that keeps stories alive? For some their stories only live as long as they do, or as long as their loved ones. In the spaces where not everyone is 'given permission' to tell their stories and some are denied the act of storytelling – those stories themselves would become lost. For the stories not 'big' enough to fill the pages of textbooks, or to flash across the screen of a news media site, for the stories that do not leave the lips of their teller – their vessel, stories – might not always be the thing that remains.

Stories of entanglement

Dear Aida

I can only give you words for empty spaces

Dear Aida

Words for words

(Edkins et al., 2021)

Jenny Edkins (2021) in 'Tales of Entanglement' writes about how we are entangled with one another – like the way Butler writes about how we are done and undone by one another, or what Berlant says about the gradual wearing down that we face as we go about our worlds. She writes that when we tell stories, 'entanglement' becomes clear (Edkins et al., 2021). Edkins discusses a series of conferences that began in a small, crowded room – which eventually grew to a bigger space. She talks of the compelling form of stories and their appeal across boundaries and paradigms (Edkins et al., 2021). Her article is the first time one of these sessions has been published this way. A section that stood out to me is the friendship between Aida and Julio and what she calls their familiar entanglement. Julio would write poems to Aida and in return she would write letters. Julio writes to Aida about students and professors and the typically "sacred, masculine bond" of the "Christian, patriarchal, and colonial training of priests and missionaries" (Edkins et al., 2021, p.601). Through their conversations and letters to each other (profound snippets of life building that are now taped to the walls of my makeshift office). Aida captures the gruelling journey of surviving graduate studies. She talks about the relationships built in the academy, and of the best of her students, "standing on their own two feet focused on telling the stories they wished to tell" who could stay away from all the performative nonsense and noise that the academics thrives on." What high praise that is. Fawaz (2019) captures the essence of the world of Eve Sedgwick's text 'Tendencies' by unpacking the experience of tending towards each other, a double sense of learning and reaching towards something, while continuing to help it thrive. Our entanglements – our tendencies – it is all about the lack of tools we have to deal with the fact that as people we are different from one another (Fawaz, 2019).

"The body is made up of cells, that is how it is understood, But the soul is made of stories." (Colquhoun, 2002)

It takes a certain audacity to speak with authority on life and death and everything in between. It comes back to that idea of what you have to prove to write creatively within an academic discourse. There is a weight that comes from writing under a discipline – for example what separates critical thinkers and their texts from new age memoirs about mindfulness. I reiterate an earlier point about the search for writing that is beautiful – the idea of a connection to writing without the convoluted idea of 'getting it.' Words have a weight to them – as do stories. Around the edges of what interests me the most about this research process is the part about accessible language and communication. There is a double bind that comes from entering a world of creative writing. In loss there is a certain temporality – the past, the present and future are all tied up within the idea of 'the real.' I believe that is why Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva have both written on Proust and 'the sense of time'. There is a somewhat 'sub' language that I have picked up on – a thread I have softly tugged at once or twice, about the work of Marcel Proust. At times I ask myself how a certain text or thinker will fit its way into my research. I do not wish to force different puzzles pieces, nor do I wish to include thinkers for the sake of it - and yet I find myself being tugged by these ideas and thinkers.

Read it like poetry – read each word aloud, slowly, softly, gently. Hang on each word, each pause, each gasp, each moment of silence.

A story of boundaries

> *"For millennia humans have used stories to make sense of the world. Cavemen didn't draw Venn diagrams or pie charts on the walls - they told stories…children are introduced to the world by listening to stories, family bonds are built around the dinner table where everyone tells stories."* (Casinader, 2020)

So where is this role, not only for the 'I' in the storytelling of politics, loss, and grief, but where is the role for the 'we'? The use of we, often holds a certain level of pride, ownership, solidarity. 'We the people...' There is a paragraph in Butler's *Precarious Life* that reads "For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied to "you"' (Butler, 2004, p.50). In the interconnectedness of each person to the next, is this sense of we a way to separate us

from another, or to join us? Dauphinee (2019) differentiated the role of the storyteller and the story listener, she tells us of the kind of narratives that circulate through society, these scripts offer us ways of acting, they tell us how to exist (Dauphinee, 2019). This reminded me of the way that politics and conversations of politics become dictated by that traditional world I spoke of white men in suits making the same arguments over and over. It is the imperative to prove worth through jumping through the right hoops before you are 'allowed' to write and express yourself in more than another essay arguing structure and agency.

If I give you that essay, will you let me speak my mind? OK here it is we exist in a world which is built off structures of power. This world has rules that we ought to follow in order to succeed – what is the prize and what is succeeding? Well, that's not the question, is it? I follow these rules set out because I wish to survive passively. I – because I am human, have the inherent primal instincts to protect myself – the desire to survive. I, being in the 21st century, being incredibly lucky to grow up in a happy family in rural New Zealand, have all my basic survival needs met. For that reason, I am not under any direct threat – I am a cog in a system that works well enough that it does not directly impede on my survival. I, being a human being, am keenly aware of my small existence, and how my experiences balance up against others – those who are better at the game than me or maybe worse – those who got a head start, or those who started behind me. I have the agency to colour in the lines if I wish – but also have the agency to burn the sheet of paper until it is nothing but ashes, yet I also know the consequences of my actions. There is a system in place that I am taught of, the judicial, executive, and legislative – these systems are bigger than you and me – I exercise my agency by exercising my right to vote. I work – I provide a service where I exchange goods for money and where I exchange my time for that money. Human nature and the world and its systems are far older than you or me – these structures are the way that the men were the hunters and the woman the gatherers, the way that there are prey animals and predators in the wild. If I were a deer – who would I be to question the pecking order in which the lion threatens my life, simply by being a lion? I the deer am lucky enough to be spared the knowledge of my existence, I know one thing – to run, to survive. I am but one speck in this giant web of consciousness and subconsciousness – I am nothing but a product of humans in a structure – battling with their own agency.

Marysia Zalewski (2013) writes on Feminist International Relations. In the text *Exquisite Corpse*, she takes the reader on a journey of breaking boundaries and surviving the world of international relations as a self-proclaimed feminist. She wished to write a book which

worked to betray all boundaries. I love this use of the word 'betray.' She used this with full intention – to represent the personal emotion and discomfort (Zalewski, 2013). In this text there is this remind of the role of boundaries which come with each discipline. She tells us the comfort and promising violation that takes place we start to begin to push at boundaries.

In work that aims to detangle, and inevitably become retangled – I find comfort in Zalewski's (2013) words where she reminds us that we may not always arrive at something "conventionally graspable" at the end. "We may arrive at nothing, or at least that's how it might seem. It's how we decide to step through the dark that matters. And which way we can turn" (Zalewski 2013 p.5). The dark is the unknown – it is precarity, risk taking, it is the unanswerable - the paradoxical. The dark is the place we look back from to see the steps it took to get there, but when there is a vast space to look forward to. The power of ideas is not to be downplayed – we belong to a tradition that is doomed to continue in the cycle of fulfilling beliefs, maintaining status quo - it is infectious, and it is found everywhere.

"As soon as you enter thought, there it is . . . the dark" (Cixous, 2008).

Zalewski (2013) discusses the form of questions and answers – the search for finding the 'right' ones in search of hope and the promise of "assuaging" the violence we "appear to be concerned about". By asking open ended questions, there is a sense in which we can betray boundaries that keep said questions in a cold sterile place. There is a certain level of emotional and intellectual draining that comes with the space where we heavily focus on which is right or wrong, and who has the authority to decide that.

"The problem comes in knowing which unanswerable questions to ask" (Haraway, 1992, p.316)It is not only how to know – but to know what counts. So, within politics and IR – within the academic boundaries – which questions are we supposed to ask? I can think of many great thinkers who shall be discussed further down, such as Hannah Arendt and Arundhati Roy, who have a certain line of questioning. Within the critical theory world, these questions feel as though they are encouraged and supported, so why is that in the academic world they were labelled 'self-hating jew' and 'anti-American'?

Dauphinee (2019) reminds us of an important lesson, that people are invested in violence, and how in that violence we find our privilege protected in both the ideational sense and the material sense. She finishes on the ideas of Ann Denholm Crosby, summarising them as "Stop rushing to nail down the problems of 'the world' and start examining your own investments in the way the world is" (Dauphinee, 2019, p.122). Violence and conflict are all

parts of life, they are products of power, of life building, of surviving. There is a glitch – a disruption to 'the normal,' to 'the real.' The dark is the unknown of writing – stepping into the dark requires embracing the unknown. When we lean into subjectivity, it takes off the weight of categorising ideas into a traditional paradigm of black and white. Despite the fact there is comfort of being able to plot ideas onto a line graph, ironically it is when we accept the messiness that it does begin to get a little easier. There can a be a push and pull to understanding ideas in aligning them with their opposites – the public and the private, the known and unknown, the done and undone. But there are limitations to this traditional binary thinking.

> To be honest, it's not so much the
> words that move me.
>
> It is the shape of the thing.
>
> The way it places its hand
> on my chest.
>
> Slips down, then away….
>
> Sometimes we like a thing
> simply for the ghost in it.
>
> Or the ghost it finds in us (Colquhoun, 2002).

Stories of loss and creation – the losing and the hurting

> *"I could destroy the world in my dreaded desire for it – or not, and in that not, be rocked by things without being defeated by it."*
>
> (Roy, 2002).

Loss is constant. Greif is not. Survival is constant – it has two faces, passive and active. Loss is just another cycle of life that we watch pass us by – it is the beginning, and I guess ironically, it's the end. We never stop feeling that loss – we are just sometimes at different points in the spiral. In school we are taught of war and conflict; we are taught facts – or so we should hope. We are taught about the intricacies of arguments, of events, we are taught the stories that got us to where we are today. So, what are we taught of life? That the loss of lives was someone's mother, father, daughter, or son; it was someone's someone. The loss of life was not just a number, a statistic that we teach in history class; that number is an individual

complex life. This is the personal, the deeply intimate; this is life. This is still politics; there is no line in the sand, there is no sorting machine in which you can process ideas that will be churned out into categories. Despite how, on the surface, matters of loss and grief do not appear to be inherently political – how couldn't they be?

Take a case of national loss; take the loss of life, genocide, wars, conflict, crimes against humanity, terrorist attacks – how often do we give credit to each of the lives lost? What remains if not the memorialization of life – what remains in loss? Memory. We have the 9/11 memorial in New York, the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, we have war memorials with the names of the dead proudly carved into – lest we forget. After the Christchurch Mosque attack in 2019, flowers were laid in abundance, and a plaque was placed reading "we surely belong to Allah and to him we shall return". What do we do with memory? In memory we are able to tell a story – we are able to keep the sense of something alive.

In the study of loss, I have found that same dilemma of the divide between the personal and the public. There are personal stories that deserve to be told just as much as the public political stories. When choosing a subject to write on one must consider to what extent this story will survive in academia. Enter the ironic bind between exploiting certain narratives for the gain of writing, the same way Butler (2004) writes about the state's exploitation of personal grief in order to strengthen their own narratives. Some narratives of loss become stronger than others, some become more understood, and yet the process still seems to remain the same. A journey through the different processes of letting go, maybe not all at once, but bit by bit, and then the final letting go where we accept the end (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003).

In living on we have accepted the things that we can control and the thing that we cannot. After reading David Eng and David Kazanjian's book *Loss*, it reaffirmed some thoughts I had about cruel optimism and the way that we hold onto the things that we have lost. It is in their analysis of letting go that I realised a large part of cruel optimism was about what we lose. It is not only the quality of life that we lose – or the good life – but the things that are lost in the process. In reading the analysis of melancholia and mourning as two different and yet interconnected parts of the process of loss, that I realised the nature of attachments.

Cruel Optimism comes full circle to loss; it is one of those things that you see more and more as you are looking for it. In loss it can be understood that letting go does not only mean letting go of what we lose, but the idea of what we lose. It goes beyond psychoanalysis where we think about what wanting represents. In death, and in mourning we can let go bit by bit,

rather than accepting it all at once; instead of the final death, the dead can be kept alive in how we tie to present to the past (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003). When I read this, it made me think about the kind of cruel optimism where we hinder ourselves because of our attachments and what we need or think we need. The state of cruel optimism where the most is lost is the one where we continue to lie to ourselves instead of accepting an end. In reading *Cruel Optimism* I realised the process in which we have hope for something that we have lost to return, in this hope – even when we know that it is misplaced – it still feels easier than accepting the finality of that loss. In the simplest forms I am reminded of Schrodinger's cat: sometimes it is easier to keep the box closed and hold ourselves in the hope that when we open it the cat will be alive. There is something about that hope, even if it is misplaced, that is better than what remains – acceptance. When we think about loss and healing and the process of writing – there is room in this space for that attachment.

This is what Kathleen Stewart breaks down as part of this idea of the ordinary life - the 'ordinary affects' (Stewart, 2007). Different places hold 'loss' in slightly varying ways, where the ordinary shifts the practices and objects, and sense of life. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) would say that they are the "continual motion" of life – the things that happen, and the way that we exist in the world and its effects. The little space between the world that is big, and the ordinary life of laundry and taxes.

> *"You consume and consume yourself and you are finite. Or else you have a genuine passion for creation, genesis, for what we are — creations — and you want to get close to the places from which all this stems and to draw pleasure from them, because these are absolutely inexhaustible, unfathomable treasure troves. But you can only do this under paradoxical conditions, because then you're heading into territory that is by definition beyond us, eludes us."*

(Cixous, 2008).

There reaches a paradoxical effect, a give and take, or a back-and-forth argument, which is a kind of denial to avoid a simple fact – what if we don't like the answer we find? Becker (1975), in *Breathing Aesthetics* (2022) presents an interesting way to look at breathing as living and writing. He takes a literal approach to the final moments and our attachments to that final death. We can talk about what a good death is, or about the final moment where someone becomes officially gone, and even in those moments it becomes difficult to address. Our attachments to the moment of death, and the final breath, are only part of our attachment

– or the stories we tell ourselves to heal. It is the same way that we can keep something alive in the mourning instead of letting it go – our attachment to it, despite the pain it causes, is better than letting go finally. Holding onto that last breath proves Tremblay's point that along with peace comes pain, and how our mourning is a denial of loss (Tremblay, 2022). The peace of acceptance does not mean the lack of pain. Albert Camus states "Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (1955/1975, p.11). The concepts throughout this work are rooted in the search to understand life and the meaning that we ascribe to the many distinct phases of life. Politicising death in a sense is an example of the compartmentalisation of the ideas that may be too big to unpack. The terror of death is overwhelming, so much so, that we conspire to keep it unconscious (Becker, 1975).

Dauphinee (2013b) writes that the dead in 'The Politics of Exile' remain in relationship with the living, that they disrupt the intentions, the plans, and the normalcy. She writes that the people who animate the text are survivors – and we are faced with their words, ordeals, their place in space and times – their temporalities – and still the line is blurred between the living and the dead. She calls this a prerequisite to making a meaningful response – the response to when we give survivors the 'stand to have their say.' To this she asks, "faced with the silence of the dead, with those outside of existence, how is response possible?" (Dauphinee, 2013b, p.351). Is this to mean we shall never speak for the dead? What remains in loss? Silence. What do we do with loss? That is the real question I suppose: how do we survive it?

Marc Nichacian's story of Zabel Essayan and 'catastrophic mourning' - there is no art without mourning

> *"These pages should be read not as the fruit of an Armenian woman's hypersensitivity, but as the spontaneous and sincere impressions of a human being on the same level as everyone else."*
>
> (Nichacian, 2003, p.105)

Marc Nichacian writes about a women named Zabel Essayan, who wrote first-hand on the pogroms which took place in 1895 and then again in 1909 prior to the Armenian Genocide. Her text *Among the Ruins* was published February 1911, and to Nichacian it is the greatest work of western Armenian literature. Although she was not there for the month of April in 1909, she does not attempt to reconstitute the facts – only recounting what she has seen and heard. She captures this sense in which she was submerged, engulfed by this sense of

horrifying misery. He writes about her experiences there and captures the extent to which this story is not told enough, then and now. There was an extent to which these people were stripped of their mourning – there was silence. There was no justice, no demand for revenge, for the murder had only just begun "And yet, one thing was already clear: there is no art without mourning" (Nichacian, 2003. p.99). Zabel Essayan is possibly the only one who was there to write about the events that were taking place. According to Nichacian these books had an odour of blood and powerless calls for justice – they are not testimonies nor literature, they were an appeal to feeling, the delayed mourning until later, where now the one sentence we can speak as true was how that the Armenians were barred from mourning.

Zabel Essayan refers to these pogroms as "the catastrophe" no capital letter – in Armenian this translates as '*aghed.'* This unnameable horror she writes about is no complaint – unlike in other pieces of work throughout history, she is not calling for justice or change; she instead is just trying to survive. Nichacian writes about Essayan with such gentleness and admiration; there is a softness for her and admiration for the work she did – even the way she continued to outshine her husband in the work she did. Her work was not born for moral or political reasons; her writing at the time made her a threat, yet she knows that if she was there to bear witness to such atrocities – to witness the unnameable – she too will be "carried away by delirium and irrationality. In a word, it is quite clear: by madness" (Nichacian, 2003, p.101). Her writing is what saved her from the ongoing maddening world around us – her storytelling is what saved her and what saved a story that would otherwise be untold.

He critiques this sense in which her work is not regarded as 'proper' literature on the event - to him the question is futile. To him her work questions what we thought we knew about writing and its function. It is a book of mourning which was written against the interdiction of mourning – he captures this essence of her work being a somewhat piece of art – where art is mourning. Essayan's work is different to others where she is not there to bear witness to what she sees, but instead to the experience. She is an observer, "animated by sentiments that are simply human" (Nichacian 2003, p.105). It is her humanness which separates her experience and her work from others – it is her search for some sort of comfort in creation and the gentleness in her approach to telling this story.

Stories of the September 11 attacks

> *"The claim of precarious life only leads, again and again to the dry grief of political rage"*
>
> (Butler, 2004).

Although loss often inspires a form of creation, sometimes that creation is silence. In the 'not-saying' something is created - unresolved grief resulting from the inability to resolve our conflicts. Eng writes on how the silence was soon taken over by noise - he asks about the place for silence. In this case, it is interesting to think about silence, that not-creation is not 'nothing' - it is not the opposite of speech, but 'a precondition of knowing and meaning.' In the context of 9/11, we can think about reactions to a major instance of death and loss (Eng, 2002).

Judith Butler (2004), Arundhati Roy (2002) and David Eng (2002) write respectively on the September 11, 2001, attacks that the US memorialises as 9/11. In their works they capture the way that the very personal level of loss of 9/11 was turned into fuel for the war on terror. An event that has truly shaped the world in private and public. I am not here to teach you about war crimes and crimes against humanity. I am not here to tell their stories. "War cannot avenge those who have died. War is only a brutal desecration of their memory" (Roy, 2002). Personalising and depersonalising loss for gain – a cruel thing for the state to do to its people. This is the story of loss – of losing.

In a podcast interview with Berne Brown, Ester Perel (2021) discusses her work alongside 9/11 in her 'theatre of witnessing' (*Partnerships, Patterns and Paradoxical Relationships*, 2021) In conversation of trauma surrounding 9/11, Perel interviewed the local chaplains, the door attendants, schools nearby, she went to Chinatown. She speaks of how these stories often get forgotten. In her conversations around loss and grief she captures these ideas of untold stories – the ones forgotten – she gives permission to grieve. There is a common narrative in place when discussing 9/11, where the personal stories became a key part of capturing the loss of 9/11. Is this a case of getting more stories told, or is this still at its core, a case of benefiting from the suffering of another person and their story? To tell a story for another person, the story might get picked up, and receive some coverage, some support from a stranger halfway across the world, but what good does that do for the person whose story it is? In the memorialisation and in projecting a commercial commemoration in media

storytelling, what is really being created? Is there a language for loss that focuses on not only making the person at the centre feel better, but making those on the outside feel as though they have 'done their part'? Is there a way that the place of the body, and the way it exists outside of us, that opens up an exploration of a normative aspiration that can exist in politics? (Butler, 2004, p. 25).

What comes first after loss and mourning – is that the difference between the public and the private? The search for justice and retribution – versus the journey of denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. Where justification "is the political act of claiming that something is reasonable or just, justification is one of the important steps of legitimacy within ideas of power and violence (Owens, 2019, p.36). When we have been given permission to mourn – to process the loss – does it differ in what remains? In Butler's *Precarious Life*, grief is talked about as coming in waves, grief and loss are written about as transformative, and from this transformation we are in the search for a form of resolution. This text uses 9/11 as an example of grief and trauma – a crisis that captures the transformations that we find ourselves in the face of loss. To quote Butler, "it should come as no surprise that I propose to start, and to end with humans (as if there were any other way to start and end!)" (Butler 2004, p.20). This beginning is a place of formulating our own standpoint of our lives and others' lives, and what grief, loss and survival mean in each context. Butler writes about the way that when we accept loss we are changed – we submit to a transformation. In this transformation, what are we hoping to find?

Power 'springs up' whenever people get together for justice; the legitimacy of this justice comes from that getting together more so than what follows (Arendt, 1972). When legitimacy is challenged, it bases itself on the actions of the past whereas justification relates to aims for an end – the future. "Violence can be justifiable, but it will never be legitimate" (Arendt, 1972, p.151). The search for a legitimate reason or for justification affects the way the story gets told. In a sense it simplifies these events down to their causes and consequences. We put these events into structures and apply what it is we know – or think we know – about the world. More specifically, it makes us frame these events into the confines of what we are taught is political. I do not wish to break down the teaching of causes and consequences – instead maybe I wish we could push it a little further – what are the rules to justifying what is and isn't a human life? There are western narratives about protecting peace, protecting lives, and I like to think that there is a promotion of the sense of

‘humanness,’ however there is a power dynamic that comes with choosing what that humanness is. It only takes watching the news to see what stories circulate – whose stories get told.

It seems a very human action to work within the realms of justification and legitimacy. However, a lot of actions come from the place of human emotion – something that is both formed by nature and nurture, and dare I say it, structure, and agency. Why is it that it becomes up to others to legitimise and justify certain actions, ideas, or opinions? In cases of ‘crisis events,’ the story can become about legitimising loss, or legitimising the reason that loss happens. what changes, is where you are standing as you watch this unfold – whose side of the story you are on. It is not as simple as the stories we are told as children where the bad guys are evil and wreck chaos on the world, where the good guys fight against them – they are justified by their own goodness. The world however is not so simple when a self-appointed elite gets to decide who is good and who is bad – who is legitimate and who is not.

To understand what might have led to the 9/11 attacks on the US is not a question of moral relativism, according to Butler. Instead, she says that we need to feel the full measure of grief but not to let moral outrage affect negatively the critical and public discourse and debate. Butler in ‘Indefinite Detention’ makes explicit the connection between “military” retribution or action and the fear, grief, and vulnerability that comes with being a human – and specifically the attacks of 9/11. Here, however, is where the important questioning becomes on the exclusive conceptions of who is ‘normatively human.” In cases of war and conflict – in cases of public loss a human life is so easily annulled (Butler, 2004, p.20). Humanity appears not something that we are born with – it might not even be something we earn. It is something that another decides. The times that we decide to focus on the ‘humanity’ of victims appear to be fickle decisions based on what narrative needs to be told.

The story of accountability and the permission to grieve

Where do our responsibilities lie then as an individual who lives within a collective? When a group of people is subject to the violence of another, where do we begin to seek a solution? I have asked before about our duty to one another – and our duty to others. I have also spoke of the use of ‘we’ and the inclination to associate with a group, or a nation even when we have no personal loyalty or responsibility to that group. For example, “we” being the narrative pronoun used for the west. The role of accountability and responsibility is one that is reflected in the way that we understand events through their framing. . To Butler, our acts are

not self-generated, but conditioned – we are at once acted upon and acting – and responsibility is what happens at the juncture between the two (Butler, 2004). There is a somewhat paradoxical connection to the way that structure and agency functions in the decisions that we make in our individual lives, and the way that the big historical moments function – it is about responsibility. When we have been subjected to the violence of others, we are responsible for our actions that follow; what we are not responsible is the forces that act upon us. "We are acted upon, violently, and it appears that our capacity to set our own course at such instances is fully undermined" (Butler, 2004, p.16).

Whose lives get marked as lives, and deaths marked as deaths – depending on the way the story is told – who is the hero, the victor, and the villain, what are the conditions for loss – for humanity? This is where Butler would talk about accountability and say that it might be understood apart for vengeance. In the US, the story starts from the date – from 9/11. If you start anywhere before – if you tell a story that suggests some pathology, it gives back a sense of agency", by having something that is object, something that we can believe in which accords with our ideas. She brings up Arundhati Roy's thoughts on Osama Bin Laden and the way that he was "sculpted from the spare rib of world laid waste by American foreign policy" (Butler 2004, p. 10). What is easier to believe: that 9/11 was a result of evil – of extremist hate for the US – or that it was a product of the structure that is America's foreign policy? I suppose that the 'structure and agency' question found its way here after all. It is as Hannah Arendt (2006) tells us about the banality of evil: somehow the belief in acts of evil is somewhat easier than other stories.

Butler (2004) brings the question to the war on terror and the treatment of the victims of this war. Butler asks us if the Muslim life is as worthy as the first-world life in American foreign policy discourse? She asks if the Palestinians have "gained" the status of human beings yet. Even in the tense post 9/11 political scene, Butler – back in 2004 questioned the treatment of the Palestinians, and the disconnect from their humanity – the names, faces, and personal histories – what remains when nothing is left, not even an obituary (Butler, 2004, p .34). This remains to be an even more relevant and pressing conversation today, where the world is calling out to their countries for a ceasefire. 'The hierarchy of grief' where we do not hear the names of the thousands of Palestinians who have died by the military. when acts of violence are committed against the first world it is terrorism and slaughter, yet when the first world /the west is the perpetrator, it is justice. Are these lives deemed not grievable because they are victims of war? Is there a connection to the disallowance of loss to the way violence has

been perpetrated against the Palestinians? Is it a fear of a public proclamation for these lost lies, in the fear of not offending those allies with the Israeli state and military? (Butler, 2004, p/34).

The story of the battle of creation and silence – searching for there a public language for loss

> *"Silence, then, is the absolute beginning, which is not only absolute, but also negative, because in order to be silent one has to cease speaking."* (Strawser, 2006).

What platforms are we given in order to create – and how useful do they become in telling stories and breaking down the barriers of the political and the personal? I feel like it is important to note the different ways that we treat certain issues. It sems like if you begin to ignore the events around the world that you are labelled as apathetic. I think of the traditional politics conversation that happen out in 'the field' or more accurately at the dinner table. There is this bittersweet place that we begin to live in where if we are too aware of the brutal evil of the world we would not get anywhere. Is this a case where silence becomes protection from evil? It is like how Becker (1973) writes about the constant acknowledgement of our mortality, what kind of life we could lead if we were constantly spending out time focusing on 'the end' and peril of our lives. I guess this is why he writes that animals are spared from such ideas (Becker, 1973, p.28).

Eng's (2002) title 'The Value of Silence' has always stood out, for silence offers a somewhat paradoxical nature to this conversation on creation and loss. It is no wonder this phrase popped up in Soren Kierkegaard's work – notably *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* –silence is an art, a gift. Silence is a word that continues to weave its way through different texts. It is a state of being. It is a choice, and yet sometimes it is not. Silence is one of the languages of loss, for the value of silence comes from this withdrawal of the self. Eng (2002) tells a story about the initial silence that spread through New York, that soon turned to noise. When hope turns into dread, and dread into grief "trauma slowly transforms into the reality of loss...silence might be considered that moment before" (Eng, 2002, p.86). There is a narrative which rings true how in New York, there was a web of loss. Each victim was given

the acknowledgement of what their life meant to other people – they were all somebody's someone. I wish to draw upon when and how this narrative is used. This was the personalization of a narrative which continued to further push a political goal of the war on terror. The public language of mourning – inexplicable and inexpressible – singular and private – how can that be reduced to a public state unprepared and ill equipped for conversations about grief?

In a political discourse how much worth do we put on human life? For often the way we talk about conflict comes from a place of numbers and facts – when is it that we start to value the stories of the fallen? Think to Zabel Essayan writing on a group of people who were stripped of their mourning; the aftermath of war and conflict is loss. So, silence – it is not the opposite of speech, it is a condition of possibility – a precondition for the knowing and the meaning of loss. *Can we stop the spread of experience?* It seems like the very crux of human nature to share experiences; it is not the way that we try to put ourselves in the shoes of others? Is it not how we show that we understand them; is it not how we show we are able to offer advice? When we share experience – tell stories – when we break the silence, we are starting a conversation, literally and figuratively, about healing. To use some of Eng's (2002) thinking however, is there a place for silence? That is when we must ask ourselves the value of sharing our stories – what purpose does the sharing of this story serve? Is it because you – the person – wishes to be heard, or is it because them, the listeners, would benefit from hearing it? To make things more complicated – is thinking they would benefit from hearing it still only self-serving? Think to the way we offer support to loved ones, or the way that we seek closure.

Kierkegaard writes on silence, and the realm of human concern – among other things. In *Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, he covers three stages of life which he thought people would pass through. One of these lessons in the first discourse is on the 'value of silence.' He writes that the animals are spared from their awareness of mortality – it is the curse of man to know the full extent of his/her own mortality. Initially this appears to bring into question the ways that people cope, the things we do – for example, we create. But upon a little more thought, about the ways that we survive in the world that we see as cruel. It is something incredible to think at the bleakest point in human history there was still a sense of the love of life, or as Perel says a zest for life. I then think back to Kierkegaard's *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* where he states that speech places the human being above the animal (Kierkegaard, 2016). Man is above the animal because he can speak, and animal is better off than man for he is spared the ability to be aware of its own self. As Arendt says "man, to the

extent that he is a political being, is endowed with the power of speech" (Owens, 2009, p.37). Kierkegaard writes on this realm of human concern that becomes an abstract realm where we use words to reference things that have not happened yet, or things that are no longer here, where rather than being present we look to the past, present, or future – worry, regret, or analysis. According to Kierkegaard we can learn from the bird of the air and the lily of the field, we can learn from them the gifts of silence. When man (human) complains of his (their) woes, they only add to their suffering. The ability to speak – and think – although that may be the reason man is at the advantage over the 'natural' world of the bird and the lily, is what becomes man's detriment. We learn from the lily and the bird, because they are in their constant state of middling. The lily and the bird do not long or question when the next season should come because they have no reason to doubt the cycle which has happened for thousands of years.

Stories from captivity – those left dead but still breathing

There are two podcasts I'd like to discuss: the first is Brene Brown's 'Unlocking us', the second Peter Attias' 'Drive'. In both, Ester Perel tells the story of her work in narrative therapy and psychotherapy, covering captivity, conceptual revolutions, survival, and relationships. Perel captures the sense in which when there is collective trauma it demands collective resilience – no person can do this alone. She reminds us how quickly everything can disappear, how the ground you sit on could open up before you. Perel's parents were both sole (Holocaust) survivors of their families, each parents losing around 200 of their family members. Some survivors told stories, some did not. Perel had good storytellers – who told the stories that were accessible to them. This is some of that story.

> *"When you are physically incapable of leaving, the only place that you can live through is your creativity…the stories you tell in your head can make you think that you're sitting with the person that you haven't seen in 10 years… That notion that your mind, your imagination, it is not just the mind, it's the imagination part of the mind is what allows you to feel free even when you are captive".*
>
> *(Partnerships, Patterns and Paradoxical Relationships, 2021).*

In Brene Brown's podcast they discuss this sense of loss in the context of captivity and sanity by talking about both the COVID 19 Pandemic lockdowns and the Holocaust. She talks of loss – of being apart from loved ones and what we do in that space of longing. I find this such a fascinating way to look of longing and loss – for within it a mini cruel optimism exists.

There is a sense in which lying to oneself brings about a certain level of comfort. Creation is healing, and yet it is also a distraction from reality. It is a kind of story that we use to survive; it as an acknowledgement of loss, and it's a way of trying to hack the system so that we can, well, survive. The ability to feel as though you are free instead of captive – what an incredible use of language to compare various levels of loss and survival. There is a certain level of permission that Perel gives us to feel about the COVID-19 pandemics, about missing people, about feeling trapped. She herself talks about the way comparative suffering exists in mourning and how people can feel the need to be given permission for their feelings. Perel talks about post 9/11, and post-war, that to feel sad about some 'private matter' would feel unworthy, for how could one minor upset compare to a national case of trauma and suffering? In a world of crisis event, in a world with evil, our personal lives and the trials and tribulations that come with them by comparison are small – unworthy of being told.

"This is what we do" Perel tells us, "We come together in collective resilience" (*Partnerships, Patterns and Paradoxical Relationships*, 2021) Perel talks about a kind of silence that protects others. There is a double bind, where telling stories does not always have positive results – at least not for the listener. There is this sense in which these stories of trauma hold a certain burden – that without these stories it is easier to keep alive a kind of optimism. I suppose that is one of the many faces of cruel optimism – the conscious not-knowing to preserve a conscious lie about how the world is. Perel talks about this space of not wanting to tell certain stories as "I don't want to contaminate you: I don't want you to think the world could be so inhumane. I don't want you to suffer like me". This is an important thing to note – that silence protects people. Think of the children and following generations of those who survived great traumas and crisis events. To what extent does the sharing of stories provide them a foundational understanding of 'the real' and yet - we still wish to protect them from the evils of the world. Perel talks about the massive disruption to the narrative that needed to be settled. How does one pass on such atrocities and hurt?

When communities are broken, they need stories, and with a mass breakdown, there needs to be resilience on more than just the individual scale. "Storytelling binds you to people, binds you to the past. Binds you to the transmission." Within captivity – to continue to borrow this description Perel gives – there is a collective loss of people, generations, and communities, and with this comes life and dread – and yet there is still a zest for life. There is a remarkable recurrence where in the face of survival – at the easiest and most extreme sense of the word, the ability to hold on to the things that make us human. She talks of the stories her mother

told of her captivity, where she would mend her socks as they got holes, or how her father would steal potatoes to feed those who otherwise wouldn't have survived. Looking back however, she talks about stories as if they were Swiss cheese –that she just accepted the holes and never learned the minor details. This living with dignity, this sense of agency, and sheer dumb luck, are the things Perel attributes to her parents' survival of the Holocaust (*The Effects of Trauma* 2021). Viktor Frankl's (2011) stories are similar in ways to the ones that Perel tells: of suffering with dignity and the zest for life that was required in order to maintain normalcy. When someone was looking down on them – a loved one or a God, that he would "hope to find them suffering proudly – not miserably – knowing how to die" (Frankl, 2011, p.67).

Can stories contaminate another? I think to Perel's words, of the ways people do or do not tell stories. There is a very fine line between stories that need to be told and stories that should. As time passes, and generations pass – there can be a disconnect to stories.

The story of the ordinary life

> *"No one can serve two masters, for he must either hate the one and love the other or hold fast to one and despise the other"* (Kierkegaard, 2016, p.36).

Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* tells us about the inherent need to be in proximity to okayness. It is not so much the actual being okay but instead about the space in which by being around an 'okay' existence, therefore we can feel validated in our search for a 'good life.' As well as discussing the ordinary, Berlant tells us about the 'good life,' and about the way that we hold ourselves back from that life – for it is less about the good life, and more about the need to be working towards said life. Where the middle is that place where we often – subconsciously and consciously – keep ourselves; it is this psychoanalytic framework that feels as though it is the centre of what Berlant writes. The word 'optimism' for some brings thoughts of a world of sunshine and hope, but within this context, optimism is really about our attachments. Attachments are not always physical – sometimes they represent an idea, a dream – some kind of promise. In these attachments – such as our attachment to the good life, we set ourselves on a path of world and life building. What happens on the way becomes less prioritised over the end goal, despite the fact that often, we are more comforted by the act of life building – the place of dreaming – than the actual having. For when we finally get there, we are at the risk of disappointment; at the end we are only faced with the next beginning – the next obstacle, the next attachment.

Berlant's concept of being in proximity to okayness shows the way that we wish to have lives that are more than just survival. We want to have lives where we don't have to prove this – or as Berlant says 'pass some test'. And yet how there is a sense in which it is not about being okay, but about being near it – for once we are 'okay', what comes next? *Cruel Optimism* talks about the way that we hold ourselves back from getting where we want to be. I guess this research has done that very thing, that in finding a cycle it denies the very ends that it writes about. It denies the very end that begins the very process that it tries to understand. Often this space becomes cruel; it allows us to say this is how the world is – and this is how it should be, but for now, what do I do? In that middle we can reach a certain impasse where we are "dithering, tottering, bargaining, testing, or otherwise being worn out" (2011, p. 28) by the promises that we have attached ourselves to in the world. Within these promises lies the certain amount of hope we place in having more than the ordinary. In our attachment to more, it places us in this state of waiting. We must acknowledge the nature of our attachments and the way they affect us in our life-building. Sometimes it is easier to have the attachments to keep alive the thought of progress – to have an ambition – than it is to feel idle. Holding on to something, even it causes us pain, is easier than letting go completely and accepting the loss – accepting that something is gone. There is a sense where in the trauma and crisis of everyday life there are structures that shape our interpretation of the 'real.' When we are in the present, we do not always explicitly consider what happened to lead to that point – we are not always living in the conscious state of 'presence.' The recognition of existing and complications that come with it are the part of the fight for the ordinary; the precarity of existence is what keeps us in the state of crisis – this is the trauma of living. I suppose this is what she would call the 'historical present.'

There is a game we are playing of life, a balancing act for the dimensions of politics where we need to orientate the public space and to enter another language world. There is sort of 'glitch' within the matrix of our attachments to winning and losing – living and dying. If we were to reshape the public in order to accommodate the private more intimate stories, what would it take? Our intimate attachments, and our attachment to the intimate reflect the way we 'care' in the world of politics, even if politics – and the university – does not care for us. This division and binary thinking of splitting up the world and our attachments and the formulations of politics is a reminder of the work that needs to be done. What has gone wrong for the world to exist as it does? Or more optimistically, what can make it right?

I am reminded again of *The Lily of the Field and The Bird of the Air* – and the either/or that Kierkegaard speaks of. In hope, and fear – in life and middling – there is a sense in which we choose to believe that it is – or it is not. Although this text takes place within a Christian dialogue, this reflects the time – that these texts exist as ways of understanding the world. I tend to think when I read 'God's Kingdom,' that instead Kierkegaard is talking about 'the good life.' This discussion centres around choice – in a certain committed to, well, either/or. Two things can exist at the same time – there are many complicated spectrums which are representative of all of the many little 'either/ors' that exist – however, this discussion is important – or at least very interesting to the way that human beings tend to try to split up the world. "As a body falls with infinite speed when placed in a vacuum, so also does the silence out there with the lily and the bird… cause these two opposites to touch and repel one another at exactly the same instant… either to love or to hate" (Kierkegaard, 2016, p.41).

The Story of Lizzie Tollemache and trying to survive in a world that continues to throw you obstacles.

> *"Let me tell you of a complicated woman. She stood in mud, a great distance from home, tired, numb, and staring out across a decade worth of battles, on what little ground she'd gained.*
>
> *She wasn't sure what home was, how to get there, but she knew she needed it and that it looked like truth. And love. Connection.*
>
> *And so, she sailed through treacherous seas and lost companions and was shipwrecked, storm tossed, salt soaked. She visited strange lands where she found nourishment and hidings both in equal measure."*
>
> Swimming Lessons (Tollemache, 2023).

Being adjacent to the creative arts community I find myself able to take part in all sorts of opportunities, one of which was the development showing of a project Swimming Lessons, written, and performed by Lizzie Tollemache. Lizzie Tollemache is a performer and a storyteller in many respects. As she stood on stage, backed by her 'chorus', the five women

told a story of survival – a story of getting by in a world that aims to push you into a box. Magic was created that evening at Centrepoint.

***This**, this is what it's all about.*

The theatre was full of something – a sense of belonging and understanding – a sense of hope. In the foyer after the room buzzed with a sense of unity - a story was told that we all needed to hear. For weeks I drafted messages to find the right way to say "hey, this is me, this is my research, let's chat."

We talked of the healing process that comes from creation – about the steps you need to take in order to heal and grow and the role that performing – creating – has in that process. We spoke of my research, of storytelling, and of how we tell stories. She tells me that it felt strange to write a show about herself – she even admits in the show that this is no story of a superhero or historical figure – it's her. She tells me that in stand up, or in songs, poetry, it is a more accepted medium to talk about the self, but in theatre, it feels strange to use her own personal stories. From her hate of her school pool to her mother's pink socks that she still keeps in her drawer, Swimming Lessons even at its development showing was the reminder of why I wish to tell the story of stories. There are many stories of loss and grief, some stories are private, some are public, some we share and some we don't. This is one of them.

There is a sense in which we do not give our life stories enough credit to be stories we tell – our lived experiences can feel they don't weigh up enough compared to these big national cases of mourning. As we discussed – in some platforms it's completely normal to talk about the personal, to pour your heart into song writing, poetry – or to stand on stage telling curated stories at a comedy show. Is there no room in academia, for creation of stories, for making art in healing for something that is so beautifully personal and raw? Why aren't our lives, stories and experiences enough proof to talk about these big issues that we are still arguing about and trying to understand? Think to a casual conversation between friends; if one is suffering, often we try think of our own experiences in order to give them the solace they seek; we think of our direct connections to issues. Why is it that we do not give ourselves the authority to speak on such things – because in fact, who is the most qualified to tell our stories other than ourselves?

There is a division of stories where they are separated by the weight they have, their ability to stand and survive in the world. The creative community and its stories feel as though they are placed in one box which defines them and therefore the people they will reach. It becomes

less about the confirmation bias spiral – or the comfort zone, but more about the boundaries that we set ourselves within the space of writing. There is a tendency to focus on solely on the objective – or the value, one of the issues here however, is about who gets to decide the value of stories?

"Nice, healthy, happy childhood Middle class, very lucky" (Tollemache, 2023).

It still rings in my ears and as I live and breathe – as I tell stories, as I grow and change and heal. As I survive and create. Stories demand to be told – they commission us (Roy, 2002), we tell our stories, and we give another a little piece of ourselves; we are done and undone, woven, and tangled up in the human experience. In Palmerston North's Centrepoint theatre, I sit in a space of people wearing off on one another as the world wears off on us.

The story of Glenn Colquhoun and sadness

I sit in the library at Palmerston North on a cold evening. A man, Glenn Colquhoun, places eight wooden figures - totems he called them – on a table and takes his seat. Each painted as a different character. Each totem has their own story – their own song. On that cold evening Colquhoun sits in that room and tells us stories, and sings songs about loss, grief, and life. From stories of William Whiterat the swagman, to the commander of the Orpheus, he sings songs (and some nursery rhymes) to share with us their stories. He sings to his ancestor, who sent her grandchild born out of wedlock from England to New Zealand. His song tells her the story of their family – which she will never know. He sings a song for Erin Wilkinson – whose pen name was Robyn Hyde, who wrote on the Rape of Nanking, who had to give away her child. In that room through the act of storytelling of various people in history, he immortalised them by sharing a little piece of their own stories.

He tells us of his experiences as a GP working with the young people in the Horowhenua district. He tells us how the most common problem he faces is young people "suffering from sadness." That is what he called it – sadness. With gentleness he expresses his regret for not having the right words for them in that moment and more pressingly not having an easy solution. In the face of this he wrote a collection of poems – 'Letters for young people' – telling them all the things he wished that he did at the time.

"You probably think
When I listen

To your chest
With my stethoscope
I am listening
To your
Heart

But I'm not.

I'm listening to
your stories.

I'm throwing a line
From one old ship
To another

And swinging about". (Colquhoun, 2002)

This book of poems sits on my bed side table. To a room of essentially strangers, he tells us stories essentially of grief, loss and surviving. Be they the stories of the totems he carries in his weathered suitcases, or the stories of the young people whose sadness he still wishes to ease. "It feels like we are sitting around a campfire telling ghost stories, doesn't it?" he tells us, the room hangs on to his every word.

"In your sorrow-joy
Tip-winged and
Unbearable
Hangs a bird
Give me your hand.
Here, it is in your hand.
It is breathing.
Listen, it is breathing." (Colquhoun, 2002).

Sadness is its own type of survival – the survival of the self. Survival can appear in the cruellest of forms and often where we least want it to. Technically, survival is what we do every day. Survival is 'not dying.' This act of 'not dying' can be conscious or not – what we do in the day and why. There is something to say for the direct connection to what we do and how that means we survive. Often, in the modern world, some of these choices are disconnected. If survival is the 'not dying' it means that it is a struggle or a threat to the normal. If asked what a good life was spent doing, 'surviving' could be quite the pessimistic answer. Be this because we have the need to find some greater meaning in life, or maybe because we are afraid to look our mortality in the eyes and realise that our lives no matter how colourful, will still be made up of doing the things we need to live – eat, sleep, repeat.

The world is cruel until it's not.

Survival is both something that we do every day either unconsciously or consciously, and yet survival is also a state that we enter when we, or when our ideas, are threatened. We enter the state of survival when our idea of our normal life, or even the 'good life,' becomes endangered. Is survival a constant state that we live in, is survival truly just the things that we do to 'not die,' or is it a state of flux, a place that we are, and that we are not – that comes about from a place of fear. Surviving, when it is 'not dying,' is struggling. Survival in itself is cruel in how it shapes our perception of the state of our lives. By wanting more than survival, it keeps us in that state of need, of the struggle. The hunger and the desire about what we need, or think we need, is shaped by the acceptance that things are not as they should be. Often it is when we have been 'surviving' for too long that it becomes difficult to remember why it is that we are surviving in the first place. Why is it that we choose to stick around a little longer? (Strausz, 2018).

The cruellest form of survival is suffering. We want what we do to matter. For things to matter does that mean therefore they need to be more than surviving? With that thinking, the ultimate life would be one that flourishes. I think of the plant on my desk that if not cared for, to describe the plant would probably be to say, it is suffering, it is not dying. Not dying is not exactly a wonderful state to be in. To be optimistic, it's great, it means it's still alive, but that plant is nowhere close to flourishing. With that in mind, if we look at our lives like a plant, we will hope that we will get to live "the good life" that we will get past suffering and

surviving. This is where the cruelty begins, we have an idea of the good life and what that means, and we know that it is a goal that we aim to reach, but by aiming for it we need to acknowledge that we are not quite there yet. We need to acknowledge that maybe we are just surviving. Maybe we are just scraping by to eat, sleep and repeat. By admitting that we are not living 'the good life' we admit that something is wrong. We have to admit that there is a degree of suffering to our lives. When the difficult parts of our lives begin to determine every aspect, it means that we are living in fight mode. When we are suffering, when we are struggling to survive, it shows one of the ugliest sides of survival. For when we are fighting for our lives, for whatever reason that may be, it becomes a detriment to the enjoyment of the little things. Time spent no longer becomes time enjoyed, but time endured. I think this is the cruellest for often the best things are lost in this survival. We can not only lose the sense of ourselves in this survival, but we can lose the sense of others and what we are worth. Survival can become an internal struggle; it then becomes surviving the self. It is most cruel when we are pushed further and further away from what we see as 'the good life.'

> *"Whether the earth or the sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference…"* *(*Camu, 1955/1975).

So, I sit, in a small section of the Palmerston North Library listening to stories. For a second, I wonder if Glenn can feel the weight of the room, the breathing of the walls – the pulse. I think to myself of the kind of cruel survival that comes with being human – not only the terrible things that can be done to one another but the kind that the brain does to itself.

The story of 'denying creation' to procreate or to not.

> *"But also, the essence of creation is to embark on a journey with unknown destinations"* (Beauchamps, 2021).

In the interview with Brene Brown and Ester Perel 'Unlocking us' they speak of ambivalence. Perel talks about how when people make the choice to have – or not to have – children, that it is not always the not wanting to be a parent but about 'splitting the ambivalence.' She says that it's about not wanting to give up spontaneity and adventure and the division we put between these two ideas of 'life building'. This conversation shifts to becoming about how children – creation – is in a sense a sign of hope for the world. There is a common argument about 'not wanting to bring children into a world that is bad' and yet the human population has continued to survive even in the direst of times. Ester Perel speaks as a

child of Holocaust survivors. She speaks of how having children was a reflection of the Jewish population surviving – it was a sign that they were alive, and that they were human. The ability to continue with what is considered normal life was part of healing – it was part of surviving. They continue this in the wider context of 'is the world in a good place to raise children.' The surviving human race through all private and public cases of crisis events, begs the question of the "case for procreating."

> *"No!" that I had said, because it had become quite natural by then for my instincts to act contrary to my instincts, for my counter instincts, so to say, to act instead of, indeed as, my instincts"* (Kertesz, 1990).

Kaddish for an Unborn Child by Imre Kertesz is a text that is hard to do justice. It tells a certain story, which I would hate to rehash solely for the sake of proving that the text fits in into the pattern this research has found. However, the text entirely captures the ideas about the paradoxical cycles of life, death, survival, and creation within politics. This text contains monologues which meander their way through the thinking of Kertesz. At first, I thought that quite simply this text was about Kertesz' denial of having children in a world that is so unkind, in which the Holocaust could take place. To connect Perel's (2021) conversation to Kertesz' (1990) story, both approach the creation of life from different perspectives and different sides. I thought that this text was a fitting example of the ebb and flows of which the desire for life and/or creation take place. It is a text which breaks down the complexities that break down the maddening self – paradoxically maybe it is still a form of creation in the face for healing, for it tells Kertesz's story, one that would generally be reserved for the private, and yet one that is publicised not only because of the text being published, but because of the fact the conversation of having children – creation, life – is on the table. It is a story of not just the survival of the Holocaust but surviving in the wake of it – surviving the aftermath and facing the world in which such atrocities could happen.

The character has miraculously and unexpectedly survived the Holocaust, and consequently chooses to not have children, nor contribute his writing to society, and finally, to be only a speck in the machine. In the context of survival and creation, where reproduction is creation, and life is survival – is it always the case that creating human life requires a certain hope in the world? In a current economic and climate crisis, is the choice to have children one that is based on hope, or is it based on the need to continue to feel human? Is it based on a need to have an illusion of normalcy in order to remain sane? Think of Becker, who writes that if

man were to focus on his death every moment of everyday, he would go mad. Man is not designed for the constant state of suffering, I suppose that is why there can be much comfort sought in the mundane life. Sam Keen writes in the foreword about meeting Becker in his final days and how they spoke that it was his turn to test out all of the knowledge and theories he had built over his career. Like Butler (2004) said however, we cannot plan loss – we cannot plan for how grief changes us.

> *The world is ending, but I still have rent to pay and lawns to mow… "But the Earth still turns — and not as badly as all that"* (Cixous, 2008, p.180).

To Frankl, love and creation were at the centre of his continuation of his will to live. In his search for meaning, he advises the readers that by creating a work, or deed, and also by love – that is where we find meaning. Frankl kept his manuscript on his person until it was confiscated – on scraps of paper kept in his pockets we slowly rebuilt this. It seems too simple to accept that the things that kept him going and the hope he had was held in love and creation, however its simplicity is fitting. "For the world is in a bad state, but everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best" (Frankl, 2011, p.124). The search for meaning is a primary motivation for life rather than a secondary rationalisation that is based on instinct (Frankl, 2011). He wanted to live for more than his defence mechanisms – however to live and even to die for one's ideals and values was what Frankl believed in. At a point he thought it was his time to die, he passed on a message for his wife. "Tell her I talked to her daily, hourly. You remember. Secondly, I have loved her more than anyone. Thirdly, the short time I have been married to her outweighs everything, even all we have gone through here" (Frankl, 2011, p.45). It seems astounding the stories that are shared of what keeps people going – the small details of normalcy. To Frankl this normalcy was in love and creation – in what he did as a psychiatrist. The infinite meaning of life includes suffering and dying just as much as it includes creation, love, and joy. In this case of loss, through creation what remained was the search for meaning. "What you have experienced, no power on earth can take that from you...Whatever great thoughts we may have had, and all we have suffered, all is not lost, though it is past; we have brought it into being. Having been is also a kind of being, and perhaps the surest kind" (Frankl, 2011, p.67). I think of Perel's discussion on comparative suffering and the spread of existence. How inexperienced I feel to tell the tales of the people who survived such things.

"And if we have lost, then it follows that we have had, that we have desired and loved that we have struggled with the conditions of our desire"

(Butler, 2004, p.20).

Research that survives/ surviving academia - The story of forbidden/silenced stories

Dear Aida

I am afraid of the common places because I never leave places without traces, and I don't want those settling roads over my body.

(Edkins et al., 2021)

What does it take for these pieces of writing to survive – what does it take for the thinking to be celebrated and accepted as opposed to being shunned for breaking too many boundaries? Recognizing that these stories are not just our own personal views and experiences, but that they instead comprise the fabric of our sociality, is the theoretical value of approaches that use narrative to convey information. But our stories are also the product of the way we come to see the world, and this is particularly so through the way we are trained (Dauphinee, 2019). To do more than "(re)packaging and re(gurgiating) the salient goblets of disciplinary knowledge for consumption, recirculation, and reproduction" (Zalewski, 2013), When we frame a space like the classroom as a place for "knowledge transformation" how does that change the way we engage with the act of reading and writing? (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2006).

"But the Earth still turns — and not as badly as all that — I tell myself, feeling pleased to see once again the print of the planet that you stamp upon your fine pages (where the crossings-out are also beautiful, just like writing), and to find. once again, your "hand" — I can see, in the sections that cross it out, the text that I'm unable to regard without a pang, the eternal hollow spaces like dog-kennels."

(Cixous, 2008, p.180).

There is a common thread in the story of Hannah Arendt, Imre Kertez and Arundhati Roy – and this is the controversy that followed their writing. Hannah Arendt was criticised for her writing on the Trial of Adolf Eichman. Labelled a 'self-hating Jew,' she was shunned from the academic world. The opening chapter, at least in the edition I am reading, talks of her 'excommunication.' As I kept reading, I kept asking myself, where did she go so wrong? She speaks on evil – and the nature of evil. She spent her life trying to understand big ideas up

until her death. There was something so thrilling about reading about her life, and about her ideas – it is only now posthumously (as happens with many talented artists) where she is celebrated for what I see as 'thinking big.'

It prompts me to question the nature of the stories we tell, and the time that we are allowed to tell them. At the time, the world was not ready for such ideas. It was too close to the grief. Her thinking identified the mediocrity of the man whose trial was highlighted – a man who was tried for the six million victims. Hannah Arendt saw through this – she saw that what is scarier than a bloodthirsting murderer is the man who simply could not think for himself, who felt that he was not to blame for he was simply following orders. The names he listed to be transported stopped being his responsibility the second they got on that train. She questions the actions of the Jewish leaders of the time, she questions the political climate, she questions the world that existed that allowed such a thing to happen.
Arundhati Roy who wrote Not Again one year after 9/11, like Hannah Arendt, thought big. She asked different questions, and this created a controversy to her work. Butler's (2004) *Precarious Life* discuses the criticism of Roy after the publishing of her work. She was described as anti-American for her framing of the actions of Osama Bin Laden – where she chose to question the events that led him to act as such, as opposed to continuing the common narrative of him simply being 'evil'. She discusses the way that Arundhati Roy was criticised, that she was called a diva – a cult figure. Under the contemporary structures on public discourse – the dual thinking, the critical thinking cannot be heard. It comes off as contradictory or disingenuous – which is a common thread with these thinkers.

> *"I wanted to understand how it was so that some people wear their souls on the surface of their skins, and why"* (Dauphinee, 2013a).

Where would one place *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* within this discussion on controversial writing in the face of crimes against humanity? As mentioned, I could spin the story of the denial of creation that contradicts the very stories Perel tells about proving humanity, and yet I feel as though that would be making an example out of a story of tragedy for confirmation bias. For writing to survive – after being churned through the machine politicised and depoliticised, what are we left with?

What Remains – post acceptance, is it really over?

> *"What is lost?" is posed, it invariably slips into the question "What remains?" That is, loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained."*
>
> (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003, p.2).

What remains in loss? This question of remains is important, for what is left is often what becomes a part of the next step. Remains are there as lessons, as nostalgic memories, as trauma - what remains is not our choice, but what we do with them is. In the cruel survival that we face, in this cruel state of reaction and non-reaction, or creation and non-creation, breathing and not-breathing. The question becomes about the reaction to death – the reaction to living and the politicisation of living. Eng and Kazanjian write on how in order to fix histories, and to establish a new normal or set of truths, "the lost past needs to step into the light of a present moment of danger" (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p.6).

All things come to an end: from the moment they are born it begins that process of dying. But that dying isn't always the end – it may be the end of something, but again what remains is something else entirely. What remains in loss – the aftermath? It is the slow release, a little bit at a time. We live with loss; we live in loss. We are losing – we are living. What remains? Loss is the name for what survives – life becomes about maintaining and beckoning loss. In 'Reading Sedgwick' Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman (2019) discuss loss as being the thing that remains. That we are left with survival and loss – loss is at the end rather than at the beginning. "It's what you are left with when an object changes shape (Berlant & Edelman, 2019).

Butler asks an important question about grief, "what counts as a liveable life and a 'grievable' death?" (Butler, 2004, p. XIV). In her work *Precarious Life*, there is a passage that stands out that captures the vulnerability to others in grief and in melancholia. This is an important part of how we converse with loss. In these conversations of letting go, of death, of meaning and connection, what it comes back to is this sense of 'what next?' What happens after we are done mourning? What happens when we are done with melancholia, and when we are ready to say goodbye? Loss may be a name for what survives (Berlant and Edleman, 2019).

"Seeing life as a weave, this pattern is not always complete and is varied in a multiplicity of ways, but we, in our conceptual world, keep on seeing the same, recurring with variations"

(Brill, 1995, p.35). In this conceptual world of concrete understandings and definition, we ought to remind ourselves that our concepts are not for use on a single occasion (Brill, 1995). When we look for a pattern and continue with that pattern, it becomes its own confirmation bias; understanding and breaking down these patterns become the need to fit all the facts into order understand them better, or in other words "if you complete it, you falsify it" (Brill, 1995 p.37).

Moving on – is that the final part of the process? If only it was so simple, for like the small beginnings and ends, the continuous cycles, something happens next. What remains after loss – what survives is the stories we tell, what survives is the loss. This is where we meet the bittersweet twist of the threads of finality and cycles. Where in a crisis event we experience the grief – the loss? – we experience the attachment (the holding on), we heal (we grow), we move on. But then what?

> *What is going to be later on – it's now. Now is the domain of now…I am, simply, I myself. And you are you. It's vast, it will last…What I write to you is this. It won't stop: it continues on…What I write you continues on and I am bewitched"*
>
> (Lispector, 2014, p.79).

The story of healing

> *"But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death on the other hand, is the final silence…without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waiting for someone else's words" (Lorde, 1984).*

Jean-Thomas Tremblay (2022) talks about what a good death would be – to die well. Tremblay talks about this illusion of aliveness as part of this process of letting go. *Breathing Aesthetics* takes the approach of the science of dying. Rather than politicising dying, this book challenges what we see as alive and "not alive." Where a heartbeat showing on the monitor does not represent aliveness, it is not evidence of feeling alive. If this is put into conversation with Eng and Kazanjian (2003), they talk about how loss is apprehended in history and how in that apprehension comes the point: we ask what remains. The mourning and loss become part of the public sphere as opposed to the more personal loss; to them "[a]t the dawn of the twenty-first century, mourning remains" (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003, p. 6).

This national mourning applies to Eng's The Value of Silence and Arundhati Roy's 'Not Again', as well as Butler's *Precarious Life* where 9/11 is the crisis event which triggers us into that state of mourning, melancholia, loss, grief, and healing. It is what starts this new cycle, is in a sense its own form of creation.

After reading Tremblay, we can think about the mourning the dying person faces in their final moments. We talk about the fear, about what happens in those last moments. This reading talks about the final process of dying in a way that unromanticised how we let go of the dead. How in the moments where the heart monitor may still show life, that there is not (Tremblay, 2022). It is interesting how Tremblay focuses on the way doctors explain that to the families of the departed, especially in instances where that person was on life support. Tremblay (2022) captures this essence that we live and we breath alongside loss – and how that although in death there is peace, there also comes the pain. I suppose that is just a way to remind ourselves of our own consciousness – and our search for meaning in both life and death. Butler differentiates between losing as we know it, and the transformative effects of loss, but how that transformation cannot be planned for – there is very little knowing in loss. She writes I think one is hit by waves, and that starts out the day with the aim…and find oneself foiled" (Butler, 2004, p.21)".

> *"What I have related is just a tale, which, as such, certainly cannot hope to make 'the' difference. But it does call for other tales, for a weaving of regenerative, slightly transgressive imaginations. Such a weaving might indeed make a difference as it brings with it the possibility of sharing and cooperating – which, while certainly not sufficient, is perhaps a necessary condition for reclaiming a future worth living"*
>
> (Stengers, 2018).

When you consider the very humanness of our attachments to a life, we believe we want – or deserve, it should not come as any surprise how twisted people get. Twisted up in the world and each other. I feel as though I am at the beginning of a journey, taking the last step in a sense, and the first step in another. This great big fabric now lays before me; under its weight I continue to wonder about the legitimacy of my words – what the shape of their impact will be. Lispector (2014) wrote that true thought is authorless, and yet she continues to spill herself on to the pages of *Agua Viva*. The politics of living and dying, is that when something

happens to the individual, to make sense of it we can politicise it. One the other hand when there is a great political loss, often to make sense of it, we apply it to the personal.

The remains of the remains conclusion and "casting off" the threads

> Dear Aida
>
> What is left of you when you are empty spaces with gratitude words on heart-shaped scars? (Edkins et al., 2021)

To tie together the final threads of what has become a complicated patchwork quilt, the main question we are left with is: what keeps us moving forward despite knowing the bad things that happened in the past, and the bad things that will happen in the future? It is creation – it is hope, that despite any amount of realism, we keep on going trying to understand our attachments. The fixation of death which has been reflected in art, in writing, in history, is a reminder of the fine line we balance of surviving actively or passively. The fixation on the final moments be it art, life, silence, noise – it is creation (or not-creation) that continues to prove the way we wish to act in the world. Even if we are in the world as opposed to of the world – we keep on asking what do we owe to others? What do we owe ourselves?

Really, we are all just loose threads weaving and intertwining with the threads of the world around us. It is like Judith Butler says, we are done and undone by each other (Butler, 2004, p. 23); it would be foolish to ignore the way that we wear off on each other. It is not because we are rational beings that connects us to each other but instead because of our exposure to each other – "requiring a recognition that does not substitute to recogniser for the recognised (Butler 2004, p. 48). If we are not wearing on each other then we must be doing something wrong (Butler, 2004, p. 23). We begin life as individuals who are welcomed into a web of human relationships. "Woven by the deeds and words of innumerable persons, by the living as well as the dead" (Arendt, 1987, p. 149). There is a wearing down of the self as we live and breathe in the world. As we face illness, aging, desire both requited and unrequited, we are made vulnerable to each other. These stories are the sharing of the self – even if just a little bit. That is all that we can do really – live, lose, and live in the remains of it. We tolerate loss, it is somewhat a constant which has many forms. The sharing of lived experiences – of grief, loss, and survival in the face of living and dying – how is that not politics?

"Define loneliness? Yes. It is what we cannot do for each other."

(Berlant & Edelman, 2019)

In storytelling, what we are really doing is wearing down on each other; we are surviving. Be that surviving academia or be that surviving a world that throws hurdles before you – we are human. With humanity comes an entanglement that is life and death – and losing and loss. When we aim to share knowledge, and lived experiences, we are storytelling. When we learn – when we read and write – we are engaging with story. With all this talk of endings, I think the problem might not lie in the end as such, but in control or more accurately the lack thereof. I guess it explains a lot about the way we view fate, as where we don't always get a choice when these beginnings happen, maybe it's the same for their counterpart – the end. I guess realising this, I see even more that this is where that part in the middle is so important – that's the free will part, that, to use the magic words, is where life happens.

I have found a place in which from time to time I rest my weary head, the place that sometimes I like to visit and pretend that there is not a great loss in the world, nor great sadness. The place where I can slow down and read – like poetry, pausing and taking as many breaths as I see fit. It may be a blessing or a curse to be human – to be able to feel such suffering, and even more so to live in a world where suffering is evoked on one another.

The story of sticking around

> *"A hundred times I was upon the point of killing myself; but still I loved life. This ridiculous foible is perhaps one of our most fatal characteristics; for is there anything more absurd than to wish to carry continually a burden which one can always throw down? to detest existence and yet to cling to one's existence? in brief, to caress the serpent which devours us, till he has eaten our very heart?"* (Voltaire, 2006).

This thesis is a love letter to the thinkers who came before me, who put in the work pushing boundaries, testing the waters, time and time again. To the thinkers who did not get to see the way their work is celebrated. To the thinkers who will never know the *shape of their impact.*

It's quite funny, really, in all this reading and writing of grief and loss, on the mini cruel optimisms that we create for ourselves, this research - these very words are creation.

Creation not just in the face of loss, but in the face of life. I find this research in everyday life – the good and the bad times. In the beginning I wanted this research to be a love letter to my

discipline – to the university that, to borrow the words of Alexis Pauline Gumbs, does not love me, and to the universe that does (Gumbs, 2012).

The connections and webs, I discovered – or uncovered along the way. The constant cycle where these ideas were concreted by the many rabbit holes I found myself in. Falling down the rabbit hole, I'd watch as these ideas would float around, and bounce off each other. Where these threads of consciousness and exploration would somewhat find themselves. In the beginning, I had a pile of readings that were connected by the fact they evoked a certain kind of *feeling,* the feeling that I just liked them. That pile now sits scattered all over my desk, right at the end of this research where it feels as though I am ironically just at the beginning – making new piles of books. There are no words for the amount of joy I find in my many rabbit holes, where I find that the thinkers I wished to put in conversation – already seemed to know each other. It a little funny really, to think about the ins and outs of life – and death, in the end, all we have is meandering. All we have is a car trip up north. Because, even if we know what is coming at the end, why wouldn't we want to stick around a little longer?

Once upon a time there lived a girl who lived in a tower of creation, from the tower she would look down and watch the world burn and then heal. She felt small up in her tower, but sometimes, she felt big, that her life was a complicated story, with many small beginnings middles and ends, that stretched out and wrapped themselves in the stories unfolding beneath her. She would sit in her tower and would sit in her silence….

The End.

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