The missed encounter: An autoethnographic a/r/tographic portrayal of diarized posttraumatic growth in the context of the mother-daughter dyad.

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the Missed Encounter

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC A/R/TOGRAPHIC PORTRAYAL OF DIARISED POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER DYAD.

by

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I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University’s rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

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November 1 2017
Abstract

This thesis is an arts-based educational research inquiry that portrays a journey of diarised posttraumatic growth in the context of the mother-daughter dyad. Using an autoethnographic methodology enacted through the living inquiry of a/r/tography, a creative work was produced, namely an artist’s book titled M/other, which unravels the story of the researcher’s relationship with her alcoholic mother, from the impact of childhood trauma to its repercussions in the present day. Portrayed through the lens of loss, M/other contains in poetry, creative writing, photography and film, a narrative retelling of the lived experience of a ‘motherless’ daughter negotiating a fractured maternal relationship. As a relationship marked by ambivalence, the mother-daughter dyad in M/other is a complex entanglement seen through the eyes of a daughter who becomes ‘motherless’ at the conclusion of the narrative, but in essence was motherless all along.

The Missed Encounter was guided by three central research questions:

1) What is the connection between posttraumatic growth and creativity?
2) What is the relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?
3) How can creative arts pedagogies, with particular respect to posttraumatic growth, contribute to educational practice?

This thesis spans the fields of psychology, social science, education and fine arts, proposing a connection between posttraumatic growth [PTG] and creativity. M/other is an account of posttraumatic growth lived in and through the creative process, supporting the posited proposition that creativity is growth. The Missed Encounter draws from the literature on posttraumatic growth, eudaimonia, childhood trauma, creativity and motherless daughters. Posttraumatic growth is the process of an individual’s struggle with reconciling new life circumstances post-trauma, a process that contains both negative and positive experiences. The post-trauma journey is marked by positive outcomes visible in Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (2004) five specific life areas, which are: deeper personal relationships; increased spiritual growth; appreciation of personal strength; acknowledgment of new opportunities; and an overall gratefulness for life. These five life areas were used to focus the search for evidence
of posttraumatic growth in a thorough analysis of a collection of seven of the researcher’s adolescent diaries (1,140 pages in total). The diaries were found to indicate a strong presence of posttraumatic growth and specific excerpts were used as the inspiration for the poetic and creative writing in M/other.

What *The Missed Encounter* proposes is a style of PTG called diarised posttraumatic growth (DPTG) where the confessional and daily writing of issues and traumatic events in a personal diary has the potential to promote growth and eudaimonia in individuals. It is one way – not the only way – an individual can self-soothe and thrive in positive ways after trauma. From the exploration of grief and loss through creative practice in *M/other*, the researcher found that her teenage diaries possessed an epistolary function as letters to her absent, and now deceased, mother. Their relationship survived because of the role of ambivalence and the researcher’s ability to create the mother she needed in the narrative of her journals. In light of this, *The Missed Encounter* advocates for an ideally daily engagement with diarising and creative practice as a strategy for eudaimonia and growth, particularly for individuals post-trauma.
Acknowledgments

Brené Brown (2012) touts vulnerability as an essential ingredient in human connection, creativity, social change and innovation. I knew this journey would be difficult but I had no idea how rewarding and fulfilling it would be, the people I would encounter and the ideas I would generate. This research would not have been possible without the presence of Dr Lexi Lasczik Cutcher in my life. The phrase ‘thank you’ seems inadequate to cover 16 years of learning, creativity, friendship and care – we did it and I thank you. To my secondary supervisor Professor Amy Cutter-Mackenzie, your knowledge and ambition inspired me to keep on going when the motivation had almost run out. My third supervisor, Dr Janie Conway-Herron, for your experience and understanding during the difficult parts of this journey, I thank you for every kind word. I would like to thank The Graduate School and School of Education at Southern Cross University, for allowing me to take this journey and make it my own, giving me the freedom to create my own path. To my late mother, Deborah Piper, who didn’t live to see this project come to fruition, I know you’re at peace and you’ll always be my lady in red. I would not be here today if not for the unwavering support of my father, Daryl Piper, and grandmother, Evelyn Piper. To the global autoethnographic community, for inspiration and paving the way for artists like myself to contribute to the larger dialogue around arts education and the value of lived experience in research. The enigmatic Arthur Bath, for his superior computer whispering skills and steadfast belief in my creative spirit. My global tribe who, at various stages during this journey, were my soundboards, parents, friends, editors, landlords, audience, nurses, brothers, sisters, confidants and cheer squad: Kate Morgan, Lauren Stripling, Megan Phillips, Erin Ginder-Shaw, Theresa Powles, Claire Hielscher, Bianca Donateo, Jeff Moscato, Yanin Ruibal, Allison Chalco, Pam Rana, Emma Davis, Erin Haslam, Miranda Borman, Sandra, Wes and Nick Gordon, Liz Fletcher and Stefan Gunev (plus Bianca and Sofia).

And lastly, to all the creators who have inspired me, motivated me, challenged me and made work despite the odds – thank you.
Dedication

To Motherless Daughters everywhere – may we all find the space to forgive, to love and to grow; we are our mothers now.
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List of Publications, Conference Papers and Exhibitions


introduction
Language and visual imagery are powerful communicators, and “sometimes we wrap our words so tightly we can’t see the gifts in them – same with our research” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 18). *The Missed Encounter* is an arts-based educational research [ABER] project that seeks to loosen the grip of academic language through the evocative emotionality of poetry and creative writing combined with the interpretive nature of photography and filmmaking to explore complex emotions associated with the lived experience of grief and loss.

This research was born out of my adolescent experience of struggling to reconcile the childhood trauma of living with an alcoholic mother with the new situation of living with my father and grandparents. This process was documented in my teenage diaries and was the inspiration for the creation of *M/other*, a multimedia artist’s book that portrays a journey of diarized posttraumatic growth [DPTG] in the context of the mother-daughter dyad. Concepts of motherloss, grief and the complexities of familial relationships are explored through the lens of creativity to offer tools and strategies for individual well-being post-trauma, particularly for adolescence, but also more broadly in other educational settings.

ABER projects are powerful because they “have the capacity to move us in ways that connect us with aspects of our lives as teachers and learners” (Anttila, Doan, Barrett & Ruthmann, 2014, p.4). This research is a living inquiry (Irwin, 2004), one that is rooted in a deep engagement with the creative practices of writing and art-making. Drawing from the field of ABER, *The Missed Encounter* is different to other, more traditional, forms of scholarly research because instead of being driven by a desire for certainty, this research seeks to enhance perspectives by suggesting “new ways of viewing educational phenomena” (Barone & Eisner, 1997). Using an autoethnographic methodology to “connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix), the research design incorporates personal experience of childhood trauma and my subsequent engagement with diarizing and art-making as a coping strategy against the childhood trauma I experienced.

My method is similar to Ellis’ (1999) where,

I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand
an experience I’ve lived through. Then I write my experience as a story (p. 671).

The aim of this research is to artfully explore and unpack the relationship between posttraumatic growth and the creative process in the context of the mother/daughter dyad to uncover what it was that may have contributed to my personal flourishing in adolescence and beyond. In order to navigate the sensitive content and difficulty of being both the researcher and the research (Finley & Knowles, 1995), the above research aim will be unpacked by the following three questions:

1) What is the connection between posttraumatic growth and creativity?
2) What is the relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?
3) How can creative arts pedagogies, with particular respect to posttraumatic growth, contribute to educational practice?

These questions frame the inquiry and the thesis document has been structured in a particular way in order to enhance the reading and understanding of M/other, the creative component. A preferred reading of this document, followed by a contextualizing personal orientation to the research is now offered.

A.1 Ways of reading this document and accompanying creative work

The architecture of engagement (Cutcher, 2015) for The Missed Encounter is built upon the relationship between this thesis document and the creative work, an artist’s book entitled M/other. This thesis diverts from the traditional exegetical presentation in order to draw a stronger, almost inseparable link to M/other. Both are research in and of themselves, extensions of one another and are bound together by the living inquiry of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004) through the lens of autoethnography. To support the reading of this thesis, an outline of the relationship between the content and specific design elements is offered, as every aspect of this document is intentional and planned.

Beginning with the table of contents, the reader will notice that each of the chapters carries a vowel in their titling. This is an act of dedication to language and continues in the alphabetical titling of poems in M/other. The use of vowels and alphabetical titling represents the excess of language that perpetuated my development through adolescence, as documented in my teenage
diaries, and my identity as a writer and artist. Additionally, each of the chapters has an illustrated titled page, using simple graphics and drawings to highlight the playfulness that keeping a diary often contains. These illustrations draw attention to the physical, material act of writing, the analog pen-to-paper moments that formed my adolescent diary keeping practice.

One of the biggest challenges faced with the creation of M/other, was how to best represent a phenomena that is primarily sensorial. Motherloss isn’t a one-time event (Edelman, 2014) but rather ebbs and flows at different times in an individual’s life. It is a lived experience. Accordingly, the interactive, digital version of M/other was created around five video vignettes portraying what motherloss felt like for me. Thus, it is recommended that the reader experience the interactive copy of M/other in the first instance after reading this introduction and subsequently engage with the hard copy of M/other as a touchstone when reading the remainder of this thesis, perhaps oscillating back and forth between the two. Having the opportunity to move between the scholarly writing and M/other encourages an understanding of the nature of The Missed Encounter as both artwork and research (Finley & Knowles, 1995). One did not come before the other, but rather, they were produced synchronously and in dialogue with each other. This is why the hard copy exists – to provide a material, physical and intimate engagement with the research, an experience that mirrors the act of M/other’s creation and the daily practice of keeping a diary.

M/other should be approached as an installation (Lejeune, 2009) – an assemblage of multiple yet interrelated parts – that takes the form of a book. Read as a linear text, from front to back cover, M/other contains creative writing, poetry and photography, and five video vignettes in the interactive version (that are represented as still images in the hard copy). M/other unravels the story of my relationship with my mother, a dyad that was affected by my mother’s alcoholism. The material in M/other is sensitive and emotion is central (Staller, 2013) to the retelling of the childhood trauma of living with the absence of my mother. It is recommended that the reader take time to linger with the digital materials in order to fully experience the narrative.

The actual sizing of the hard copy of M/other is significant and a deliberate aesthetic choice. It is 210mm x 210mm, square in shape, and designed as a portable object, to be touched and interacted with. The hardbound thesis is the same size. This intentional design decision was made to reinforce the symbiotic nature of the research and the creative work in both their creation and
dialogue with one another. Both M/other and the thesis replicate the approximate size of my teenage diaries, further reinforcing the important role diarising has played in both the content of the research and my life as an artist.

A.2 Personal Orientation

The next section contains my personal orientation to the research. As a child who lived through adversity, including divorced parents and an alcoholic mother, I took solace as a teenager writing in the pages of my personal diary. The format of this section is designed as a diary entry to deliver personal anecdotal evidence of my connection and motivations to complete the research. It is descriptive and intimate, part confessional and part documentary, placed here to orient the reader in preparation for an engagement with M/other and the remainder of the thesis.
Monday 6 January, 2017

Dear Diary,

Ugh. How can I explain my own connection to this project in a way that won't sound like a sob story or segment from 60-minutes (*Young girl survives adolescence using art and writing*)? I am verbose, over the top and a little hyperactive at the best of times. I get anxious when I'm not writing or creating and it's something that has always managed to calm me down, bring peace and clarity, and provide an avenue for frustration and venting. The words are always flying around; I just have to use the right net to scoop them out of the sky.

Diary, I have a confession to make: I am an artist. I KNOW *slaps forehead* but not in the black beret, paint-stained overalls kind of way. My medium is the written word, including, but not limited to, language, syntax, punctuation, and poetry. For me, reading is seeing and seeing is reading. In my creative practice, performing (singing and spoken word poetry) connects my words to my voice. I went to art school and studied photomedia, making video art and taking photographs. I then studied writing and loved every second of it. I knew at that point my love of both visual art and writing was inseparable.

I had a shit childhood (for the most part): as an only child with my mum on the Gold Coast, I inhaled the smell of cheap wine and cigarette smoke as ash fell through cigarette burn-shaped holes in bed sheets. Mum was an alcoholic, although I didn't realise it was an illness back then. I just thought she was overly-emotional-sloppy-didn't-listen-never-spent-any-time-with-me-on-the-weekends-didn't-help-with-homework-never-came-to-see-me-perform-sing-paint-draw-laugh-cry-yell-
scream...[breathe].

At 11 years old, I placed a rescue call to my dad: he swooped in and got me outta there. Rain was beating down on my body as I rode my bike down to the corner store to make that phone call. It was warm. I was freezing. The darkness was overwhelming as purple clouds swirled around above me. Without dad’s intervention, who knows where I might be now, perhaps not here, writing this, living my inquiry.

![Mum and I looked so similar as kids, don't you think?](image)

Mum and I looked so similar as kids, don’t you think?

I have so many vivid memories of mum’s drinking, revolving boyfriends and absence. Her absence was such a presence in my life, which is where the phrase ‘The Missed Encounter’ comes from. So many things got in the way of our relationship that eventually it just combusted. Bang. Gone. Before I started living with dad I was alone. Ten-years old: making my own food, walking myself to school and cleaning the house. It was what I did, nothing more, and I didn’t know any better. I didn’t know it shouldn’t be like that.
As I got older, I started to write more. I expressed my childhood experiences through art-making and performing. 'Living with' my mum, both literally and then with her absence, affected the development of my identity, as I did not have a readily available maternal influence. Because of this, I searched for other adults to look up to and I found allies in schoolteachers, friends' parents and music/art tutors. Looking back, the encouragement and support of these people gave me the emotional strength, acknowledgement and security I had been yearning for from my mother. Lexi Cutcher, that 'Cutcher woman', was one of those people who just 'got' me.

I met my PhD supervisor, Dr Lexi Cutcher, in the high school art room in year 10 and she continued on as my art teacher during my senior schooling. We kept in touch in the 10 years since then, until she became my 'teacher' again at SCU.
The creative arts gave me permission to express myself in a multitude of ways, although I realised it could not replace the bond that a mother and daughter should share. I began to learn, through art-making, how to relate to my peers. However, one of the most pivotal activities I undertook on a daily basis was writing in a diary, because it, akin to my experience with the creative arts, was something I could control. It created a safe place where I could express myself in an unfiltered way using whatever materials I had at hand. Sometimes this was a ballpoint pen, other times it was collage, or I would even use techniques I had learned in the art room at school. The ritual I created to write in my diary became an integral part of my day: writing late at night, just before bed, it let my brain ‘dump’ the day’s information and prepare to wind down for sleep. Diarising fostered my commitment and self-discipline, giving me a way of reflecting on everyday life that wasn’t positive or negative, but rather matter-of-fact.

From late 1998 to the beginning of 2006, I recorded my movements obsessively, perhaps as a by-product of feeling unacknowledged by my mother: diarising functioned as a type of ‘mark making’ to prove that I did, in fact, exist. The ritual of writing and recording my daily events and feelings created a space for self-reflection: the physical act of writing was calming and the diary became something I relied on for conversations I could not have with anyone else. Hard conversations, difficult feelings and even praise - I was simultaneously my harshest critic and biggest fan.

I had a very specific routine or formula for my diary keeping (I did say that I wrote obsessively, right?). Each entry was limited to strictly one page and I recorded the time I went to bed, down to the minute. Once that time was down, I had clocked-off, I could finally rest. Coming to each page felt like lying on fresh sheets in my bed, regardless of what was happening or how I felt.
The best part? Diary writing made me fearless in the face of writing tasks at school because I had established a routine of daily writing. I wrote about my friends and family (which was useful for English essays), I drew pictures of my house (which was useful for Art assignments), and I even recorded my assessment marks (useful for my dad if he ever read the diary!). Happiness and frustration were side by side in my diaries, neither more important than the other. The most important part was that everything was written down.

Writing my life out, page by page, was a way of articulating my experience. I constantly referenced popular culture, music, art and school. That was my life - repetitive yet new. I was a self-reflexive teenager, unpacking events and commenting on them as they related to my 'self in construction. As diary pages were filled, my vocabulary grew, and so too did my articulation of the past.

Every diary had its own personality. The first one was a yellow spiral notebook covered in stickers of celebrities, shortly followed by a purple A4 book of poetry. The paper quality changed from book to book along with the colour of pen and the quality of my handwriting (usually legible). I experimented a lot...with words and tested out different ideas, colours and shapes. The diaries helped me to cope with the demands of adolescence, with my emotions and the hormonal womanly body growing beneath my head.

I still have my diaries. All of them. So many voices graced the pages of my diaries over the course of my adolescence through the fluid movement of my hands, fingers and eyes. Who were these girls? They were all me: in my differing moods, on different days and in many different contexts and roles. My diaries brought the sting of self-awareness to the surface and the trauma of my childhood.
into full view, marking a passage of time tarred by incredible amounts of self-reflection and questioning.

As a teenager, I had an interesting relationship with both of my parents because we were all independent agents: the combination of my mother’s debilitating alcoholism, my father’s physical absence and my own struggles in personal development did not help the situation. These experiences happened in tandem and affected all parties involved. Escaping into the discipline of daily diarising allowed me to narrativise my daily life and control what was recorded. I couldn’t control my context but I could control my response to it. I could write in capital letters if I was angry, in big cursive letters if I was happy or I could not write anything at all and just draw. It was, and still is, a flexible medium to me.

Wow, my research has intensely personal motivations. I knew I was involved in the research but this goes right down into the core of who I am as a person. I have always felt empathetic towards others who have experienced a difficult childhood. There is something that runs quite deep, below the skin’s surface, which seems to vibrate or shake whenever I meet someone who has a difficult story to tell. In fact, there was something hidden in my own body that emerged at the beginning of this research journey…

In September 2013, a few days after I found out that I was accepted as PhD candidate at SCU, I felt a sharp pain in my left heel. I was panicked. After an ultrasound and an x-ray, a small piece of metal was discovered in my foot, embedded one-inch into my plantar fascia tendon. It was a sewing needle and the eye of the needle was glaring me in the face from the illuminated x-ray. I called my dad to report the strange discovery and he mentioned that my mum had a sewing room at the rear of their house where we used to live in Melbourne. As a toddler, I’d run through the sewing
room with bare feet whilst my mum altered clothes. That must have hurt like hell, yet I never felt it in there. Not once.

Look at that sewing needle! So deep and so obvious.

In October 2013, I had plastic surgery to remove the needle that, according to the surgeon, had been in my foot since I was a very young. That discovery was significant to me and to the research and perfectly timed too. The sewing needle that lay dormant until provoked (perhaps by my PhD application) I see as a metaphor for trauma. Often, what is buried deep within will only emerge when it comes into contact with the right external force. Timing is everything here.
I know that’s probably a lot to digest, and that’s only the first 15 years of my story. From quite a disrupted beginning to now, you can see that my trajectory is just one story amongst the many stories of those who believe they have experienced resilience and thriving. I know I’m not the only one, or that my story is perhaps not even the most bizarre, but what I have seen and experienced is infused in my research and gives it the depth and authenticity that research deserves and requires.

To keep in line with past traditions, I shall now sign off.

Over and out.

11:43pm.
A.3 Assessing *The Missed Encounter*

To my mind, *The Missed Encounter* should be assessed as an example of ABER using the following parameters established by Barone and Eisner (1997), where ABER projects contain:

1. The creation of a virtual reality,
2. The presence of ambiguity,
3. The use of expressive language,
4. The use of contextualized and vernacular language,
5. The promotion of empathy,
6. Personal signature of the researcher/writer, and

These are guidelines that may assist in the examination process alongside the provided university rules and specifications. One of the most significant features of ABER projects is that they redefine the academic product, in both form and process, shedding light on the ways in which teaching and learning are affected by emotion and spirit (Cole & Knowles, 2008). This is evident here in the marriage, in terms of form, between the thesis and *M/other*.

This thesis document is comprised of five main chapters: Chapter A: Introduction; Chapter E: Literature Review; Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks; Chapter O: Methodology; and Chapter U: Renderings. As a physical object, as mentioned previously, it is square in shape to and draw attention to the symbiotic nature of this doctoral project as ABER with the creative work *M/other*. As mentioned, it is recommended the reader oscillate between this document and *M/other* during the examination process in order to remain engaged in the space of motherloss and creativity, paying particular attention to how the content of this document manifests in innovative ways in *M/other*, such as the video vignettes and non-traditional poetic forms. Both texts seek to expand understandings of the relationship between posttraumatic growth and the creative process by offering a narrative of growth in an evocative way. *M/other* is a book in its own right as well as transcendant of the research.

Viewing the digital, interactive version of *M/other* is a sensory experience. Being present with the work in time and space is crucial to understanding the narrative and the unfolding of the research. The flipping digital pages mimic the hard copy experience of turning the physical pages of a book and while the text is linear in format the content moves through different time periods of my life, from adolescence to the present day. This interactive version was created to address questions of
how to represent motherloss as a dynamic concept bound to time and emotion. The only difference between the interactive version and the hard copy is the video vignettes. Thus both versions form the text M/other and should not be assessed separately but rather as two sides to the one coin.

In somewhat of a contrast, opening the hard copy version of M/other is an intimate experience. I ask that the reader take note of the texture and quality of the paper, the lux of the photographs and the shape of the words on each page. It is a spacious text in the sense that there is a lot of white between poems and blocks of writing. This is a deliberate action designed to give the reader ample room to pause and absorb the narrative, especially due to the sensitive and confronting content. M/other is to be viewed using the guidelines outlined above and read as both a text and an artwork – imagery is communicated through words, static photographs and moving image. M/other can be read and also viewed, taken as a whole story comprised of intricate moving parts. M/other may also be assessed for how its affective-ness as an artwork and rigour as an ABER work that function together to address the research aim and questions and perhaps most importantly, offer an insight into the lived experience of motherloss.

In the next chapter, a critical review of the pertinent literature will position the inquiry and introduce some the key concepts explored in M/other.
Literature Review
The Missed Encounter connects concepts and ideas from multiple disciplines in order to explore and artfully portray a journey of diarised posttraumatic growth [DPTG] in the context of the mother/daughter dyad. Through this unique study, the significant contribution to knowledge is comprised of an understanding of the relationship between mother and daughter through the lens of creativity in order to determine what it was that may have contributed to flourishing in adolescence and beyond. This literature review synthesises and evaluates some of the key concepts in the fields of research this project traverses (Knopf, 2006) in order to establish the boundaries within which the research has been designed and undertaken.

The Missed Encounter spans the fields of psychology, social science, education and fine arts. This research journey began in the field of positive psychology (E.1) where research on resilience (E.2) provided some direction. That lead to engagement with eudaimonia (E.3), a concept that is embedded in the ontological and epistemological perspectives of the research (see Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks). Beginning to investigate different approaches to well-being in the lead up to entering the creative production phase of the research, I turned to the literature on Childhood Trauma (E.4) to provide insights into the nature of trauma. It was at this point I came across the central concept to The Missed Encounter: that of posttraumatic growth [PTG] (E.4). Resilience and eudaimonia are closely aligned to PTG and function as supporting ideas for the artists’ book M/other. The discussion will then move on towards motherless daughters (E.6), a social identity that provides the context for the creative research. To conclude the chapter, an introduction to the relationship between PTG and creativity (E.7) will be presented as a preface to the unfolding of the research findings in Chapter O: Renderings.

E.1 Positive Psychology

A focus on positive adjustment is a recent development in the field of psychology and has made its mark through the popularity of Positive Psychology. The ways in which this field has influenced The Missed Encounter and the value the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) can bring to arts-based educational research [ABER] will now be outlined.

Positive psychology can enrich research into individual development because it maintains
a “focus on strategies that prevent damage to, restore, or compensate for threats” (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers & Reed, 2011, p. 127) to basic human protective systems. The development of positive psychology has shifted investigations towards more affirming qualities, like optimism and hope. It is a time-centric psychology, and at the subjective level it works towards identifying experiences that are meaningful, such as, “well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). In many ways positive psychology works beyond the more traditional behavioural sciences and towards techniques and ideas to promote human thriving. For a positive psychologist, “treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best” (ibid, p. 7).

In the search for positive well-being, the concept of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) offers an alternative view on lived experience that is particularly pertinent to the creative arts. Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has dedicated more than three decades of research to the abstract idea of flow. In his fieldwork he has studied diverse groups of people, from rock climbers to artists and musicians, exploring the reasons such activities affect a person’s quality of life and personal development. Specifically, flow theory emerged from Csikszentmihalyi’s research into creative processes in the 1960s (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). He noticed that the artists he observed ignored basic needs, such as hunger and tiredness, if their creative work progressed well. What Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues began to uncover was a process that could be learned and integrated into many areas of daily life for individual well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2002) offer, “a good life is one that is characterized by complete absorption in what one does” (p. 89). This is the key to flow: the ability to surrender completely to an activity to the point where nothing can detract an individual from what they are experiencing (Lutz & Guiry, 1994). Flow is an autotelic phenomenon, an “activity rewarding in and of itself” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 89). The focus is shifted away from the end product and towards experience; at the heart of a flow activity is focus and concentration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) believe that to understand well-being and ways to improve it, the individual cannot be studied in isolation; researchers need to look at the ‘phenomenology of person-environment interactions’” (p. 90).

The conditions for flow appear at first rather abstract, but there must be a perceived challenge
in the activity that will extend and stretch the individual’s abilities in terms of their own capacity. The challenge must be akin to the individual’s perceived abilities and they must both be of a high level (Asakawa, 2004). Additionally, there must be “clear proximal goals and immediate feedback about the progress that is being made” (ibid, p. 90) in the activity for flow to occur. Bakker (2005) comments, “one has to invest time and energy to experience flow” (p. 28). With these specific parameters in mind, what exactly is a flow activity? Before this question can be answered, it is helpful to unpack the above conditions.

In a state of flow, action and awareness are merged as the individual has a distorted experience of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Flow has the potential to infuse an individual with a greater sense of self-agency and autonomy by promoting “the growth of skills over time” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, 95-96). A side effect of this is the potential for developing commitment and self-discipline, which are skills that are transferrable to a number of different areas of life. This is particularly pertinent to adolescence, a context for this study. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter (2003), “teenagers ascribe ‘happiness’ to their moods when they are in situations of relative freedom, in the company of age-mates, able to engage in flow activities that stretch their skills and makes them feel alive and proud” (p. 197). Examples of flow activities include, but are not limited to, rock-climbing, painting, playing a musical instrument, reading a book, playing chess or a game of tennis (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Whilst this could be the outcome for some adolescents, it is by no means a generation-wide phenomenon. Not every individual experiences flow, yet from the research presented by Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) it can be seen that there are benefits from the present-ness that flow facilitates. Using the concept of flow in this study creates a lens through which adolescence can be viewed as a time for positive growth and thriving, not just a developmental stage to conquer on the way to adulthood. Flow contributes to a type of well-being imbued with meaning and value, which is also known in the literature on positive psychology as eudaimonia, which will now be explored.

E.2 Resilience

At the start of this research journey, resilience was the first concept investigated, as it was what I
had initially proposed to find in my teenage diaries. These readings provided the foundation from which the resulting study was framed. The key moments of my reading as they pertain to the research will now be briefly outlined.

Resilience, as defined by Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990), is “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426). Challenges and threats can range from acute trauma, such as the death of a loved one, to a more sustained risk, such as a parent with a psychological disorder or disability. Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) define resilience as, “a two-dimensional construct that implies exposure to adversity and the manifestation of positive adjustment outcomes” (p.2). The key words in this latter definition are ‘construct’ and ‘exposure’. Construct implies that it is not a naturally occurring process but rather something that is built; exposure implies contact, without any protection, with something damaging or harmful. It can be inferred from this that resilience is either a process or a label bestowed on an individual who has experienced a significantly damaging or harmful event, person or object. The common thread amongst all definitions of resilience, is that there needs to be an exposure to a risk – or multiple risks – in order for the process of resilience to take place (Masten, 2011).

Resilience is not a once-off phenomena – it is a lifelong process that can be triggered by a myriad of factors, both positive and negative (Herrman, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, Berger, Jackson & Yuen, 2011). It is a concept imbued with a number of conflicting definitions and diverse applications depending on the field in which it is studied (for example, see Windle, 2011). After more than twenty years of research, there seems to be a move “towards an increasing emphasis on optimism and hope as opposed to the frustration and despair that can occur from an emphasis on risk processes” (Kumpfer, 2002, p. 179). This shift has coincided with, or is perhaps a result of the rise in popularity of positive psychology which, as previously mentioned emphasizes positive well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is this paradigm shift that has sent researchers elsewhere into different fields, to search for alternative methods and models for the promotion of well-being (see Masten & Obradović, 2006).

The literature on resilience leads towards other ideas associated with well-being and thriving, both of which I believed initially were connected to the lived experience I wanted to explore (the role of my teenage diaries). Through the above research on flow I encountered the
concept of eudaimonia, a philosophical concept geared towards positive well-being (Huta, 2013). In eudaimonia I had found part of the ‘why’ of The Missed Encounter, largely tied to the effects of keeping a diary (see Chapter O: Renderings).

E.3 Eudaimonia

Well-being, as an umbrella term, follows the broad definition given by Deci and Ryan (2008) as, “optimal psychological experience and functioning” (p. 1). Eudaimonia has come from investigations into well-being, primarily from positive psychologists (e.g., Huta, 2013). A eudaimonic philosophy underpins The Missed Encounter and provides a framework for an alternative view of well-being that is grounded in meaning-making and human virtue.

Eudaimonia is a relatively new term in the social sciences and is often best “understood in terms of what it is not” (ibid, p. 201). When well-being is in question, the term ‘hedonia’ is typically thought of first – this is because happiness is commonly associated with pleasure. The concept of hedonism has attained quite negative connotations, yet it should not to be discounted entirely. The relationship between eudaimonia and hedonia is symptomatic of our times and eudaimonia is only just beginning to be defined and used as a way of thinking and being in the contemporary world (ibid).

Leading the way in advocating eudaimonic research in psychology is Veronika Huta (2013), who has mapped the history of the concept as well as offered future directions for potential research. According to Huta (ibid), “eudaimonia includes states and/or pursuits associated with using and developing the best in oneself, in accordance with one’s true self and one’s deeper principles” (p. 201). Even though eudaimonia is broadly defined as happiness, Huta (ibid) equates it more with “flourishing or excellence” (p. 202). Biswas-Diener, Kashdan and King (2009) emphasize how inconsistent the basic definition of eudaimonia is within the social sciences. They suggest the philosophical ambiguity of the concept is one of the possible explanations for current conflicting definitions.

Eudaimonia has a rich history in philosophy yet tends to divide thinkers into two camps based on the eudaimonic/hedonic dichotomy. Those in favour of eudaimonia emphasize a better life
through strong virtues (Joachim & Rees, 1953; Jung, 1933), whilst others who champion hedonia, view pleasurability as the primary driving force for the individual (Freud, 1920). Aristotle, who coined the term, believed eudaimonia to be ‘the good life’ or the ‘highest good’ (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008, p. 82). Conflated with contemporary ideas of happiness, “Aristotle’s formal definition of eudaimonia as rational ‘activity of the soul in accordance with virtue’ is far different from our ordinary thinking about happiness” (Cashen, 2012, p. 623). A eudaimonic person engages in, “active behavior that exhibits excellence and virtue in accordance with reason and contemplation” (Huta, 2013, p. 2013), which Aristotle believed was, “the highest kind of eudaimonia” (Rowe, 1971, p. 34). Whilst Aristotle’s definition possesses validity, contemporary social contexts have changed; what was valued in Aristotle’s time may not translate so easily to contemporary life.

Kashdan, Biswas-Diener and King (2008) offer a detailed history of eudaimonia, including a list of some of the virtues that Aristotle believed would lead a person towards eudaimonia, and they include “courage, temperance, proper ambition, patience, truthfulness, wittiness, friendliness, modesty, and righteous indignation” (p. 222). What the researchers also note is that Aristotle believed in objective happiness; it was the job of others, at the end of an individual’s life, to determine whether or not they had lived a ‘good life’ (ibid).

In terms of theoretical constructs, Abraham Maslow’s concept of self-actualization (1965) has been linked to eudaimonia. It refers to the human need to strive for something greater and to fulfill individual potential – it sits atop Maslow’s hierarchy of basic human needs. For Maslow (1965), “self-actualizing people are, without one single exception, involved in a cause outside their own skin, in something outside of themselves” (p. 110). In order for self-actualization to occur, there needs to be a significant presence in each of the lower levels of the pyramid of needs. Maslow (ibid) also asks that individuals look within themselves for the answers to their questions whenever possible rather than taking cues from society. This self-questioning is one of the key aspects of eudaimonia, a trait that is also mirrored in keeping a personal diary (see Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks).

Self-determination theory (SDT) works in a similar way (Ryan & Deci, 2012, p. 5), starting from the assumption that individuals are active agents in the construction of a unified sense of self. This theory provides a number of developmental outcomes that range from the highly integrated self to the alienated self, depending on the social-contextual environment (ibid). Another theory,
psychological well-being [PWB] is grounded in six specific constructs, namely environmental mastery, relatedness, personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, and purpose in life (Ryff & Singer, 1998). The key to well-being, according to Ryff and Singer (2008), is balance. PWB has similar tenets to the five life area’s of posttraumatic growth (discussed below), and both constructs revolve around similar themes that carry an attention to the mission of eduaimonia where meaning and thriving are the goals of human activity.

Eudaimonia is supported by both SDT and PWB, yet it is cemented in cognitive psychology, which is not the central focus of this research. What can be garnered from these theories however, are models or approaches that acknowledge both the biological and social contexts that influence well-being and in turn an individual’s subjective experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2012, p. 27). One of the more popular frameworks in the literature on eudaimonia is subjective well-being [SWB], which it is outlined below.

Diener, Sapyta and Suh (1998) present a compelling case for the essential role of SWB in promoting positive psychological health. SWB is how a person evaluates their life in terms of the values they deem important (ibid). Deci and Ryan (2008) concur, stating “well-being is considered subjective because the idea is for people to evaluate for themselves, in a general way, the degree to which they experience a sense of wellness” (p. 1, emphasis in original). The danger of this approach is that it places too much importance on individual values, which are incredibly diverse; what one person considers important won’t necessarily be the same to another person, particularly cross-culturally (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). However, Diener et al., (1998) assert what they believe are the predictors of SWB, namely, “people having a feeling of mastery and making progress toward their goals, from one’s temperament, immersion in interesting and pleasurable activities, and positive social relationships” (p. 34). These factors can be linked to what has already been discussed about positive psychology, as they are all elements of positive adaptation. What this indicates is there’s not one singular factor that promotes positive adaption, but rather the combination of multiple positive factors. Diener et al., (ibid) acknowledge this and point out that whilst SWB is vital to living a happy and healthy life, it is not entirely sufficient on its own. In the Western world primarily, the “basic physical needs are met and greater respect is given to individuals” (ibid, p. 36) which is one reason that SWB is gaining ground as an appropriate framework to study positive health and the
causes of happiness (Diener et al., 1998). Along with self-determination theory and positive well-being, SWB provides another example of working models of positive approaches to well-being. In this context, Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) offer a working model for eudaimonia based on self-determination theory. They frame their discussion around this central point,

eudaimonic conceptions focus on the content of one’s life, and the processes involved in living well, whereas hedonic conceptions of well-being focus on a specific outcome, namely the attainment of positive affect and an absence of pain (ibid, p. 140, emphasis in original).

In this vein, eudaimonia can offer an alternative means towards happiness that might also include hedonic pleasure as an outcome, and other researchers have reported similar findings (Kashdan et al., 2008; Waterman, 2008).

The first of many challenges faced by researchers wishing to offer insights into eudaimonia and its contributions to well-being can be seen here. For example, what actually determines a ‘good life’? Is subjective experience the best indicator of eudaimonia? Subjective well-being, as outlined above, is one way of retrieving primary data on the issue of personal well-being and is often used by researchers investigating hedonia. Much of the research into eudaimonia conducted by psychologists today involves scales and questionnaires that aim to determine “how integratively one thinks about the self and others” (Bauer et al., 2008, p. 84, emphasis in original). Eudaimonia isn’t just the antithesis of hedonism (ibid, p. 82). Ryff & Keyes (1995) believe that psychological well-being is what determines eudaimonia, which is comprised of the following elements, “personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance” (Huta, 2013, p. 204; Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 4). Parallels can be drawn with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) flow theory as “eudaimonic pursuits are voluntary, and are expressions of the self rather than products of external control or ignorance” (Ryan et al., 2008, p. 145).

Eudaimonic activities could be likened to flow activities that are primarily autotelic in nature. What is interesting about connecting eudaimonia with flow theory is that it clarifies the definition of eudaimonia. Rather than following the Aristotelian definition where a ‘good life’ is only ascribed objectively after death, eudaimonia can be seen as an everyday experience for
any individual who wishes to pursue it. In this instance, the challenge lies in uncovering what conditions induce eudaimonia because, “not all virtuous lives are likely to be equal” (Kashdan et al., 2008, p. 223). Choice and autonomy then becomes key attributes for the eudaimonic individual.

The role of autonomy is important in eudaimonia, which “results from choosing to act virtuously—that is, being volitionally virtuous—rather than being drawn into excesses such as accumulating material possessions” (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 7). This is the hard line distinction between eudaimonia and hedonia that Kashdan et al. (2008) refer to, as Waterman elaborates, “experiences of eudaimonia are always accompanied by experiences of hedonia, but that the reverse is not true” (p. 243). They are both “subjective states [to be] experienced, not as goals being pursued” (ibid, p. 243; emphasis in original).

Eudaimonia is inextricably linked to human virtue (Huta, 2013, p. 2008) and it is fair to say that this can present a number of tough questions when it comes to the types of situations that could predict eudaimonic behaviour. Ryan et al. (2008) briefly address two examples of micro and macro social contexts in which eudaimonia has been studied, which are the family unit (see Kasser, Ryan, Zax & Sameroff, 1995) and broader consumer society. The Missed Encounter artists’ book M/other focuses on the first social context, the family unit, and the interplay between mother, father and daughter as trauma and adversity occur (see Chapter U: Renderings). This focus is designed not to pin down meaning or present an absolute in terms of well-being, but rather show how different lives may present different opportunities for growth and stagnation.

Biswas-Diener, Kashdan and King (2009) approach the current literature on eudaimonia with a measure of intellectual skepticism. Their warnings about how to approach a study of eudaimonic behaviour are invaluable: “we often forget the importance of behavior and functioning and implicitly assume that by measuring positive experiences we are measuring positive functioning” (Biswas-Diener, et al., 2009, p. 209). They call for researchers to provide a conceptual framework that focuses attention on the particular combinations of activities and influences in an individual’s context that lead to various outcomes (ibid). They believe it is the combination of positive and negative influences that will elicit eudaimonia, rather than the simplistic idea that positivity begets positivity (ibid). Kashdan et al. (2008, p. 228) note, “eudaimonic and hedonic aspects of well-being can operate in tandem” to provide positive outcomes, which is a similar perspective to that of
posttraumatic growth (outlined below) which identifies that there can be positive outcomes from experiences of trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Kashdan et al., (2008) believe that there is room for researchers to explore “aspects of the good life that are unrelated to good feelings [...] to include variables that are, themselves, outside the province of well-being research such as regret, boredom, failure, trauma, and existential dread” (p. 229). Huta (2013) concurs, believing that eudaimonia “may also help people to cope with trauma, and buffer them against despair, because of its link with meaning and purpose” (p. 213). This is a beneficial process for those who may be experiencing difficulty with their identities or struggling to cope with childhood trauma. Eudaimonic principles are valuable “because when we are our ideal selves (whether intentionally or not) the lives of other people in our sphere of influence are benefited” (Kashdan et al., 2008, p. 222). This is where it is useful to examine the role of identity in eudaimonic literature, as identity is a key theme woven in and through the artist’s book M/other.

Within eudaimonist philosophy, “identity formation and implementation is an ongoing dynamic process throughout life” (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013, p. 107). Eudaimonic identity theory is particularly pertinent to the study of adolescent well-being because identity is at the core of the adolescent experience (Spacks, 1978). Eudaimonia offers a view on identity that is positive and values the self as an autonomous being, rather than one at the mercy of the social world or internal emotion.

In eudaimonic identity theory, identity formation is predicated on a self-discovery metaphor, where we “come to recognize something about the nature of the world or ourselves. That which is found is something that already exists. Now it is recognized and understood” (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013, p. 101). This perspective touts identity as a construct found in the social world to be discovered. What this does is place the onus on the individual; it is their task to discover who they want to be and how they want to live their lives. Waterman and Schwartz (ibid) use eudaimonia interchangeably with the term ‘personal expressiveness’, as “feelings of personal expressiveness derive from who we really are and serve as a continuing source of reinforcement for activities consistent with our aptitudes and predispositions” (p. 105).

If this is the case, then the task at hand is to guide and assist individuals towards their goals through actively listening to what it is they wish to achieve. This could be seen as a naïve
perspective, yet Waterman and Schwartz (ibid) offer that, “perseverance in the pursuit of self-realization appears to be a reliable source, very possibly the essential source, of flourishing” (p. 115). Eudaimonic identity theory frames well-being as a task for the individual, rather than society, as identity formation is a journey of self-discovery.

What eudaimonic identity theory, self-actualization, self-determination theory and psychological well-being all have in common, is that positive outcomes are determined by the individual’s thoughts and actions. However, there may be incidences beyond the control of the individual that affect their growth and development from an early age. Childhood trauma, as a prominent feature of M/other, is the type of trauma that influenced my experience and is a useful concept to introduce here as a support for the literature on PTG discussed below.

E.4 Childhood Trauma

At the heart of The Missed Encounter is a traumatic event that occurred in my childhood. Terr (2003) defines childhood trauma as,

the mental result of one sudden, external blow or a series of blows rendering the young person temporarily helpless and breaking past ordinary coping and defensive operations [...] All childhood traumas, according to [this] definition, originate from the outside (p. 11).

The ‘outside’ in Terr’s definition is the child’s external world – the forces that impact upon the child. I follow Whitfield’s (1998) definition of CT as, “any event, usually a non-ordinary one, that harms the body, self, or spirit” (p. 361) and occurs before the age of 18 years. Terr (2003) notes four interesting characteristics of childhood trauma, which are:

strongly visualized or otherwise repeatedly perceived memories;

repetitive behaviours;

trauma-specific fears, and;

changed attitudes about people, aspects of life, and the future (p. 12).
These characteristics are by no means prescriptive as individuals may react differently to trauma, yet they provide a guide to what kinds of disruptions and changes a child may experience as a result of trauma.

Studies of childhood trauma (CT) are diverse, including: clinical studies in neurobiology (Teicher, Andersen, Polcari, Anderson, Navalta & Kim, 2003), CT and psychosis (Read, van Os, Morrison & Ross, 2005) and the impact of CT on individual health and well-being (Lee, Tsenkova & Carr, 2014). Much of the trauma literature focuses on the severity of trauma symptoms (Briere, Kaltman & Green, 2008), such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. The focus of *The Missed Encounter* is on the positive outcomes of trauma so what is relevant from this body of literature are the concepts of coping and the phenomenological aspects of trauma.

Individuals cope with and respond to trauma in varied ways, with many experiencing difficulty, yet, large numbers of people manage to endure the temporary upheaval of loss or potentially traumatic events remarkably well, with no apparent disruption in their ability to function at work or in close relationships, and seem to move on to new challenges with apparent ease (Bonanno, 2004, p. 101).

The breadth of responses to trauma is as diverse as the nature of the traumatic events from which they stem. In the context of childhood trauma, “not much is known about the impact of a history of trauma on moment-to-moment emotions and experiences in the flow of daily life” (Glaser, Van Os, Portegijs & Myin-Germeys, 2006, p. 230).

The circumstances for childhood trauma vary, yet Lee et al., (2014) report that, “higher rates [of childhood trauma] have been documented in low-income and impoverished family environments, possibly due to increased exposure to stressful circumstances” (p. 123). The contextual factors of an individual’s life situation can affect their experience and reception of both the trauma itself and the proceeding recovery period, as Whitfield (1998) offers: “to heal from trauma, the experiencer [sic] has to be able to grieve the associated pain. To grieve, the person must remember the trauma well enough to name it accurately” (p. 361). Memory and remembering then become a crucial part of the processing of trauma as memory is a type of knowing – an ‘other’ – that is “at the heart of the reflexivity that defines anthropological knowledge” (Behar, 1996, p. 82).
However, as Ellis (1999) suggests, memory doesn’t work in a linear way, nor does life either, for that matter. Instead, thoughts and feelings circle around us; flash back, then forward; the topical is interwoven with the chronological; thoughts and feelings merge, drop from our grasp, then reappear in another context. In real life, we don’t always know when we know something. Events in the past are always interpreted from our current position (p. 675).

Naming trauma, putting it into words, can help an individual come to terms with what has happened. However, the source of the trauma has a large impact on how the individual will be affected, as Cook, Spinazzola, Ford, Lanktree, Blaustein, Cloitre and Van der Kolk (2005) offer, “when the child-caregiver relationship is the source of trauma, the attachment relationship is severely compromised; 80% of maltreated children develop insecure attachment patterns” (p. 392). Anda, Felitti, Bremner, Walker, Whitfield, Perry, Dube, Giles (2006) concur with this, stating, “early adverse experiences may disrupt the ability to form long-term attachments in adulthood” (p. 181). However, Allen and Lauterbach (2007), in their research on the relationship between childhood trauma and personality traits in adulthood, report, that the research, “suggests that child trauma victims are likely to be higher in traits such as curiosity, creativity, openmindedness, and cleverness (p. 592). What this identifies is that there are both positive and negative outcomes from childhood trauma.

*The Missed Encounter* is interested in exploring the positive outcomes, as outlined below in the discussion of posttraumatic growth, and creativity is one such positive outcome and healer of trauma. St Thoman and Johnson (2007) suggest,

rediscovering the possibility to become spontaneous, to release the interrupted action, to invoke the impulsive act, to create some freedom, to imagine healing, to open the creative space, is in fact to resolve some of the conflict that remains frozen or unexpressed [as a result of trauma]. Establishing the safety and permission for such activity belongs to the creative. (p. 41)
The above quote touches on the versatility of the creative process as a way for an individual to process trauma. I encountered this idea of positive outcomes after trauma through reading the literature on positive psychology. Posttraumatic Growth, or PTG as it is known in the literature, provides a way to understand trauma not as a setback, but rather as an integral part of individual growth.

E.5 Posttraumatic Growth [PTG]

At the core of The Missed Encounter is the possibility that growth and positive outcomes from encounters with trauma can occur. Key to this process is posttraumatic growth [PTG], a concept that gained traction in the 1990s from the result of overwhelming clinical evidence indicating that trauma can produce positive outcomes (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In this section, PTG will be introduced and the field explored as well as its foundational influences as they pertain to The Missed Encounter.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (ibid) define PTG as, “the experience of positive psychological changes that occur in the wake of a traumatic event as a result of the ensuing (psychological) struggle with what happened” (cited in Dekel, Mandl, & Solomon, 2011, p. 241). Studies of PTG have taken place only in recent decades and have investigated a broad range of topics, and how the concept manifests in cancer survivors (Arpawong, Oland, Milam, Ruccione & Meeske, 2013; Danhauer, Case, Tedeschi, Russell, Vishnevsky, Triplett, Edward & Avis, 2013; Phipps, Klosky, Long, Hudson, Huang, Zhang & Noll, 2014), college students (Shigemoto & Poyrazli, 2013), survivors of natural disasters (Lowe, Manove & Rhodes, 2013), people exposed to war (Powell, Rosner, Butollo, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2003; Laufer & Solomon, 2006), and adolescents (Milam, Ritt-Olson & Unger, 2004). From a broad database search, there was only one scholarly article available that directly addresses a link between PTG and creativity (Forgeard, 2013 – see Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks). This gap in the field is where The Missed Encounter is positioned – between the fields of Fine Arts, education and psychology. PTG is gaining momentum as a theory yet is still in its infancy as a concept, which makes it a fruitful area of investigation and the generation of significantly new knowledge.

For an individual to experience PTG, trauma must transpire, which for Triplett, Tedeschi,
Cann, Calhoun and Reeve (2012) refers to, “events which have negative consequences such as causing persons to fear for their lives or the lives of loved ones, causing physical or emotional distress, and/or causing major disruption in their lives” (p. 1). The literature on PTG doesn’t assume that trauma predicts growth, but rather the individual’s struggle with trauma will determine the extent of PTG experienced (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This is the ‘post’ in posttraumatic growth.

PTG has been described as ‘thriving’ (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995) and ‘flourishing’ (Ryff & Singer, 1998) in the literature, which equates it more with the concept of eudaimonia (as explored above). Whilst PTG has similarities to the concept of resilience, it “is not simply a return to baseline – it is an experience of improvement that for some persons is deeply profound” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 4). It has been reported that there are at least five major areas of an individual’s life where PTG can be found: “improved interpersonal relationships, a greater sense of personal strength, new opportunities, greater appreciation for life, and spiritual growth” (Lindstrom, Cann, Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013, p. 478). What this means is that an individual recognizes the support system they are a part of (including family and friends); they identify that strength exists within themselves to survive and thrive against adversity; they see new opportunities or challenges to advance their life’s direction; they can appreciate the preciousness of life; and changes in spirituality can mean the development or enhancement of a belief in a higher power separate to themselves (ibid).

Taking these five areas into account, PTG contains qualities of transformation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995) as the individual may experience profound changes in core beliefs they hold about themselves and the world in which they live (Groleau, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2013). Those core beliefs make up what is known as the ‘assumptive world’ (Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman, Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Trauma shakes the assumptive world; Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) use the metaphor of an earthquake that shatters the very foundations of an individual’s world, “posttraumatic growth is most likely a consequence of attempts at psychological survival, and it can coexist with the residual distress of the trauma” (p. 5).

What is interesting to note here is that the scholars say that growth and distress can exist concurrently; an individual can experience growth and stress at the same time after the traumatic event. It is the struggle, then, that is of upmost interest in studies of posttraumatic growth and The Missed Encounter is a qualitative inquiry into what this struggle may look and feel like in
the context of the mother/daughter dyad. More specifically, the artist’s book M/other delves into a struggle experience in and through the creative process (see Chapter U: Renderings).

Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi and Solomon (2010) believe, “the well-being, or sense of life meaning, a person experiences after dealing with a stressful event can best be understood by understanding both the growth and the depreciation the person has experienced” (p. 164). This highlights the paradoxical nature of PTG, where “at a time when one is vulnerable as never before, there is a sense of strength. Out of spiritual doubt there can emerge a deeper faith” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 6). Making sense of these paradoxes is part of the process of PTG, and “whatever the catalyst might be for growth, there are bound to be some biases introduced by the person experiencing the growth, because experience is inherently constructive” (Neimeyer & Stewart, 2000, cited in Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p 15).

In PTG, the process of an individual moving from trauma to growth is said to occur in repeated cognitive activity, which is the extent to which they repeatedly think about the event (Triplett et al., 2012). This is known in the literature as rumination (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), and two types of rumination – “deliberate rumination and intrusive rumination” (Triplett et al., 2012, p. 2) – appear to affect the rate of PTG an individual experiences. The connections between PTG and ruminative thought have been explored (see Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, & McMillan, 2000), so too has the role of these two different types of rumination on individual experiences of PTG (see Taku, Cann, Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2009). Intrusive rumination has been linked to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and is a cognitive process where images and memories of trauma flood an individual’s mind automatically (see Affleck & Tennen, 1996). Deliberate rumination, however, involves consciously addressing the reality of the event and searching for meaning. It is this second kind of ruminative thought that The Missed Encounter explores, particularly in the context of the personal diary (see Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks).

Taku et al., (2009) in their study of the relationship between the two types of rumination and their timeliness after trauma state, “ruminative thoughts can be viewed not just as intrusive, potentially nonconstructive or psychologically harmful, but also as deliberate, reflective, or constructive” (p. 130). Reflective rumination is of interest here because of its positive correlation to growth after trauma, as suggested by Treynor, Gonzalez and Nolen-Hoeksema (2003), who
describe it as “a purposeful turning inward to engage in cognitive problem solving to alleviate one’s depressive symptoms” (p. 256). This ‘turning inward’ is a reflective activity that is done to rebuild an individual’s assumptive world that has been shattered due to trauma. Encouraging this kind of behavior can assist in individual coping strategies and potentially elicit a greater experience of PTG (Taku et al., 2009).

Treynor et al., (2003) propose: “a key question then is why some people, when they contemplate their problems and feelings of distress, are able to engage in adaptive reflection whereas others fall into brooding” (p. 257). Brooding, in this context, is akin to the intrusive rumination described above, and has been linked to the appearance of depressive symptoms (see Just & Alloy, 1997; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). A lower sense of mastery over life events was shown to lead to brooding (Treynor et al., 2003) whilst some researchers suggest that reflective rumination is a predictor of PTG (Taku & Oshio, 2015; Treynor et al., 2003; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004). Taku et al. (2009) found that, “it was recent deliberate rumination that most strongly predicted the current extent of PTG. Ongoing constructive cognitive processing was associated with greater growth” (p. 134). What this indicates is that the rate at which an individual will experience growth after trauma is related to the amount of rumination they engage in both directly after trauma and as time goes by.

Verhaeghen, Joorman and Khan (2005) offer that, “rumination could be linked to creativity through a common underlying style of thought. In particular in writers and poets, a focus on the self and one’s feelings may be an important part of creative activity” (p. 227). These researchers define a third kind of rumination called self-reflective rumination in a study that “explored the hypothesis that depression and creative behavior may be linked” (ibid, p. 227). The Missed Encounter research process (see Chapter O: Methodology) involved considered amounts of self-reflective rumination in the form of daily diarizing during the research process and production of the artists’ book M/other. This kind of thinking, according to Verhaeghen et al., (ibid), “prepares individuals to generate a larger number of ideas. This enhanced fluency, in turn, allows for the emergence of more creative ideas and for increased elaboration” (p. 230). This is a useful insight for The Missed Encounter and has influenced the direction of the research design considerably. Deliberate, or reflective, rumination is a useful tool for both the nurturing of PTG and for the encouragement of creative
activity more generally by providing a way for individuals to cognitively process the events in their lives.

A main concern of the literature is whether or not PTG is a process or perhaps something more. Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) view PTG as both a process and an outcome where, “posttraumatic growth is a consequence of attempts to reestablish some useful, basic cognitive guides for living, rather than a search for meaning” (p. 15). In their model of PTG, an individual doesn’t consciously go on a quest for meaning following trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). However, Groleau et al., (2013) highlight the importance of an individual’s cognitive processing and search for meaning as it relates to their ability to rebuild their assumptive world post-trauma. It must be noted here that cognitive processing of trauma “has a highly emotional element connected to it” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 5). This is where self-narratives and survivor stories become an important part of PTG. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) believe, “the narratives of trauma and growth may also have the effect of spreading the lessons to others through vicarious posttraumatic growth. These stories then transcend individuals, and can challenge whole societies to initiate beneficial changes” (p. 9).

Journalist Jim Rendon (2015) presents a general review of PTG in his book Upside: The New Science of Post-Traumatic Growth and specifically presents a number of examples of individuals who have experienced PTG. These stories, including a war veteran and a breast cancer survivor among others, all exhibit positive reframing: “applying a positive meaning to negative events as a means of coping with it” (ibid, p. 28). After consulting with PTG research experts Tadeschi and Calhoun, Rendon (ibid) offers, “trauma, or more accurately, what people perceive as traumatic, is subjective. Everyone perceives an event and its meaning a little differently” (p. 53). This is one of the benefits of qualitative research into PTG – as each individual encounter with trauma is potentially different and unique, documenting and sharing these difficult stories has the capacity to offer hope to those who may be suffering from trauma and trying to rebuild their lives. PTG offers a more positive approach in the literature on trauma without diminishing the intensity of the trauma itself, which can breed negative outcomes for the individual under stress.

Webster and Deng (2015) list a number of negative effects an individual may experience as a result of trauma, such as: “schisms between the pre- and posttraumatic self; ruptures in normal avenues of intimacy; chaotic emotional processing; numbness, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and other
symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder; and questioning of values, beliefs, and attitudes” (p. 254-255). It is beyond the scope of this research project to offer any clinical suggestions or psychological interventions for the treatment of trauma. The Missed Encounter offers an alternative approach to coping with childhood trauma, one that is positively geared towards artful interpretations of difficult events. PTG offers a lens through which traumatic events can be used cathartically and for educative purposes. To this effect, Webster and Deng’s (ibid) conceptualization of PTG as, “indicated by beliefs that one had grown through adversity and that one could identify certain benefits from coping with the trauma” (p. 256) is most appropriate. My adolescent diaries are an archive that seeks to demonstrate this idea and show the complexities of childhood trauma, a concept outlined below.

As has been stated, in order for PTG to take place, the assumptive world must be shaken and shattered; yet “even tremors, lower on the ‘psychological’ Richter Scale, could lead to an examination of one’s core beliefs” (Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, Kilmer, Gil-Rivas, Vishnevsky & Danhauer, 2010, p. 31). What can be garnered from this perspective is that trauma, in varying forms of severity, has the power to make individuals question the way they live their lives and what they deem important. For The Missed Encounter, the self-reported PTG process of the narrative in M/other begins after a childhood trauma where I moved from a difficult life living with my mother to a new situation living with my father and grandparents. The literature on childhood trauma is extensive, so I will briefly explore a few relevant ideas here in the context of PTG.

The above literature on posttraumatic growth (PTG) posits that it’s possible to experience positive growth after trauma in adolescence and beyond. What is of interest to this research journey is the role of creativity in PTG. For The Missed Encounter study, Creativity is broadly defined as both a process and a product, and a powerful tool for individual transformation that has played a vital role in this research and the lived experience that the artists’ book, M/other, reveals (see Chapter U: Renderings). The links between PTG and creativity are yet to be explored in great detail in the field, thus some insights and connections are now offered below that have been discovered in the literature during the course of The Missed Encounter.

E.5.1 Posttraumatic Growth and Creativity
As previously stated, a scholarly journal database search on JSTOR revealed that there have been only two articles that directly addressed PTG and creativity in the context of research (Forgeard, 2013; Peterson, Park, Pole, D’Andrea, & Seligman, 2008). In order to add to this very small body of research and strengthen the correlations between PTG and creativity, I will turn to the work of Glăveanu (2013) and connect his 5A framework of creativity to the five areas of PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

In offering this connection, The Missed Encounter hopes to encourage future research into the relationship between PTG and the creative process in other fields. Theories of creativity will be outlined in Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks below, however, the research outlined in Chapter I doesn’t explicitly explore the link between creativity and PTG, and as such, it needs to be addressed and identified here as a gap in the literature.

The most significant journal article for The Missed Encounter is by Forgeard (2013) as she offers a distinctive perspective on the nature and role of PTG through the lens of creativity. What this perspective offers is an alternative to the clinical and treatment approaches of other empirical studies in the literature (see Calhoun, Tedeschi, Cann & Hanks, 2010; Tedeschi, Calhoun & Groleau, 2015).

Looking at PTG through the lens of creativity creates an opportunity to add another dimension to this concept.

Littered throughout history are studies of well-known artists who have undertaken creative work as a result of experiencing trauma (Herrera, 1983), such as Mexican artist Frida Kahlo who used her significant physical injuries and subsequent psychological distress as the catalyst to explore and express her identity. However, as Forgeard (2013) points out, “little is known about the relationship between adversity and everyday creativity” (p. 246). Everyday creativity denotes creative activities and behaviours associated with non- eminent individuals (ibid), ranging from what Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) call ‘mini-c’ to ‘little-c’ to ‘Pro-c’ creativity in their four-c model of creativity. What these academics are referring to is any creative activity that is not ‘big-C’ creativity, which, “consists of clear-cut, eminent creative contributions” (ibid, p. 2). Hungarian scholar Csikszentmihalyi (1999) has offered insights into ‘Big-C’ creativity in his Systems Model of Creativity, yet Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) note a number of studies into ‘small-c’ creativity (see
Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Singer, 2004 for a detailed review).

In her study, Forgeard (2013) “used path analysis to look at the relationship between the experience of adversity, rumination, self-reported posttraumatic growth (PTG), and posttraumatic depreciation (PTD), as well as self-reported creativity, in a sample of online participants” (p. 248). Creativity in Foregread’s study, is largely a self-reported, subjective experience. Forgeard (ibid) hypothesizes that, “perceptions of increased creativity following the experience of adversity constitute a manifestation of PTG” (p. 246). This suggests that an individual, as a result of trauma, could experience positive change in their relationship to creativity, or, feel able to experience creativity as a result of trauma. Thus creativity, as suggested by Forgeard (ibid), may be both an expression and an outcome of PTG. This is a very interesting outcome.

As the first empirical study into the relationship between PTG and creativity, Forgeard (ibid) found that, “given that a majority of individuals unfortunately experience adverse events at some point in their lives, they may be able to use their experiences – alone or with the help of competent clinical counsel (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999) – to heal, grow, and fulfill their creative potential” (p. 257). Thus, creativity is a force for positive growth in the face of trauma, yet not just as a clinical or therapeutic tool. What is suggested is that traumatic experiences can be used to nurture creative potential in individuals. Forgeard (2013) doesn’t diminish the effects of trauma in her research, but rather suggests, “it is possible that the experience of adversity provides important material, ideas, and motivation for the realization of creative projects” (p. 247).

The above study calls for a greater range of in-depth and diverse quantitative and qualitative research into the assessment of growth, and also into, “the various ways in which positive changes in creativity may be experienced and expressed” (ibid, p. 256). *The Missed Encounter* embraces Forgeard’s investigations and contends that creativity is both an expression and an outcome of PTG and its value lies in the subjective experience of the creative process.

Nestled within the research aim of *The Missed Encounter* is the mother/daughter dyad. This intricate and dynamic relationship provides the context through which the other elements of the research situation were brought into being because it was such a formative relationship for me, tied intimately to my identity as both a woman and an artist. The aspect of this dyad that is most pertinent is the concept of motherless daughters as my mother was absent for the majority of my
adolescence and passed away during my doctoral research. As an autoethnographic researcher (see Chapter O: Methodology), my personal stories form the gateway through which larger culture phenomena can be explored and critically examined. As a concept, ‘motherless daughters’ provides clarity for the research aims and meaning for M/other, the artists’ book, through an unpacking of a difficult sociological situation that many women face. I will now unpack this concept and its relationship to The Missed Encounter.

E.6 Motherless Daughters

It is my belief that between mothers and daughters there is a kind of blood-hyphen that is, finally, indissoluble (Shields, 1987, p. 127; cited in Miller-Day, 2004, p. 3).

The mother-daughter dyad is a key context for this research journey. Outlining what the literature identifies and defines as they key features of this relationship will now occur. It will be linked back into my own experience in order to create the foundations for framing the creative work in The Missed Encounter, the artists’ book M/other. Key to reading the creative work is the concept of ‘motherless daughters’ (Edelman, 2014), a sociological situation that defines my identity as a woman, an artist and a researcher. It is a position defined by grief and loss with repercussions that extend beyond the immediate family unit.

Baruch and Barnett (1983) write, “for children of both sexes, of course, the mother is viewed in both research and clinical literature as the most important figure in the child’s life” (p. 601). This is because it is a relationship that begins in the body with pregnancy (Douglass, 1999). The mother-daughter dyad is one characterised by transitions: from childhood to adolescence to adulthood and potentially into motherhood; to the mother’s continued growth and move into old age (Fischer, 1981; emphasis added).

The literature on the mother-daughter dyad is diverse, including research into mothers and their adolescent daughters (Apter, 1990), problems within the dyad (Caplan, 1989), the similarities between mothers and daughters (Bassoff, 1987; Gillison, Givan, Beatty, Kim, Reynolds & Baker, 2015), and Boyd’s (1989) thorough review of the dyad. The majority of literature emphasizes that
the mother-daughter dyad is indeed unique and different to other relationships (Russell & Saebel, 1997).

Miller-Day (2004) notes, “each maternal relationship has a story. The cast of characters change, the settings are altered, and the stories evoke a range of unresolved contradictions, joys, hopes, and tensions” (p. 4). This research focuses on the adolescent years of transition, which Turner (1970) believes contain conflict between parents and their children over the adolescent’s uncertain identification between being a child and being an adult (ibid). During adolescence, instances of conflict are believed to be more frequent (Paikoff, Carlton-Ford & Brooks-Gunn, 1993) as relationships are renegotiated and friendships become more central to adolescent growth and development (Paterson, Field & Prior, 1994). As the emphasis shifts from the family unit to the social world, the frictions in the relationships between parents and children can cause discomfort and hurt for those involved.

Wiggs (2011) “assert[s] that mothers and daughters engage in personal identification throughout their lives” (p. 992), which involves an ethics of care defined by a power relationship predicated on pedagogy. Mothers teach daughters the skills they need to move in and through the world, particularly how to be a woman. Miller-Day (2004) writes, “to understand themselves, whether they like it or not, many women feel they have to look first to their relationship with their mother, achieving selfhood in a relational context” (p. 4). The mother-daughter dyad is a dance (ibid) of constantly evolving relationships and role reversals (Miller, 1995), however Wiggs (2011) points out that, “the literature is sparse regarding the normative developmental phase in the mother–daughter dyad as the daughter transitions from childhood to adulthood (p. 1000; see also O’Connor, 1990; Shrier, Tompsett, & Shrier, 2004; van Mens-Verhulst, 1995). This is a gap in the literature this research seeks to address, particularly in relation to trauma and how it connects mothers and daughters together. The identification between mothers and daughters may be a lifelong process that continues even after the daughter leaves the home and pursues her own separate life.

Shapiro (2006) writes, “the mother–daughter pair shares early intense attachments and multiple projections, identifications, and internalizations” (p. 92). Physically, they possess similar bodies, and, “sometimes boundaries become so porous that they may feel they are one another”
(ibid, p. 93). Indeed, as Miller-Day (2004) states, “the literature surrounding the mother-daughter relationship promotes the image of this relationship as a unique bond in which daughters are seen as extensions of their mothers” (p. 6). Shapiro (2006) explores two mother-daughter relationships defined by trauma located in the body (for example, a mother’s experience of depression) and discusses the ‘somatic symbiosis’ of mother and daughter. This perspective is typical of early psychoanalytical research where, “struggles between mothers and daughters are rooted in this symbiotic attachment and the daughter’s desire for separation of self from mother” (Miller-Day, 2004, p. 6).

My experience has been very similar, as my mother suffered an addiction to alcohol and smoking when I was a child, which developed into cirrhosis of the liver and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in my adolescence. Chronic illness defined our relationship and sculpted our identities as a result, and this occurred across multiple generations: my mother’s mother passed away from cancer when my own mother was 16 years old.

The interconnectedness of mother-daughter relationships across generations lies at the centre of Miller-Day’s (ibid) research and the concept of connectedness influences much of my research and creative practice. Charles, Frank, Jacobson and Grossman (2001) working across three studies of separation-individuation models in the mother-daughter dyad, reported that, “daughters were most likely to perceive their mothers as enabling the daughter’s autonomy strivings if the mother remembered her own mother as enabling” (p. 724). The intergenerational threads that bond mothers and daughters together is an interesting idea that is beyond the scope of this doctoral project, but is worth noting here as a future avenue for research.

As daughters mature and move into adulthood, their mothers start to get older, and the mother-daughter dyad becomes a space for meaning making for both women (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999; Henwood, 1997). In their in-depth study of mother’s and daughter’s perceived understandings of the mother-daughter dyad, Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson and Kaufman (2011) used a narrative approach to unpacking and dissecting the adulthood stage of this complex relationship. The researchers found, “that when daughters are young adults and their mothers are middle-aged, the past—the daughter’s childhood and the mother’s earlier child-rearing—is revisited and reassessed by both generations” (ibid, p. 473). Additionally, in the above study, there was evidence to show that the direction of support primarily stemmed from mother to daughter, not from daughter to mother.
Of particular interest to *The Missed Encounter* is the theme of ambivalence in the mother-daughter dyad, a well-researched topic in the social sciences (e.g., Spitze & Gallant, 2004; Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2003). Bojczyk et al., (2011) found that ambivalence is a key feature of this complex relationship, particularly from the daughter’s perspective. The researchers all call for further research into mothers and daughters whose relationships are in crisis, as the aforementioned study focuses solely on positively perceived mother-daughter dyads (ibid). One such example of a mother-daughter dyad under crisis involves the concept of motherless daughters, which will now be described.

Two significant resources for *The Missed Encounter* come from American researcher Hope Edelman: *Motherless Daughters: The legacy of loss* (2014a) and *Letters from motherless daughters: Words of courage, grief, and healing* (2014b). These two books outline the concept of motherless daughters, which is the cultural phenomenon that *The Missed Encounter* investigates. Edelman began her research after the death of her own mother and a lack of resources to help her process and deal with the trauma she had experienced. Her insights have been a valuable addition to both this literature review and the artists’ book *M/other*, whilst also providing comfort in the aftermath of my own mother’s death in November 2014.

Edelman’s (2014a) excavation of the term motherless daughters covers a broad range of life situations, from young girls who lose their mothers to cancer or sudden death, to the ongoing grief that elderly women experience years after their mothers have passed away. Edelman (ibid) observes, motherless daughters talk about empty spaces. They talk about missing pieces. They talk about the void that exists where a family once was, and the gaping hole that sits permanently between their stomach and their ribs. This emptiness turns the unmothered into emotional hoarders (p. 181-182).

The ‘missing pieces’ described above have occupied a visible position in *The Missed Encounter*, referenced in the title of the project itself. A more in-depth discussion of the concept of ‘missing’ is present below (see Chapter O: Methodology) but what Edelman brings to light is the apparent lack that motherless daughters experience after the loss of their mothers, a hole that they try to fill with
other things.

Lovelace and Smith (2002) use examples from adolescent literature to initiate a discussion of the motherless daughter, offering the observation that, “people are uncomfortable discussing grief” (p. 16). Using Edelman’s (2014) research as a support, the researchers highlight that, “the motherless daughter is also coping with rejection. ‘My mother left me’. The argument is not rational, but the feeling of rejection is real” (Lovelace & Smith, 2002, p. 20).

However, not all emotions felt by motherless daughters are negative. Pill and Zabin’s (1997) and Schultz’s (2007) research both suggest a number of positive experiences by daughters following mother loss, such as independence and a greater sense of courage and empathy. Similarly, Rowe and Harman (2014) also highlight the connection between mother loss and posttraumatic growth, offering, “bereavement can serve as a catalyst for the development of positive personal change” (p. 4) specifically in the previously outlined five domains of PTG: recognition of new opportunities, a change in personal relationships, greater perception of personal strength, improved appreciation for life, and spiritual growth (see Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001). As Edelman (2014a) offers, “many daughters who lose a mother to sudden death say the experience guided them into a new state of awareness. Having learned that life can end at any moment they become determined to appreciate each moment for its beauty” (p. 87). If a daughter loses her mother, the grief process may make her question fundamental beliefs about life and the world that she holds, and this can lead to searching for ways to live a better life.

There are many avenues a daughter can explore to reconcile her new motherless life situation. Ruddy (2008) turned to literature to unpack her complicated relationship with her now deceased mother. Discussing books such as Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, Ruddy (ibid) offers, “I find my mother ever-present in my writing because she is the dominant leitmotif of my life, and I have no tricks of fiction with which to look at myself without seeing her shadow” (p. 41). Douglass (1999) touches on a similar idea when she writes, “motherloss, no matter what age we are, will always echo a cry from deep within of ‘the continual presence of an absence’” (p. 314). These writers indicate a lifelong connection that exists between mothers and daughters that may not be solely bound by the death of the mother. The daughter continues on with her life carrying the memories and genetics of her late mother, and even if the mother is still alive, this process can occur. I
experienced motherloss twice: once, as an adolescent, when I left my mother to live with my father; and secondly, after her death in November 2014. In both cases, “I come face to face with what I fear / Frightened for the loss of my self” (Miller-Day, 2004, p. 228).

This quote represents a type of mirroring that can occur between mothers and daughters, where the two women identify strongly with each other (Chodorow, 1978). As mentioned above, mothers and daughters often feel as though they have the same bodies and such mirroring can amplify this. When the mother dies, the daughter may feel as if she has lost part of herself in the process, and concurrently discover parts of her she didn’t realize she possessed. As Edelman (2014a) notes, “loss doesn’t give a daughter brand-new skills she didn’t possess. Instead, it acts as a trigger event that inspires a latent talent to emerge, or it provokes the spirit and will she needs to push her abilities beyond safe and predictable limits” (p. 273). This is important because it emphasizes the power of trauma to bring forth growth and resilience in individuals, specifically in motherless daughters. This subculture of women is part of a large body of literature known most commonly as bereavement research (Stroebe, Hansson, Schut & Stroebe, 2008; Parkes, 2001; Stroebe, 1993; my emphasis).

Kübler-Ross (1969) introduced the now famous five stages of grief in her book On Death and Dying that are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In Kübler-Ross’s model, the grieving process is completed once all five stages have been achieved. Edelman (2012) points out that, “bereavement experts now recognise mourning as a fluid, cyclical and lifelong process” (p. 4), and that while individuals may go through the aforementioned stages of grief, these same emotions may appear later on in life at seemingly unexpected moments. In the literature, this is, “called a STUG reaction, an acronym for Subsequent, Temporary Upsurge of Grief” (ibid, p. 5). As Rowe and Harman (2014) add, “these brief periods of renewed grief are typically triggered by precipitants such as previously shared experiences, anniversaries, developmental milestones and family occasions” (p. 4). What this highlights is that the grief process is not linear – it continues throughout an individual’s lifetime in varying degrees. It is beyond the scope of this research to delve deeper into theories of grief, but noting the presence of grief within my research acknowledges its influence and the potential for future research. However, central to the concept of motherless daughters is the idea of mothering.
Bromley (2012) reconceptualises mothering in her narrative account of caring for her own mother who battled Alzheimer’s disease: “mothering is about the all-consuming emotional and empathic work of caring for and nurturing others” (p. 207). Such a definition moves the concept of mothering out of its more traditional place in the family unit as lead by women, and can include any acts of care for others. Mothering, in the context of motherless daughters, takes on different significance, as Edelman (2014a) explains: “I wonder if all the years spent alone, hoping a mother substitute would magically appear on her own, have made me too self-reliant and self-protective to ever accept one. I wonder if for me it’s just too late” (p. 195). The motherless daughter has to search elsewhere to be mothered or, as is the case with Edelman, learn to mother herself. There is a range of repercussions to mothering oneself that are beyond the aims of this research, but mothering is mentioned here to bring awareness to the notion that care plays a big role in the mother-daughter dyad.

The motherless daughter has to face the reality of contending with new life circumstances in the aftermath of her mother’s death. Douglass (1999), however, reminds us that, “inherent in the daughter-mother relationship is the inevitable and inescapable reality that death will occur, most likely with the mother’s death first” (p. 309). This is true for any intergenerational relationship and may not be a conscious thought in daily life. As Edelman (2014a) notes, “no matter how old we are, we yearn for a mother’s love throughout our lives, reaching for the security and comfort we believe only she can provide at times of illness, transition and stress” (p. 33). Carrying an awareness of the temporality of the mother-daughter bond into The Missed Encounter, I now end this journey into the relevant literature as a motherless daughter, as not just a researcher, but as a part of the literature I have been reading; a difficult situation but one that places me in an advantageous position to analyze and synthesise the existing research.

Bromley (2012) so aptly says, “Only I am my mother’s daughter. This bond for me is unbreakable and at times unbearable” (p. 210). This is a type of ambivalence noted briefly above that has been infused in M/other, the artist’s book of The Missed Encounter. To conclude, Douglass (1999) describes the motherless daughter beautifully by saying, “my personal mother has died, yet my inner mother provides the archetypal sustenance of an eternal embrace. This is the promise of the Motherline” (p. 313).
E.7 Summary

*The Missed Encounter* is a unique study, its significant contribution to knowledge being an understanding the relationship between mother and daughter through the lens of creativity in order to determine what it was that may have contributed to flourishing in adolescence and beyond.

This literature review has traced the research journey through a number of different but related fields and literature. Drawing predominantly on literature from psychology and the social sciences, this chapter creates a space where the focus is on positive well-being and thriving in the face of adversity and trauma. Beginning with resilience, the ability to bounce-back after adversity, through to eudaimonia, a positive psychology term equated with human flourishing, the place in which *The Missed Encounter* occupies in academic research is that of a boundary-crosser. The mother-daughter relationship is the site where I experienced childhood trauma, and is a dyad defined by transitions. Contextual and environmental factors can affect the impact of trauma on a child and understanding trauma is the gateway to understanding what happens afterwards for an individual’s life course.

Eudaimonia, the key concept in this review, presents an exciting opportunity for significant research. What separates eudaimonia from other psychological terms is its basis in positive psychology; it is a move towards using more positive language when it comes to adolescent well-being. As has been revealed, eudaimonia is in essence the study of thriving, human flourishing, and what makes a ‘good life’. Subjective well-being and flow theory are part of the overall theoretical framework for eudaimonia, but also need to be considered in relationship to individual contexts to be effective models. Eudaimonia offers some intriguing and very relevant ideas to help nurture individual well-being.

As the product of the research and as the research itself, the artist’s book *M/other* is imbued with elements of the literature outlined above. As a motherless daughter, the story within *M/other* will be a resource for other women going through similar situations. As an educational tool, the literature on the mother-daughter dyad provides a sketch for *M/other* of the complexities that exist within this relationship. Edelman’s (2014) research has been vital to *The Missed Encounter* and sheds light on an underrepresented identity.
Concluding the chapter with an outline of posttraumatic growth (PTG) lays the foundations for the theoretical frameworks (Chapter O: Methodology) to come. PTG posits that it’s possible to experience positive growth after a traumatic encounter and the literature defines five key areas where this takes place. The literature on PTG has guided the research process and precipitated the research findings (see Chapter U: Renderings). The overall direction of this literature review has been geared towards the positive nature of growth despite often unfavourable conditions. Layered behind this are the theoretical frameworks, grounded in the practical activities of the creative process.
theoretical frameworks
The main aim of *The Missed Encounter* is to explore and artfully represent a journey of self-reported posttraumatic growth [PTG] in and through creative arts pedagogies in the context of the mother/daughter dyad. To do this, three research questions were designed to guide the research journey, and they are:

1) What is posttraumatic growth in the context of the child of an alcoholic mother?

2) What is the relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?

3) What are the ramifications of utilising creative arts pedagogies, with respect to posttraumatic growth, for educational practice?

This chapter, *Theoretical Frameworks*, unpacks the essential concepts of the research beginning with the ontological and epistemological perspectives (I.1). A eudaimonic ontology (I.1.1) and an autoethnographic epistemology (I.1.2), grounded in my identity as an artist, view knowledge production as a positively geared creative endeavour. Supporting this is Glăveanu’s (2010) argument regarding creativity as a relational process (I.3), a way of understanding the conditions for the personal diary (I.4) as a mode of knowledge production through the process of deliberate rumination (I.5). Supporting these concepts is Maslow’s (1943) process of self-actualization (I.6), as a lens through which to view the growth process within the context of personal development.

To begin, I will outline the ontological and epistemological perspectives that underlie the research in *The Missed Encounter*.

I.1 Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives

In research, ontology and epistemology not only prescribe a particular approach to the human condition, but they also offer a number of concepts to address the research problem. In the case of *The Missed Encounter* it is the relationship of posttraumatic growth (PTG) to creative arts pedagogies in the context of the mother-daughter dyad, and what PTG may look and feel like.
The ontological and epistemological concerns in *The Missed Encounter* stem from a holistic well-being approach to research grounded in my identity as an artist. In explaining the use of eudaemonist ontology and an epistemology largely influenced by my research methodology autoethnography, the upcoming sections aim to demonstrate how a positively geared approach to research, both in theory and practice, has advanced the overall aims and direction of the project and respective creative work. Creativity is infused in every aspect of *The Missed Encounter* and combined with a well-being approach, reinforces the idea that it may be possible to experience positive growth after trauma through an engagement with the creative process.

I.1.1 *Eudaimonic Ontology*

Uschold & Gruninger (1996) write, “an ontology necessarily entails or embodies some sort of world view with respect to a given domain” (p. 5). The worldview driving *The Missed Encounter* is one that holds the optimistic belief that human beings are wired for growth, that transformation is an important and vital part of human development (Fosha & Schneider, 2008). For the purpose of this study and for my lived experience of the phenomena, my ontological position is one of optimism. My epistemological perspective acknowledges that an engagement with the creative process is seen as one of the most powerful vehicles for transformation and as Springgay (2002) notes, “creating art is the rewriting of what is private and what is public, the reversal and displacement of these realms and their opposition in order to actively assert, displace and assemble new ways of knowing and being” (p. 8). In line with this perspective is the concept of eudaimonia, which is an Aristotelian term meaning ‘human flourishing’ (Huta, 2013). In eudaimonist ontology, through engaging in activities that promote meaning making, it may be possible for individuals to flourish and reach their potential. The Arts promote meaning making as they,

offfer both tools for inquiry as well as expression, they offer both depth through linking cognition, affect and somatic ways of knowing, and breadth through multi-modal forms for sharing and engaging with diversity of viewpoints, experience, ideas and visions (Wright & Pascoe, 2015, p. 296).
Connecting eudaimonia and the Arts together from a perspective that places growth and transformation at its core, posits an holistic view of well-being that is not exclusive; in *The Missed Encounter*, well-being is the sum total of a whole life. Eudaimonia is a philosophy that contains a manifesto for ‘being’, as “the first and most basic point about eudaimonia is that it is an inextricably ethical concept because it is about living the *best* kind of life” (Fowers, 2012a, p. 6; emphasis in original). The best kind of life, for Fowers (citing Aristotle), is found in human action: “the core of Aristotle’s conception of the human good is that it is found in activity rather than in possessions or subjective experience” (p. 11). Activity refers to the kinds of tasks and acts performed in the social world, as “eudaimonia is conceptualized as a subjective, cognitive-affective condition, a feeling that accompanies right desire, that is, activities consistent with one’s best potentials” (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013, p. 104). In the context of posttraumatic growth, this would include activities that promote growth after trauma.

What eudaimonia advocates for, is a holistic view of lived experience, as “eudaimonia is comprised by a complete life, meaning that eudaimonia is a matter of how one’s life comes together as a whole rather than being comprised of a series of transitory states such as emotions, moods, or experiences” (Fowers, 2012a, p. 6). The eudaimonic view of life is individualized; what works for one person may not work for another, which is why research into individual lived experience is so important. To get to the heart of what it means to experience eudaimonia, the activities and their effects must be examined, for “the breadth of the human good means that individuals shape their lives emphasizing the goods that best match their preferences, abilities, and context. Therefore, there is no single prescriptive shape for a eudaimonic life” (Fowers, 2012b, p. 21). This is also true of posttraumatic growth, as individuals experience growth in different ways and from different activities (see *Chapter E: Literature Review*). *The Missed Encounter* artist’s book *M/other* shows activities such as expressive writing and art-making as active contributors to the well-being of the artist/author post-trauma. These activities created opportunities for me to connect with others, express my altered beliefs and negotiate my changing life situation.

Understanding eudaimonia as a lived experience or condition begins with acknowledging the role that human virtue plays in everyday life, and “virtues are, simply, human excellences or character strengths that make it possible for individuals to pursue characteristically human goods
(e.g. social connections, knowledge) that allow them to flourish as human beings” (Fowers, 2012a, p. 6). Central to eudaimonic well-being is the search for meaning in life (Hallam, Olsson, O’Connor, Hawkins, Toumbourou, Bowes, McGee & Sanson, 2013). Meaning can be acquired through the use of ‘good’ human virtues and “an important function of meaning systems is that they can integrate adversity into narratives of personal growth” (Bauer et al., 2008, in Hallam et al., 2013, p. 3). This is an example of similar paradoxes that exist within the literature on posttraumatic growth (see Chapter E: Literature Review), and what a eudaimonic perspective affords is the coexistence of both adversity and growth in the process of meaning making. It is this holistic view of well-being that has driven the research in *The Missed Encounter*.

Haybron (2008) offers, “eudaimonistic theories share a teleological structure, grounding well-being in ideals of nature-fulfillment: we flourish by fulfilling our natures. The claim is that certain goals are somehow implicit in, or indicated by, an individual’s constitution” (p. 22). In this way, eudaimonia promotes the development of a personal ontology whereby meaning is placed at the centre: “ontological development is commonly forged around existential questions such as ‘who do I want to be’ and ‘how do I want to act’ which are highly salient across the periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood” (Hallam et al. 2013, p. 3). In *The Missed Encounter*, a personal ontology has placed meaning and purpose as the core values underpinning every research and creative activity undertaken. This personal ontology has influenced the epistemological concerns of the research, which is influenced by an autoethnomic approach. I will now outline how this informs my research.

I.1.2 Autoethnographic Epistemology

The term ‘worldview’ applies in *The Missed Encounter* to refer to the epistemological perspective behind the research. Creswell (2013) defines worldview as, “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study” (p. 6). Informing this worldview is an autoethnographic epistemology that, “is based on the assumption that knowledge is not something that is objectively discovered lurking in the mind or in matter, but is a uniquely human process that results from interactions and dialogue that leads to new understandings”
Sprague and Kobrynowicz (2006) offer, “every epistemology, Genova (1983) says, involves assumptions about the points of a triad: the knower, the known, and the process of knowing” (p. 25). In doctoral research, the researcher, the literature/knowledge and the research journey represent this triad. In The Missed Encounter, this triad is one marked by soft boundaries (Detels, 1999, cited in Bresler, 2006); the edges of each point in the triad are malleable and flexible, constantly shifting in response to the interactions between their parts. My role as the researcher and the researched (Finley & Knowles, 1995) shapes this project and differentiates it from the more scientific hypothesis/testing style of research that exists in the social sciences. This is the task of autoethnography, the primary methodological framework guiding The Missed Encounter.

Autoethnography, as defined by Ellis (2004), is, “research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social” (p. xix). I present autoethnography in much greater detail in Chapter O: Methodology, but it is this focus on the self-connecting to culture that epistemologically fuels The Missed Encounter. Spry (2001) emphasizes this, as “in autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (p. 711). As an artist and writer, my creative life is the foundation upon which the research has been built. This creative life includes the childhood experience of trauma that shaped my world and the ramifications of this on my adult life. I identify with Leggo (2006) when he states, “postmodernism reminds me that everything is constructed in language; our experiences are all epistemologically and ontologically composed and understood in words, our words and others’ words, discursively promulgating words” (p. 73). It is a belief of The Missed Encounter that it is in language where humans learn to articulate the world, visuals are used as a way to represent identity to the world. The relationship of these two modes of knowledge building is blended in The Missed Encounter in autoethnography through a/r/tography (see Chapter O: Methodology).

Autoethnography, as Staller (2013) identifies, “starts from a subjectivist epistemological base” (p. 410) and moves outwards into a more social constructionist realm as it connects personal experience to cultural conditions (Spry, 2001). Subjectivism influences autoethnographic research as it places importance on the ways in which people legitimate their place in the world (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Butz and Besio (2004) state, “autoethnography imagines a more proactive and self-
confident—but no more autonomous—subjectivity” (p. 354-355), one that argues for the centrality of personal experience in both life and research. In *The Missed Encounter*, this is epistemologically enacted through the personal diary and its role as a vehicle for my connection to the world through writing. Mingé (2016) articulates, “mindful autoethnographic epistemology is in the doing, in the writing, in the detailed and localized exploration of the complexity of relationships and communities” (p. 441).

In autoethnography, “values and emotions are important” (Staller, 2013, p. 410), and they are drawn from the researcher’s own life and experiences in order to investigate and connect to a larger culture phenomenon. Ellis (1999) explains, “honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts—and emotional pain. Just when you think you can’t stand the pain anymore, well that’s when the real work has only begun” (p. 672). *The Missed Encounter* research journey has challenged me both ontologically and epistemologically through the emotional intensity of its content, but it is this emotionality that has allowed for a deeper and more authentic investigation to take place. As Spry (2001) writes, “the autoethnographic text emerges from the researcher’s bodily standpoint as she is continually recognizing and interpreting the residue traces of culture inscribed upon her hide from interacting with others in contexts” (Spry, 2001, p. 711). It is from this position that the epistemological roots of *The Missed Encounter* can be traced, including elements of a feminist epistemology that have, “tried to reintegrate values and emotions into our account of our cognitive activities, arguing for both the inevitability of their presence and the importance of the contributions they are capable of making to our knowledge” (Narayan, 2004, p. 214).

The research stems from a broad Humanist/Feminist perspective that focuses on eudaimonist philosophies, involving a positive view on personal development. Sprague and Kobrynowicz (2006) observe that, “traditional research carves a sharp distinction between investigator and investigated and creates a hierarchical relationship between the two [...] Feminist approaches have tended to replace models of control and domination with those of connection and nurturing” (p. 32).

This approach to research, of connection and nurturing, filters through every aspect of *The Missed Encounter*, especially in terms of ethical responsibility. It is, by no means, the only type of Feminist approach but it is most appropriate to this research, particularly in relation to the context of the mother-daughter dyad, which involves adopting a relational paradigm, which is where Bickel, Springgay, Beer, Irwin, Grauer and Xiong (2011) see a/r/tography positioned as a practice. I identify
with the a/r/tographic mission and use it to support the autoethnographic methodology I have chosen to use (see Chapter O: Methodology).

Carter, Beare, Belliveau and Irwin (2011) note, “a/r/tography is distinct with its commitment to relationality as a condition for its enactment, and its commitment to renderings as conceptual frames for its processes and representations” (p. 19). My identities of artist/researcher/teacher within the a/r/tographical framework are intertwined to reinforce and expand – as opposed to define – my ontological and epistemological position in regards to research. I am in a process of becoming (Irwin, 2013), of continually reflecting on and reinventing my position.

Carter et al. (2011) suggest that,

if one visualizes a series of strong roots connecting the artist’s work to that of the writer, teacher and researcher the spaces in between these seemingly separate identities disappear. Instead each identity is strengthened by another allowing for new directions/approaches/ideas to emerge—unrealizable when one chooses to ‘plant’ themselves in a particular epistemology/subject/way of thinking or being (p. 18-19).

In this sense, I practice an emancipatory epistemology (De Lissovoy, 2015), a perspective that celebrates knowledge building in the in-between spaces (of artist/researcher/teacher) by marginalised forms of data (the personal diary) from the researcher’s personal experience (autoethnography).

I.2 Creativity as a relational process

The literature on creativity is broad. For the purposes of this research I identify with the work of Glăveanu (2010) who writes, “creativity is not the product of a ‘disconnection’, but of deeply rooted ‘connections’ between person and environment, self and others, creator and culture” (p. 147). Here, creativity is a relational process – when people create, they do so in conversation with their cultural environment, history and interpersonal relationships. Glăveanu (2014a) argues for a socio-cultural model of creativity that “considers identities to be relational structures emerging out of a work of representation performed by the self and multiple others” (p. 15). This moves the conversation away
from the historical image of a ‘solitary creative genius’ and towards an interconnected network of creative elements engaged in the creative process (Glăveanu, 2013). As Adams (2012a) articulates, “a relational perspective treats disappointment and conflict as products of joint interaction, of people being, working, and relating – together” (p. 193). This same principle applies to the study of creativity.

Traditionally, “the paradigmatic model for studying creativity has, by and large, revolved around the creative person and, ‘within’ the person, a strong emphasis placed on cognition and individual attributes” (Glăveanu, 2014a, p. 12). However what this paradigm misses are the complex cultural and social influences that both guide and hinder the production of creative work. My identity as a creative artist is “developed within self–other relations through action and communication” (ibid, p. 15); creativity is not an isolated activity, but rather, as Winnicott offers, “a continuous way of living” (cited in Glăveanu, 2009, p. 7; emphasis in original). It is woven into and through my research and underpins the ontological and epistemological concerns of this PhD project. Glăveanu (ibid) expounds a cultural psychology of creativity that “is focused on the ways in which creativity takes place within a representational or potential space and uses cultural artifacts in a constant process of expressing the self and the relation between self and other” (p. 7). In The Missed Encounter, I am interested in the spaces between daughter and mother, self and other, here and not here, presence and absence. These in-between spaces where creative exchange occurs can be explored through Glăveanu’s (2013) Five A’s framework of creativity, which has informed my research and parallels the five tenets of posttraumatic growth articulated by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004).

Glăveanu (ibid) alters the language of Rhodes’ four P’s model of creativity – person, process, product, and press – to create a five A’s framework of creativity: “actor, action, artifact, audience, and affordances” (p. 70). This model is an epistemological shift in the conception of creativity and offers an alternative way to investigate the creative process. Each of the five A’s are subject to their relationship with the socio-cultural environment and exist only in relation to one another.

According to Glăveanu (ibid), the word creativity comes “from the Indo-European root ker or kere (to grow) via the Latin creatio or creates (to make grow)” (p. 69). Taking into consideration Glăveanu’s (2012) point that “contemporary (Western or Westernised) societies are based on a glorification of ‘big C’ creativity, great creations and extraordinary creators” (p. 35), the day-to-
day interactions with creativity may go unnoticed or unrecognized. Through my research into the personal diary I agree with Glăveanu (ibid) that “ordinary’ creativity can lead to innovation and innovations themselves grow out of a habitual and improvisational basis” (p. 35). This is also reminiscent of my methodology that has grown from emergent practices and an intuitive, creative way of working with data and ideas (see Chapter O: Methodology).

The above five A’s framework has parallels to the five life areas affected by posttraumatic growth (see table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five A’s Framework element</th>
<th>Posttraumatic Growth life area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Spiritual change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Personal strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Deeper appreciation of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Relating to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordances</td>
<td>New Possibilities</td>
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I am not suggesting that each of the five points is exactly the same as the other, but rather that there are synergistic connections between them. For example, when an actor (artist) realises their own inherent ‘personal strength’ they may be inclined to create. Or similarly, if an audience experiences an improvement or deepening of their relationships to those around them, their experience of the artifact may become more significant. I have made these connections from my own lived experience of creating, viewing and participating in creative acts and processes. It is beyond the scope of my project to explore this more deeply, but I note it here to support the idea that creativity has the potential to nurture growth. It was in my early formal schooling where I was also introduced to Visual Arts pedagogy and the creative process, both of which became crucial activities in my personal development.

I had a similar experience with expressive writing. As an adolescent, writing daily in a personal diary became part of my creative process and formed the basis for my Higher School Certificate (Rothschild, 2000) Visual Arts body of work. Diarising, as a daily practice, is a key
process within *The Missed Encounter* as it has facilitated the creative research and will now be unpacked as a theoretical framework below.

I.3 The Personal Diary

*It [the personal diary] was the sign of my failures, in life and in writing, and it was my only hope (Lejeune, 2009, p. 150).*

Different to an autobiographical text, the personal diary has been dismissed previously as an area of critical study and is situated on uncertain foundations with scholars (Paperno, 2004). Much of the critical debate pertaining to the personal diary as a literary genre has occurred in France through the work of Philippe Lejeune (Lejeune & Eakin, 1989; Lejeune, 2009). This is problematic for my research, as not many of his influential texts have been translated into English. In North America, James Pennebaker is a leading scholar on the benefits of expressive writing and journaling and his research informs *The Missed Encounter* in a number of ways that will now be outlined.

There has been much discussion of other types of journals, such as the learning journal (see Moon, 1999a, 1999b) or Intensive Journal (Progoff, 1977), yet the personal diary has not received much critical attention as a genre in its own right. This is where the work of Lejeune (2009) has been significant as he has much to offer regarding the function and theoretical constructs of the personal diary. As an avid diarist himself, he is an advocate for a critical exploration into the diary-diarist relationship. Lejeune (2009) sees diary keeping as “a way of living before it is a way of writing [...] a *to-and-fro* movement, an *occupation*” (p. 153-154; emphasis in original). This raises interesting questions about the nature of the writing process and the purpose of diary keeping for an individual. If the personal diary is in fact a behaviour or way of life, what does it provide for the individual authoring it? What kind of behaviour does the personal diary elicit? If the personal diary is secondarily a text or book, what kind of text or book is it? These questions will be explored through the work of Lejeune and others in order to link this practice to a key methodological aspect of this project, namely my personal experience of keeping a diary as a teenager to the present day. To do this, I will offer a basic definition of what a personal diary is and discuss its potential functions and relationship to individual well-being.
A personal diary typically involves a notebook of some sort, or loose-leaf paper, or exists in
digital form, where each entry is dated and sequential (Hiemstra, 2001). The contents of a personal
diary may vary, from the more mundane details of everyday life to evocative descriptions or poetic
language. Baldwin (1977) highlights how the terms diary and journal are often used interchangeably,
yet there are considerable differences between the two: a “diary connotes a more formal pattern of
daily activities, experiences and observations [whereas] journal is looser in definition, may allow for
more creative expansion of the entries, and doesn’t imply an obligation to write every day” (p. 3-4,
emphasis in original). For the purpose of this project, the definition of a personal diary as outlined
by Lejeune (2009) will be followed – the diary has been described as a way to:

1) Build a memory out of paper;
2) Create archives from lived experience;
3) Accumulate traces;
4) Prevent forgetting;
5) Give life the consistency and continuity it lacks (p. 195).

The style and purpose of a personal diary will vary from individual to individual, and the diary-diarist
relationship will change over time in response to the needs of the author. In this sense, the
diary is as Hogan (1991) defines it: the ‘genre of the detail’, as it promotes the ornamental and the
everyday as its allies. Hogan (ibid) goes one step further and states that the diary should be studied
as a form, not a genre, because “in practice each diary will probably mix two or more genres” (p. 97).
It may be useful to consider the diary as a form that lies on the outskirts of literature, as a subversive
form of writing, closer to the realm of the everyday; or through a different theoretical lens, such as
Feminism (Done & Knowler, 2011). Feminist research is complex and multifaceted and although I
am aware of what it can offer my research, it is not the driving force or the most appropriate lens
for my project. However some tenets of Feminist research are worth exploring here.

A feminist epistemology proposes that, “knowledge is seen as gained not by solitary individuals
but by socially constituted members of groups that emerge and change throughout history” (ibid,
p. 218). In this case, knowledge is the outcome of human activity (Sprague & Kobrynowicz, 2006),
which can be seen to align with a eudaimonic perspective, as knowledge is a key virtue towards the experience of eudaimonia. This perspective, “stresses [...] the need for a positive ethics, [...] an ethics based on the necessity of meeting the challenges of contemporary transformations with creativity and courage” (Braidotti, 2007, p. 72). This epistemological perspective suggests an approach to knowledge and learning that is positive and optimistic, one that places lived experience at the heart of its lens.

Feminist approaches question the nature of valid data for research, as some researchers have chosen to study alternative forms of data, such as poetry, music lyrics, quilts, everyday conversations and domestic activities (e.g. Aptheker, 1989; Collins, 1990; DeVault, 1991). This sets a precedent for my project as my personal diaries do exist outside of the more formal channels of research data. They contain photographs and drawings, as well as writing, and are a pastiche of cultural influences. As a snapshot of my experience they also record a particular time in history, as they document fashion trends, music and a particular type of everyday language.

There has been a tendency to label the diary as a feminised form because, “the privileging of the detail in the diary form gives it a structure and perspective which have been culturally and historically seen as feminine” (Hogan, 1991, p. 99). This labelling can be useful to disrupt the reception of the diary as a form bound to the literary canon. The style of writing – fragmentary, continuous, open-ended – and the nature of the content – repetitive, idiosyncratic, unstructured – all point towards a kind of ‘anti-writing’ that leans more towards artistic genres than literary texts. This is also because the personal diary is inherently reflective. It is this reflective quality that has drawn educators to use the diary as a tool for learning.

Moon (1999b) offers three main types of learning journals that typically exist, namely: unstructured (free writing and reflection initiated by the individual); structured (using constraints imposed by the writer or journal itself for the purpose of a project or exercise); and dialogue journals (created to foster exchange between a number of writers). The personal diary can belong to any or all of these categories depending on what function an individual needs the diary to perform.

Boud (2001) views the personal diary “through the lens of learning” (p. 9) as a form of reflective practice. He acknowledges that journal writing can be viewed from a number of perspectives, all of which bring to light different outcomes for individual development and well-
being. Boud (ibid) believes that journal writing is intimately tied to learning, regardless of the content being written about (p. 10). Boud and Walker (1990) note that, “most learning takes place outside of organised educational settings. Such experience is typically haphazard and unplanned, and difficult or impossible for the learner and those facilitating learning to control” (p. 61). This is where the personal diary can be utilised for an individual to make sense of their environment and regain some control over experiences by putting them into words.

The personal diary supports reflective practice, and it is in the work of Donald Schön’s (1983) influential text, *The Reflective Practitioner*, where this concept was first explored. Schön coined two phrases that when put together provide a picture of the reflective practitioner: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (ibid). The first “acknowledges the tacit processes of thinking which accompany doing, and which constantly interact with and modify ongoing practice in such a way that learning takes place” (Leitch & Day, 2000, p. 180), whereas reflection-on-action involves retrospective analysis and close attention paid to events and actions of the author. Larrivee (2000) warns, “the process of becoming a reflective practitioner cannot be prescribed. It is a personal awareness discovery process” (p. 296). There are some activities that can be performed to initiate the process of reflection, such as “making time for solitary reflection, becoming a perpetual problem-solver and questioning the status quo” (Larrivee, 1999, cited in Larrivee, 2000).

The personal diary provides a context in which reflection, problem solving and questioning can occur, particularly as these activities relate to the self/other. During the course of my research I engaged in daily diary writing about my creative practice and the work of other academics. This helped me to process the information I was gathering and to develop my own reflective practice, which involved asking myself questions such as ‘so what?’ and ‘why’ when it came to constructing the narrative for the artist’s book *M/other*. The personal diary also had an effect on my formal schooling as an adolescent, which I discovered in my diaries through the process of rereading them (see Chapter O: Methodology).

In terms of formalised education, Connor-Greene (2000) uses the term ‘journal’ to refer to any “written connections that a student makes between course content and material outside of class” (p. 44). This is an interesting definition that isn’t in line with the definitions described above, but the intent is similar: to improve the learning abilities of students. The results of Connor-
Greene’s (ibid) empirical study of using journal writing as an assignment for her students, found that this particular style of recording enhanced student learning and this was evident in their test scores. Connor-Greene provides an example of holistic learning where students were asked to make connections between their own personal lives and the content they were studying at school. The major difference here is that the personal diary as it pertains to my research is typically written with no particular audience in mind, or rather, not for the eyes of a teacher or parent, particularly in adolescence. In the above example, the nature of the content is very different and governed by different constraints (course content and a more liberal privacy policy), yet Connor-Greene provides an interesting and challenging way of integrating the personal journal into curriculum.

Similarly, Moon (1999a) offers a number of educational purposes for writing in a journal, including: increased personal ownership for learning; enhanced creativity through intuitive understanding; development of a personal ‘voice’; an increased understanding of an individual’s learning process; and an improvement in critical thinking. What is missing from Moon’s list is an acknowledgment of the importance of context when it comes to keeping a diary. Boud (2001) warns, “the conditions under which journal writing takes place can have a powerful influence on what is produced and the extent to which writers can engage in critical reflection” (p. 17). For example, the conditions for an adolescent would be very different to that of a middle-aged person. Every journal writer has to negotiate a different set of challenges and routines when it comes to penning an entry, yet what they all have in common is that the diary does not claim to have grand literary ambitions, as Lejeune (2009) articulates, “it does not purport to take in all of existence, to resuscitate the past, or read a person’s fate. For brief periods, it sculpts life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time” (p. 173).

Aside from the learning benefits outlined above, Hiemstra (2001) also offers that being able ‘to review or reread earlier reflections’ can provide a ‘progressive clarification of insights’. The accumulation of entries also provides an individual with the opportunity for self-discovery. This process is tied to self-expression, which through the act of writing in a journal encourages an individual to develop trust in the ‘self’.

As Lejeune (2009) comments, “the diary is both a retreat and a source of energy in each person’s dialectical relationship with the world, which he uses to construct and sustain himself
as an individual” (p. 164). In this sense, journal writing acts as a type of self-directed learning that has the potential to feed into other areas of an individual’s life, including – especially for adolescents – schoolwork and academic pursuits. What journal writing facilitates in this instance is “thinking aloud on paper” (see Brown & Sorrell, 1993; Ibarreta & McLeod, 2004), which creates a situation where an individual can come to terms with ideas or events that affect their lives. This was definitely the case in my research as I found that my journal writing directly affected my relationship to writing formally in my schooling. I often used my journal as way to process and unpack information I had gathered in class.

Although the above researchers use journal writing as a tool for practical study, the same applies for the personal diary: it is a space enacted by the individual to process and reflect upon the issues they experience on a daily basis. Sosin (1982) points out that, “the act of writing, however, is not merely an intellectual activity; there is an emotional component and developmental function to the diary-diarist relationship” (p. 92). The formation of a personal journey can be seen in writing as a very powerful and motivating force, particularly in relationship to time. Sherman (1996) traces the origins of the personal diary back to the mid-seventeenth century and links it to the invention of clocks and pocket watches; the diary performs temporal notation that both counts time and narrates it. Time is made tangible through language, a strategy that not only has educational potential but also a therapeutic component.

Janesick (1998) suggests that students aren’t the only writers of journals, as “Behaviorists, Cognitivists and Jungian Analysts have used journals in the process of therapy. The journal is seen as a natural outgrowth of the clinical situation in which the client speaks to the self” (p. 7). The diary creates a space where Rainer (1978) believes the individual can be both the patient and the therapist, writing about their fears but also gaining some objective distance from their life through the writing process. Rainer’s seminal text The New Diary (1978) touches on a number of pertinent issues pertaining to journal and diary writing, one of which is the use of the diary as catharsis: “cathartic writing is done under the pressure of intense emotion that calls for immediate expression” (p. 53, emphasis in original). Rainer notes that the end product of cathartic writing might not be pleasing, yet it is the process of this style of writing which can benefit the author. By placing worries and issues on the pages of a diary, the author can gain critical distance and begin to understand
them as separate to their own subjectivity. This distancing can foster enough objectivity to initiate therapeutic recovery for the individual (see Kerner & Fitzpatrick, 2007; Pennebaker, 2004; Wright & Chung, 2001).

I found that my diaries were a form of catharsis, especially during my PhD research when my mother passed away:

Catharsis refers to the experience of relief resulting from the expression of strong emotions that may be experienced after, for example, crying, swearing, or aggressive acts [...] thus by definition implies self-soothing, because it brings relief and diminishes tension and/or negative feelings irrespective of the removal of the external source of stress (Gračanin, Bylsma & Vingerhoets, 2014, online).

However, the amount of cathartic writing required will differ for every journal writer depending on the issue and the context. *The Missed Encounter* artist’s book *M/other* facilitated some cathartic release for me during the writing process, and one of the hopes I have for this text is that it offers, through personal connection, some catharsis for the viewer/reader (see Chapter U: Renderings). This hope is concerned with promoting positive individual well-being, a theme that runs through the history of the personal diary as a therapeutic tool in clinical psychology.

Progoff (1977) outlines a type of journal he has called the *Intensive Journal*. This journal is heavily structured with a focus on using it as a psychological tool for individual development. Around the same time, the work of Baldwin (1977) contrasts Progoff’s approach and offers a more creative and reflective alternative to the idea of the journal. Baldwin (1977) believes that, “Progoff’s concept of the journal as a psychological notebook and his tight structure of writing and personal life-appraisal are different in style and method” (p. 173), yet both researchers preach similar goals for individual well-being. Both Progoff and Baldwin acknowledge the importance of a dialogue with the self or an imagined other in the personal diary as a way to reconcile inner-realities with external experiences. Moon (1999b) states that the Intensive Journal was developed from psychotherapy sessions held by Progoff in which he would ask clients questions about their personal writing. This then developed into the structure of the Intensive Journal, a more formalised process of 19 sections.
designed to help structure daily life.

The personal diary provides an organising structure for daily behaviour (Lejeune, 2009, p. 153; emphasis in original) dependent on when an individual chooses to write in their diary, where, for how long and using what instruments (e.g., pen, particular type of paper, in a specific location). This will vary from person to person, yet the activity itself becomes a daily ritual; the commitment of writing down the date and perhaps even numbering the pages fosters routine and ritual – in other words consistency – for the author. This is particularly important during adolescence, a time of intense growth and change. In my own diaristic practice, I wrote late at night before going to sleep and the time was recorded towards the end of each entry, almost as a way to ‘clock-off’, like a worker after a day of work. These time-markings were precise and down to the minute, a permanent reminder that ‘I am here’ and ‘this is now’.

The meaning behind this activity may change from person to person and it is beyond the scope of this project for me to explore this in greater depth here. It is worth noting however that diarizing carries with it an element of duration, of a visceral activity experience in real time that requires focus and concentration to endure. I view it as a daily practice, as one small part of life that supports other aspects of lived experience, and strongly tied to self-soothing activities. Self-soothing involves activities that an individual uses to make themselves feel better and is, “a form of emotion regulation, which includes extrinsic and intrinsic processes involved in monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions” (Gracanin, Bylsma & Vingerhoets, 2014, online). As a type of emotion-focused coping, self-soothing (particularly for adolescents) is geared towards helping the individual develop “a cohesive sense of self” (ibid).

Sosin (1982) believes the personal diary functions as a transitional object for adolescent females, akin to the role of a blanket as a mother-substitute is for a newborn baby. The diary is transitional because it is only used during a specific timeframe to self-soothe, or during the normal separation-individuation process that enables the child to tolerate ambivalence and to differentiate between the ‘me’ and the ‘not me’ (ibid, p. 95). This process is part of the developmental phase of adolescence as the child transitions between childhood and adulthood, distinguishing themselves as separate from others, particularly the family unit. Sosin’s (ibid) study found that “the diary mirrors, soothes, helps inhibit frightening impulses, and helps integrate inner and outer realities” (p. 101).
The ability of the diary to act as a soundboard in this instance is extremely beneficial, particularly for adolescents.

Boniel-Nissim and Barak (2013) name three types of diary writing experienced by adolescents in the contemporary world, namely, “ink-based, standalone computer-based, and Internet-based” (p. 339). There are subtle and more noticeable differences between these three mediums, the most obvious being audience. A blog, for example, can be publicly viewed and shared through social networks across the world. It is also a published work, as opposed to the ink-based diary that is a one-of-a-kind object. However, computer-based diaries have the advantage of including multimedia that can extend and enrich the more traditional ink-based diary. In the digital version of M/other, I have embedded five video vignettes into the narrative to give the reader the opportunity to pause and absorb the experiential nature of grief and loss within the context of the story I have constructed (see Chapter O: Methodology). These videos are portraits of my research, moments of reflection and quiet, designed as real-time experiences of difficult content. Layering these different forms of media together in a bricolage captures the complex and often contradictory nature of our emotional selves. From my diaries I have extrapolated that it is possible to be positive and optimistic as well as grieving and melancholic (see Chapter U: Renderings).

Regardless of the medium, the diary (as a process) is typified by its use of intertextuality that, in this context, refers, “first, to the fact that diary writers borrow, recycle, and echo various culturally recognized modes of speaking; and second, that one of the intertexts of diary writing is the diary as a genre” (Jokinen, 2004, p. 351). This is what makes the personal diary an appropriate means of self-expression – it is a form constructed by multiple genres of the individual’s choosing that is completely adaptable and alterable according to their needs. One of the more recognizable forms that the personal diary can exhibit is the ‘archive’, which as a term, was explored thoroughly by Derrida (1996).

From a psychoanalytical perspective, Derrida’s concept of the ‘archive’ as a site for the construction and destruction of memory (Lapping & Bibby, 2014, p. 2) is fruitful when applied to the personal diary. The events and memories an individual chooses to record are constructed through narrative and recollection, yet this very act also excludes other events and memories deemed of lesser importance. These two opposing forces, construction and destruction, coalesce and
are born of the individual’s cultural and historical background; what is chosen to be conserved is done so at the expense of everything else.

Due to the nature of the content – everyday activities and personal feelings – the diary could be thought of as a methodological archive that preserves the self in flux. It is a self that both constructs and deconstructs itself from written entry to written entry: “every written page holds in suspense, but only for the person who wrote it, an entire ‘reference’ that the person can access solely through that writing but that is non-existent for any other reader” (Lejeune, 2009, p. 170). This is why the personal diary cannot be considered a text in literary terms because there is a gap that exists between the writing and reading of its contents and, “no outside reader can read it in the same way as the author, even though the very purpose of reading it is to discover its private contents” (ibid, p. 181). The language employed by the writer can be quite repetitive, messy, unstructured and disjointed and for this reason it can be difficult to negotiate for an external reader, which is largely an issue of audience. In most diaries, there is no definitive audience for the writing (other than the author).

Paperno (2004) believes that the diary is an ‘archive of the intimate’ due to its ability to objectify and externalise the inner world of the individual: “in a word, it is a mold waiting to be filled—a generic matrix that gives distinctive shape to the experience it records” (p. 571-572). In a similar way, Lejeune (2009) describes the personal diary as a kind of installation, “that plays on fragmentation and plays on the tangential in an aesthetics of repetition and vertigo that is very different from traditional narrative aesthetics” (p. 203). What Paperno and Lejeune both recognize is the fluidity lack of form in both writing style and aesthetics of the diary – it is difficult for researchers to quantify personal diaries or to perform empirical research when each diary is as distinct as the experience it represents. I believe that the physical form is secondary to the process, as this is where the most benefits can be drawn from for an individual.

In The Missed Encounter, I have analysed my personal diaries as data (see Chapter U: Renderings) because, “the most basic way to gain understanding of our own experiences is to narrate them and to listen to others’ narratives” (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 148). One way that this can be done is through the use of self-narratives. Self-narratives can take the form of recordings, written texts, artworks or any external representation of the narrative. Ricoeur (1991) is a key theorist here and he
defines a text as “any utterance fixed by writing” (p. 135) and emphasises the role that reading plays in the explanation and interpretation of meaning from a written text. Ricoeur (ibid) differentiates writing from speech because, “the writing-reading relation is not just a particular instance of the speaking-answering relation. It is not an instance of dialogue [...] the writer does not answer the reader” (p. 136). The absence/presence duality of writer and reader in a text is certain, as “the reader is absent from the writing of the book, the writer is absent from its reading” (ibid, p. 136). This too is the case for the personal diary, though in many cases the reader isn’t present at all – what does stay constant throughout the process is the narrative. For Ricoeur (1974) narrative is inextricably linked to time, and he supports a “theory of interpretation which lays the stress on ‘opening up a world’” (p. 110).

In the personal diary, what is opened up is an individual’s subjectivity, aspects of lived experience that are specifically contextual and unique. Flaherty and Ellis (1992) define subjectivity as, “human lived experience and the physical, political, and historical context of that experience” (p. 1). In The Missed Encounter, subjectivity is enacted and conceptualised through language. Fırat and Dholakia (2016) argue that, facilitated by language, and simultaneously stimulating language, we inhabit an existence that is at once a gift and a curse: a gift because we can make sense of, analytically understand, and act upon our existence using our conceptual ability; and a curse because making sense of everything then becomes an obsession. (p. 3)

One author who uses an interesting approach in her research is Ronai (1992), who attempts to reconcile the difficult experience of, “extricating a researcher self from other selves while involved in participant observation” (p. 102). Ronai’s (ibid) identity as an exotic dancer is tied to her identity as a researcher because she danced to finance her undergraduate studies and master’s thesis (p. 103). Her observations are located in the act of conversation with herself, with others, and written records of conversations she had witnessed. What makes Ronai’s account of her subjective experience so valuable is the layered approach she takes, each short narrative expounds the difficulty Ronai had in maintaining a number of different selves whilst undertaking her research. It is the intimate knowledge that Ronai (ibid) shares that gives, “the essential elements to readers so that they may read, and vicariously live, an experience through the medium of the text provided by the author” (p.
It is this function of subjectivity that I am interested in, especially in terms of the relationship between the writer and the reader. Following Ronai, I understand the role of the text as an arbitrator for embodied meaning that the reader activates through the act of reading the text.

The personal diary is a process, lens, writing style, installation, archive and functions as a tool of self-expression. Pivotal to this last point is deliberate rumination, which is also found in the literature on posttraumatic growth (PTG) to be a key aspect of positive growth. I will now discuss deliberate rumination and how it is related to the personal diary.

I.4 Deliberate Rumination

Rumination is the cognitive process of repetitive thinking (Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun & Reeve, 2012). Deliberate rumination, then, is focused attention on the meaning of a thought, feeling or event (see Chapter E: Literature Review). As a conscious activity, deliberate rumination allows an individual to turn inwards to work through an issue by analysing and examining the multiple components that make up the larger concern. Known also as reflective pondering (Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003), deliberate rumination has been shown to lead to posttraumatic growth (Stockton, Hunt & Joseph, 2011). It can be a positive coping strategy, particularly if it is applied to thinking about an event (Allbaugh, 2013), as it has been in my experience.

As a theoretical construct, deliberate rumination is a useful concept in The Missed Encounter because it is the cognitive process by which my teenage diaries were predominantly created. The repetitive thinking and writing about the trauma of living with my mother, and subsequent creation of the artist’s book M/other, are an attempt to make meaning out of a painful experience. It is meaning-making that has been shown to have lasting effects on an individual’s well-being (see Stockton et al., 2011; Larner & Blow, 2011) and one path to not just finding meaning but creating it is by keeping a personal diary.

The diary space also offers the opportunity for deliberate rumination through a process of ‘thinking aloud on paper’ (see above). As there is no specific audience or reader for a diary other than the writer herself (see section I.4 above), the focus shifts from the quality of the writing to an intentionally free form of self-expression. Tedeschi and Blevins (2015) offer, “deliberate rumination
is an effortful strategy enacted with the intention of reconceptualizing (i.e., reappraising) highly stressful circumstances in such a way that meaning or growth become potential outcomes” (p. 372). The goal of deliberate rumination is not to dwell in the nature of the event or issue, but to gather all of the information known about it and to evaluate it against an individual’s feelings and thoughts. As Bray (2013) notes, “deliberate rumination allows cognitive changes to occur involving rebuilding a meaningful and coherent view of self and the world that leads to further narrative development” (p. 892). The story than an individual constructs about the event or issue then becomes the vehicle through which stagnation or growth can occur.

The purpose of deliberate rumination is to cognitively work through an issue or event that an individual needs to process. This need or desire to understand is a basic human function, according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943). The basic premise of Maslow’s case is rooted in human need, which can be understood as this: “as a complex organism, human beings express their needs in different ways and levels, which can be divided into five categories: physiological needs, safety needs, love/belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs” (Liu & Han, 2013, p. 231). Of interest to *The Missed Encounter* is the concept that sits atop Maslow’s pyramid, self-actualization, which will now be reviewed.

I.5 Self-actualization

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) is a useful construct to turn to here, particularly his concept of self-actualization. Liu and Han (2013) outline self-actualization as, “the basic need, the ultimate goal and a continual process of growth for human beings, and demonstrates itself in the form of peak experience in psychology” (p. 229). The hierarchy of needs is one way to approach human development where different aspects of lived experience build on one another with the aim of contributing to higher levels of individual well-being. Self-actualization is the achievement of full human potential and it carries similar ideals to that of eudaimonia (see above).

*The Missed Encounter* is conceptualised through a eudaimonic ontology that places human thriving and positive growth at the heart of research. Viewing personal growth as a eudaimonic adventure, Bauer, Park, Montoya and Wayment (2015) discuss a model of personal growth that is,
“about the humanistic development of personhood, focusing on the cultivation of qualities such as wisdom, virtue, love, and non-egoistic meaningfulness” (p. 187). The researchers suggest that by understanding eudaimonia in terms of both “thinking well and feeling good” (ibid, p. 189; emphasis in original), growth can be enacted through meaning and wisdom over time. This idea is similar to self-actualization and both concepts purport a developmental perspective, a feature also prevalent in the personal diary as outlined above.

Maslow’s humanistic perspective on growth reflects the nature of PTG; in PTG it is the individual’s struggle with reconciling their pre-trauma world with the post-trauma situation that instigates growth (see Chapter E: Literature Review). For Maslow (1962),

Growth has not only rewards and pleasures but also many intrinsic pains, and always will have. Each step forward is a step into the unfamiliar and is possibly dangerous. It also means giving up something familiar and good and satisfying. It frequently means a parting and a separation, with consequent nostalgia, loneliness and mourning. It also often means giving up a simpler and easier and less effortful life, in exchange for a more demanding, more difficult life. Growth forward is in spite of these losses and therefore requires courage and strength in the individual, as well as protection, permission and encouragement from the environment, especially for the child (p. 42; emphasis in original).

Self-actualization is a useful theory in The Missed Encounter but it has received criticism (see Poston, 2009; Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976) and, as Rajasakran, Sinnappan and Raja (2014) note, “Maslow later admitted that self-actualization should not be at the top of the hierarchy, but it should be self-transcendence” (p. 201). Frankl (1966) introduced self-transcendence as any activities that contributed to a search for meaning in an individual’s life. Meaning-making is Frankl’s primary focus in terms of personal growth and he, “argued that forgetting about self and seeking challenging tasks to add meaning to one’s existence should be considered as the highest human needs” (Rajasakran, Sinnappan & Raja, 2014, p. 201). This aligns with the goals of eudaimonia as, “self-actualization is a self-oriented concept, whereas self-transcendence is an other-
oriented concept, possibly linked to feelings of empathy and altruism” (Otway & Carnelley, 2013, p. 218). Both self-actualization and self-transcendence maintain a focus on achieving the full potential for individual well-being and whilst it is beyond the scope of this research to address these concepts completely, they do support the aims of The Missed Encounter. As Rakšnys and Vanagas (2014) explain, self-actualization and self-transcendence are focused on the revelation of the individual’s best qualities, in case of self-actualization, it focuses on the revelation of human’s individual, creative and personal potential, whereas self-transcendence, by trespassing the highest level of personal boundaries, focuses on a meaning, value or other objects (p.199).

The positive perspectives on growth by both Frankl and Maslow add to the previously discussed literature on posttraumatic growth (see Chapter E: Literature Review) and show that there is a rich history in the field of psychology that focuses on positive human development.

I.6 Summary

This chapter introduced some of the key concepts that have influenced The Missed Encounter research journey. Built on a foundation of eudaimonia, of human thriving, enacted through a subjectivist epistemology influenced by an autoethnographic methodology, the research takes the standpoint that growth is a positive journey that contains both positive and negative experiences. It is through activities like keeping a diary where an individual can engage in deliberate rumination to work through troubling issues or events. As a type of expressive writing, keeping a diary is a creative pursuit, and Glaveanu’s view of creativity as a relational practice is closely aligned to the positioning of a/r/tography as a living inquiry. What this creates is a situation where creativity becomes a guiding force not just in research, but also in the quest for individual well-being.

The Missed Encounter, supported by the above theoretical constructs, investigates the relationship between posttraumatic growth and the creative process. In order for this to begin, the research process had to be designed, and in the next chapter I will move through the chosen methodology and creative methods used to produce the artist’s book, M/other.
Methodology
As I work, the text that accompanies the finished rendering comes in bits through the process; the ideas begin to pattern themselves. Alternately, when I am writing, I begin to envision representative images which reiterate or layer my thinking processes. Despite this simplistic observation, not only the act of art-making creates understanding but the finished product maps a broader picture. (Sameshima, 2007, p. 138)

*The Missed Encounter* aims to explore and artfully represent a journey of diarised posttraumatic growth [PTG] in and through creative arts pedagogies in the context of the mother-daughter dyad. Using my adolescent diaries as primary data, I have used the creative practices of photography, creative writing, filmmaking and poetry to create an artist’s book titled *M/other* that presents a narrative unpacking the concepts of grief and loss and enacting the process of PTG in its creation. As a research project, it “is transdisciplinary and strives to capture the complexity of educating and learning” (Hartas, 2015, p. 14).

It is useful to begin from the initial research questions that were devised for *The Missed Encounter*, which are:

1) What is the connection between posttraumatic growth and creativity?
2) What is the relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?
3) How can creative arts pedagogies, with particular respect to posttraumatic growth, contribute to educational practice?

The first question is largely an issue of definition and theory (see Chapter E: Literature Review and Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks), so I will unpack the other two questions in relation to the methodology used to perform the creative research. Using a combined methodology of autoethnography supported by the arts-based educational research [ABER] methodology of a/r/tography, this research journey has been an immersive, lived inquiry marked by creative encounters and ritualised deep reflection,
guided by my ontological and epistemological position as an artist and poet.

A/r/tography is a methodology but is used in this study as a theory as well. It functions alongside a/r/tography as a meshwork of frames used to guide, perform and present the research. Autoethnography (O.1) is a methodology that connects personal experience to larger culture phenomena (Ellis, 1999) and it is conceived of here as an encounter (O.1.1) and as missing (O.1.2). Supporting this is the ABER methodology of a/r/tography (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004). The first section of this chapter unravels autoethnography as the primary methodology, through an ABER (O.2) approach to the research. Following this is an exploration of a/r/tography as living inquiry (O.3), including an unpacking of the identities of artist/researcher/teacher (O.2.1) that are central to this research, and the gateway to an unfolding of the creative practices (O.3) used to undertake the research.

To lead into the discussion of the research methods, I outline how keeping a diary (O.3.1) as a teenager created the foundations for my current artistic practices (O.3.2). Taking an awareness of my daily creative practices into the research, began with rereading the diaries (O.3.3) and resulted in the creation of the artist’s book. Creating M/other (O.3.4) unpacks the elements of the artwork and explains how the artist’s book was assembled and arranged during the research process.

Concluding this chapter is a summary (O.4) of the methodological design of The Missed Encounter that reinforces the artistic and scholarly significance of the research. To begin, autoethnography is introduced as the scholarly framework through which the research was conceived and undertaken.

O.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography [AE] grew out of the social sciences from the influence of postmodernism in the 1980s as different approaches were emerging to the relationship between ‘author’, ‘text’ and ‘audience’ in academia (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Hughes, Pennington and Makris, (2012) add, “Ellis and Bochner (1996) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) are credited for bringing autoethnography to mainstream education research audiences” (p. 209) and over the past twenty years it has been used in other disciplines, such as nursing (Peterson, 2015), business (Ngunjiri, 2014) and cancer research (Sealy, 2012). Ellis and Bochner (cited in Ellis, 1999) define autoethnography as,
an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness.

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (p. 673).

As a research method, AE “is distinctive from others in three ways: it is qualitative, self-focused, and context-conscious” (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010, p. 1). The researcher is a self-in-context who investigates a phenomenon and ‘others’ who are also in-context; the resulting data connects the self with ‘other’ and with context. The blurred distinction between researcher and participant – the researcher can actively be both (Ellis, 1999) – challenges traditional scientific research models (Sparkes, 2002), and also creates a research situation where multiple perspectives and approaches are possible (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

O.1.1 Autoethnography as encounter

Autoethnography is an *encounter* of the self with the other in culture, a retrospective activity that uses a blend of both autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 278). Reed-Danahay (1997) notes that “the term [autoethnography] has a double sense – referring either to the ethnography of one’s own group or to autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest” (p. 2). *The Missed Encounter* belongs to the latter category, as it uses autobiographical accounts, drawn from my adolescent diaries as the primary data, of a social phenomenon, which in this case is the mother-daughter dyad. This primary data was then used to create an artist book called *M/other* that contains a narrative journey of posttraumatic growth in and through creative arts pedagogies. Bochner (2012) says, “autoethnographies are not intended to be received, but rather to be encountered, conversed with, and appreciated” (p. 161). An encounter with autoethnography can be an encounter with our own vulnerabilities, which reflects the uncomfortable place of emotion, both in life and in research. This is important for research as it challenges traditional empirical approaches to investigations into lived experience by introducing multiple perspectives of a phenomenon.
There are many ways to perform autoethnographic research, and approaches vary in the importance placed on the researcher’s position in the study compared to their research subjects (including the power dynamic between the two), as well as the context for what is under investigation (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This diversity has produced different types of autoethnographies, such as: narrative ethnographies (e.g. Tedlock, 1991), where the researcher’s experience and the ethnographic study of others are brought together in one text; co-constructed narratives (e.g. Vande Berg & Trujillo, 2008), where relational experiences of phenomena are explored and the co-constructed nature of experience is emphasised; layered accounts (e.g. Ellis, 1999), where the author’s experience happens alongside the data collection and analysis in an approach similar to grounded theory (Ellis & Bochner, 2000); and personal narratives (e.g. Berry, 2007), in which the author is taken to be the phenomena and their experience forms the primary data from which the research is drawn. These approaches may involve consultations or interviews with other people, other texts and data in order to aid in recall (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 278). Adams and Manning (2015) add that, “autoethnographers might consult with artifacts such as photographs, diaries, letters, and other personal texts, and often use storytelling devices such as narrative voice, plot, and character development to represent their experiences” (p. 189). *The Missed Encounter* specifically involved a close rereading of my adolescent diaries, as they are a document and artifact of my adolescent experience that are separate yet connected to my present identities of artist/researcher/teacher (see below). These diaries are non-traditional research texts and reveal, through deliberate rumination, a narrative of growth and development in and through creative arts practices.

In AE the self is placed in conversation with others in order to get to the heart of a particular phenomenon, where the word ‘conversation’ doesn’t necessarily have to be literal. In *The Missed Encounter*, my adolescent diaries were used as the primary data source from which the artist’s book was created through a process of “retrospectively and selectively writing about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by processing a particular cultural identity” (ibid, p. 279). The roles of ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ are explored (see Chapter E: Literature Review) from the perspectives of ‘self’ and ‘other’ as interconnected and relational identities bound together by loss and grief – they are also embedded in and informed by my direct experiences of mother and daughter. *M/other* contains an emotive and phenomenological narrative, which is
akin to Ellis’s (1999) evocative or heartful autoethnographic approach and will be discussed later in Chapter U: Renderings.

The two most widely discussed autoethnographical research strands in the literature are critical autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Quicke, 2010; Boylorn & Orbe, 2016) and evocative autoethnography (Ellis, 1997, 1999; Doty, 2010; Ellis & Bochner, 2011). Bochner differentiates between the two styles listed above by saying evocative autoethnographers,

think of ethnography as a journey; they [critical autoethnographers] think of it as a destination. They want to master, explain, grasp [...] we [evocative autoethnographers] want to dwell in the flux of lived experience; they want to appropriate lived experience for the purpose of abstracting something they call knowledge or theory. (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 431)

*The Missed Encounter* is an evocative autoethnography because it “tends toward empathy and resonance within the reader” (McIlveen, 2008, p. 4) through the use of rich and evocative language and descriptions (see Chapter U: Renderings). As a piece of evocative autoethnography, *M/other* explores the complex and often contradictory nature of mothers and daughters through the lens of the creative practices of creative writing, poetry, photography and filmmaking. It is critical of the traditional roles of mothers and daughters yet is more concerned with revealing the intricacies of the dyad in flux after trauma and the resulting transformations that can occur. The purpose of the narrative isn’t to develop a theory about mothers and daughters, but to show rather than tell, how the relational processes work in context through the narrating of an individual story.

Spotlighting the individual story raises challenging questions and issues pertaining to academic rigour. Ellis (cited in Anderson, 2006) advocates for the rejection of, “traditional realist and analytic ethnographic epistemological assumptions, voicing a principled belief that the value and integrity of evocative autoethnography is violated by framing it in terms of conventional sociological analysis” (p. 377). Both Laurel Richardson (2000) and Carol Rambo Ronai (1992) speak to this perspective and use well-crafted creative methods such as poetry, prose and performance in their widely cited scholarly work (Anderson, 2006). Indeed, as Muncey (2008) reiterates, “autoethnography celebrates rather than demonizes the individual story” (p. 78), which is what *The Missed Encounter* aims to do,
but not in isolation – there are intersecting narratives in this work that are woven together to expose a bigger picture of fractured family units in contemporary Australian society.

Research itself is a journey; steeped in connections, between thoughts, ideas, concepts, the body and the world. Doty (2010) believes the most significant thing about autoethnographic texts is connection, because these works make “it clear that writers are part of their work, part of the story they tell, they are connected” (p. 1048, emphasis in original). Autoethnographic texts bring together different ideas and disparate fields of knowledge and using autoethnographic methods may be the only way to address a specific research question (Duncan, 2004).

As a researcher, I am a ‘boundary-crosser’ (Cutcher, 2015; Reed-Danahay, 1997) in the sense that *The Missed Encounter* and my position as researcher within it traverses the grounds between the fields of sociology, educational psychology and the fine arts. It is sociological because it investigates individual behavior (diarizing and art-making) and examines the context of the mother-daughter dyad as an influential relationship for adolescent development. Educational psychology informs *The Missed Encounter* through concepts of well-being and positive development (see Chapter E: Literature Review) and my identity as an artist underpins the ontological and epistemological frames for the creative work (see Chapter I: Theoretical Frameworks). Like Bochner (2012), “my concern is not with better science but with better living and thus I am not so much aiming for some goal called ‘Truth’ as for an enlarged capacity to deal with life’s challenges and contingencies” (p. 161, emphasis added). This highlights one of the key differences that separates autoethnography from more traditional research methods, as the focus may shift from answering definitive questions to creating new possibilities to change the way we conduct and write research (Doty, 2010).

Taking cues from other writers working across a number of different styles and forms, from concrete poetry (Bök, 2005) to fiction (Safran Foer, 2005), researchers can imagine other ways of writing (Doty, 2010). Drawing from a range of creative media and personal artefacts, *The Missed Encounter*’s research methodology is both arts-based and peripatetic (Cutcher & Irwin, 2015), spanning decades and distances in order to uncover the relationship between trauma, growth and creativity as outlined in the literature review above.

This mirrors the plethora of topics that autoethnographic writing covers, and as Hoppes (2005) notes, “many autoethnographies are narratives of loss told to make sense of existential crises”
(p. 263; see also Ellis, 1998; Hoppes, 2005; Adams, 2006, 2012; McKenzie, 2015; Wyatt & Adams, 2014). *The Missed Encounter* artist’s book *M/other* contains a narrative of loss that moves towards an understanding of the mother-daughter dyad and sits among the above-mentioned research in its aims, specifically revealing how closely linked love and loss are in familial relationships. This context is where the title of the research comes from, a *missed encounter* between mother and daughter where the more recognizable features of that relationship are tarred by loss and grief. Autoethnography provides a way to navigate this sensitive material through a consideration of the presence/absence binary, which will now be discussed.

O.1.2 Autoethnography as missing

*The Missed Encounter* artists’ book *M/other* is “my creative construction of a reality, which I have lived through” (Dyson, 2007, p. 39), and it is one marred by the presence of an absence, namely a fractured relationship between a mother and a daughter. The narrative is based on my experience and contains elements of creative non-fiction alongside photographs, handwritten quotes from my personal diaries, academic quotes from studies of mothering and embedded video works. As Behar (1996) notes,

> living a childhood and writing about it as an adult are fundamentally different experiences, but the value of autobiography is that it creates forms of embodied knowledge in which the (adult) self and the (child) other can rediscover and reaffirm their *connectedness* (p. 135, emphasis added).

Specifically, “I engage the autoethnographic, the telling of a story, from experience, that illustrates the cultural expectations of and requirements for being parents and being children” (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011, p. 112; emphasis in original). In this process, the personal and the cultural become blurred, which is mirrored in autoethnographic research more generally (Boyd, 2008). Autoethnography,

> asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we
want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write
themselves as survivors of the story they are living (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 3).

Two autoethnographic research texts that have inspired and influenced *The Missed Encounter* in their
content and approach to research are from Holman Jones (2005) and Adams (2012a).

Holman Jones (2005) explores adoption stories and discusses the role of loss in this
particularly difficult situation: “these stories begin with loss. Mothers do the unthinkable. Only
mothers could make such plans [...] Lack and grief create matching scars that become red and
angry with each pulse after release” (p. 114). Weaving anecdote and scholarly research together to
unpack stories of loss as a result of the adoption process, Holman Jones invites the reader into her
world through narrative. Holman Jones (ibid) questions, “how then to tell the story of motherhood,
of mother/child relationships, of subjects of desire, without conceiving it, of them, as your own?
Without experiencing it? Without giving birth? Such is the desire of this story, of these words”
(p. 118). *The Missed Encounter* artist’s book works towards a similar kind of story, tracing a mother/
dughter relationship that is fractured but not entirely broken. Like Holman Jones (ibid),
I want to write something that begins with loss so that you will know what I fear to know and
become, to love, and yes, to lose. And I want to write something that doesn’t end in loss, but instead
figures another sort of presence, caring, and yes, separation, into existence (p. 123-124).

The role of presence and absence in stories of loss, as Holman Jones demonstrates above,
is integral to the telling of the story. Adams’ (2012a) writing provides another touchstone in this
regard and although the content is different to both *The Missed Encounter* and Holman Jones (2005),
there are parallels to be found in his discussion of ‘missing’.

Adams (2012a) explores the concept of ‘missing’ in his relationship with his father, an
idea that grew out of another piece of research titled ‘Seeking Father’ (2006). Adams’ (2012a)
autoethnographic research uses short, sharp and descriptive writing to illuminate the moments when
he and his father missed each other in their relationship: “Missing: longing for, regretting absence,
feeling loss. Missing: failing to meet, losing connection, talking past” (p. 194). This definition of
‘missing’ pulsates through *The Missed Encounter* artist book, between mother and daughter, mother
and father, father and daughter, and between all three central characters. The absence Adams (ibid)
considers dwells in the relational perspective he has adopted in the research. It is an approach *The
*Missed Encounter* identifies with, particularly in this quote from Adams (ibid) that appears in the artist book: “missing each other: at times it feels like progress and at other times failure. Maybe missing is the proper way we, *she* and I, should be” (p. 196; my emphasis).

Adams (ibid) repetitive use of the phrase ‘missing each other’ creates an echo throughout the piece that is jarring, reinforcing the double meaning of the word as both a presence and an absence of the relationship. Adams (ibid) chose to, “write – as talking, living, being together hasn’t worked” (p. 195), which is how *The Missed Encounter* artist’s book began, as a way to process and articulate the complex relationship I had with my mother after she passed away suddenly at the end of 2014, three days after my Conformation of Candidature at Southern Cross University. Like Ellis (1997),

I wanted to tell my stories to others because it would be therapeutic for me and evocative for them. I [know] how much we yearn for companionship when we are going through disastrous experiences (Mairs, 1994), and I felt these stories contained rich sociological insights (p. 126). Adams (2012a) and Holman Jones (2008) effectively elucidate that complexity within the family unit contains no absolutes, only relational truths to be arrived at in the process of relating.

Using autoethnography is often more than a methodological choice as it can function as “a way of being in the world, one than requires living consciously, emotionally and reflexively” (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 2) for those who take up its task. During the research journey of *The Missed Encounter*,

rather than be a seeker of truth I have been a seeker of new understandings. Rather than conduct research to confirm what I thought I knew, I conducted research to find out what I did not know and in doing so reached a new level of consciousness and learning (Dyson, 2007, p. 42).

Adams and Manning (2015) offer, “autoethnographers write about these often-private experiences not only to better understand those events themselves, but also to show others how they make sense of and learn lessons from them” (p. 191). Autoethnographic texts provide examples of ‘learning through doing’ applicable to educational research, which is one of the key aspects of *The Missed Encounter*. As Snowber (2014) aptly notes, “delving into the autobiographical and personal is an inquiry into
opening up all the cracks of our lives” (p. 3) and as a research methodology, autoethnography illuminates the cracks in a way that does not restrain meaning, but fosters sense-making. *The Missed Encounter* artist’s book promotes sense-making – of loss, grief and the presence that an absent mother may leave behind. The narrative also seeks to promote empathy and a connection that extends beyond the text and outwards to sociological understanding (Holt, 2008; Sparkes, 2002) through evocative language, deep description and literary techniques (Ellis, 1999).

Sparkes (2002) highlights that good autoethnographies have the ability to show readers, “their involvement in social processes about which they might not have been consciously aware” (p. 221). Great autoethnographic texts make visible the “tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint” (Reed-Danahay, 2009, p. 32), which is precisely why these kinds of texts are valuable in educational research. The task of *The Missed Encounter* has been to “extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived” (Bochner, 2000, p. 270, cited in Adams & Holman Jones, 2008, p. 374). This is the function of the artist’s book as it presents an opportunity for sense-making and meaning to collide.

In autoethnography, as Holman Jones (2005) offers, “it comes down to naming, to language, to untold and unfinished stories” (p. 114), particularly when the narrative begins from a place of loss and grief. What has been seen from the discussion above is the breadth and scope of autoethnographic texts and how unique each and every research story is. *The Missed Encounter* is no exception and its unique story is supported by an arts-based educational research [ABER] framework, a framework which will now be unpacked and discussed below.

O.2 Arts-Based Educational Research [ABER]

Arts-based educational research is, “an umbrella term for a range of orientations and practices” (Bresler, 2006, p. 53) where artistic practice is a scholarly inquiry (Finley & Knowles, 1995). North American educational researchers laid the groundwork for ABER in the later part of the 20th century (Franz, 2010, p. 217), particularly the seminal work of Elliot Eisner (1993) and Tom Barone (2011). Eisner (2002) believed that in experiencing the Arts, “we are given permission to slow down perception, to look hard, to savor the qualities that we try, under normal conditions, to treat so
efficiently that we hardly notice they are there” (p. 5). ABER provides an opportunity for intimate engagements with social and cultural phenomena – for the researcher and their audience – and it exists as both a process and a product of the research journey (Leavy, cited in Jones & Leavy, 2014). Importantly, what differentiates ABER from arts-based research (ABR) is its focus on inquiries into educational phenomena and how arts-based practices can reframe the way educational research is envisioned.

In further explaining this, Barone and Eisner (2006) ask the question: “what does it mean to say that an approach to educational research is arts-based?” (p. 95). They suggest two main criteria, which are:

First [...] arts-based research is meant to enhance perspectives pertaining to certain human activities. For ABER, those activities are educational in character. Second, arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry process and the research ‘text’ (ibid; emphasis in original).

The joining of educational research and artistic inquiry, “facilitates a unique view of the world, and when complimented with other practices and methodologies (for example, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory), contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being investigated” (ibid, p. 217). *The Missed Encounter* unpacks the relationship between posttraumatic growth (PTG) and the creative process through the specific context of the mother/daughter dyad. The methodological weaving of a/r/tography and autoethnography in this inquiry seeks to generate a deep and creative investigation that draws on a multiplicity of methods and concepts. Using métissage (Leblanc, Davidson, Ryu & Irwin, 2015), the artwork (artist’s book) and the research are one and the same; the research is the artwork and the artwork is the research (Finley & Knowles, 1995). This situation demands a different kind of approach to the more traditional modes of scientific research, an approach that involves all of the senses (see *Chapter O: Methodology*). This is important because in *The Missed Encounter*, the lived experience under investigation explores what a journey of PTG might look and feel like – a journey that is mediated in and through the human body.

In *The Missed Encounter*, creative writing, poetry, photography and video are not just tools – they
are the research and also exist as an outcome of the research. The synergy between the research and the artwork blurs the concreteness of both terms, as they exist in this project as one multifaceted approach. Moreover, “arts-based researchers in education contend that the creative arts are a mode of inquiry and representation that provides significant perspectives for making decisions regarding pedagogical theory, policy, and practice” (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006, p. 1226-1227). ABER posits that research can be both aesthetic and scholarly, creating new ways of viewing educational phenomena.

Quinn and Calkin (2008) offer a summary of Barone and Eisner’s (1997) seven defining features for ABER, referred to as ‘design elements’ that help to differentiate it from other forms of research:

(1) The creation of a virtual reality, (2) The presence of ambiguity, (3) The use of expressive language, (4) The use of contextualized and vernacular language, (5) The promotion of empathy, (6) Personal signature of the researcher/writer, and (7) The presence of aesthetic form (p. 2). These seven features can be used as a starting point for the evaluation of ABER work (see Chapter A: Introduction), and also provide multiple entry points into reading a piece of ABER; interestingly, and significantly for this inquiry, they may also apply to autoethnographic research. As Barone and Eisner (ibid) reiterate, ABER “prescribes no specific procedure to produce an arts-based research product, but identifies a genre within which there are a variety of approaches” (p. 98). This multiplicity extends beyond the creative work and into the exegesis, particularly methodologically, as each ABER project is unique and carries with it a different set of arts-based research tools.

Arts-based research, according to Leavy (2009) involves, “a range of arts-derived tools used by qualitative researchers at different phases of the research process, which may encompass data collection, analysis and representation (cited in Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012, p. 240). These tools are defined as ‘practices’ in this research and they enact a living inquiry (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004) propelled by a commitment to artful ways of knowing and being in the world. Lead by the unknown (Bickel, 2005), not by quantitative methods, this research harbours a connectedness (Bresler, 2006; emphasis added) that manifests itself in both this exegesis and the artist book. ABER facilitates connectedness through a dynamic relationship between the artwork, the researcher and the audience.
Cole and Knowles (2008) believe ABER has the power to redefine, “research form and representation and [create] new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and the ethical dimensions of inquiry” (p. 59). It is through the connections and the spaces between the above listed domains where methodological uniqueness occurs in ABER projects.

The Missed Encounter has created a scholarly space to generate a conversation around growth, grief and loss through artistic renderings (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005). Identities and timelines are merged (Finley, 2014) creating a situation where the researcher is the artist, and the audience/reader is brought along on a journey of unearthing meaning and understanding through the creative work (ibid). What this does is ask us, as creators and readers, “to question, to interrupt, to disrupt, to create, to inquire, to reflect, and to engage in meaningful ways, so that we might begin to offer new ways of engagements and understanding to our students, our educators, our communities” (Fels & Irwin, 2008, p. 4). It is from this engagement where growth and change have the opportunity to occur. As McDermott (2010) reinforces,

arts-based educational research can be a way to inspire teachers, students, and community activists of all sorts to experiment with raw artistic materials, exploring their own techniques, with new means and materials to create their works for their own use (p. 12).

At the core of ABER, like autoethnography, is a desire to improve people’s lives and that may result from research that seeks to change or alter perspectives of a phenomenon, or that offers a specific or individual point of entry into cultural phenomena. Bagley and Castro-Salazar (2012) argue that ABER’s “primary purpose is to provide an audience with evocative access to multiple meanings, interpretations and voices associated with lived diversity and complexity” (p. 241). This viewpoint acknowledges the breadth of ABER in practice, as approaches are as varied as the creative media they employ. The educational aspects of ABER are placed front and centre, and, “as inductive research, arts-based educational inquiry utilizes the elements, processes, and strategies of artistic and creative practices in scholarly investigation” (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1234). The focus rests not solely on the outcome of the research, but rather, the processes – the ‘how’ and ‘why’ – of inquiry.

ABER stresses “the concept that the doing of research is just as important as the research itself”
The creative process behind an ABER project carries just as much validity and importance as the final outcome, if not more so, as often it is in the research design where there is great opportunity to make an original contribution to knowledge. The combination of knowing and doing (Cutcher, 2015) within an ABER framework is best articulated in The Missed Encounter through storytelling, as “it is through genuine repetition, storytelling, that humans narrate ways of knowing and being” (Lewis, 2011, p. 505; Richardson, 1992). The narrative component exists as a vehicle for the research in the artist’s book, M/other as the re-searching of growth after trauma through an engagement with creative arts pedagogy. The inquiry functions as a gateway to the process and content of both the artwork and the research and it involves “spiritual undertakings and reflections that honour the centrality of the researcher’s voice, experience, creativity, and authority” (Jacobs, 2008, p. 1).

It is this kind of research that Barone and Eisner (2011) believe “is an evocative and emotionally drenched expression that makes it possible to know how others feel” (p. 9). For example, Pauline Sameshima (2007) weaves personal story, fiction and academic research together to create a moving and poetic rumination on love and artistic inquiry. Her book Seeing Red: A pedagogy of parallax: An epistolary bildungsroman on artful scholarly inquiry, based on her doctoral dissertation, is an illuminating example of ABER. Unraveling a fictional story through letters from a doctoral candidate to her supervisor, Seeing Red explores the complex and often competing identities of artist, researcher and teacher. Sameshima uses the device of letter writing to engage the reader in a deeply personal exploration into how teachers engage in and with the world: “I know we are what we have become. Through experience we create our understandings of life and who we are. Our experiences create who we are” (Sameshima, 2007, p. 11). Reflexivity features heavily in her writings as well as references to two other scholars, Carl Leggo (2004; 2006; 2007) and Monica Prendergast (2006; 2012). Leggo (2002) is a significantly influential scholar for The Missed Encounter as his ontological and epistemological perspectives are similar to my own, as evidenced by the example below:

Because we are constituted in language,
because we know ourselves in language,
because we constantly write ourselves,
and rewrite ourselves,
and write our relations to others,
and seek to understand
the loneliness alienation separateness
we know always, we need
frequent opportunities to engage
in discursive practices,
and an environment which nurtures
desire, insatiable desire,
to know, to quest/ion, to seek.
So, I explore ways of writing
that expose lies like vermilion threads
tangled in the illusion of a linear composition
that composes lives as lines
by experimenting
with composing in poetry,
posing in poetry,
seeking composure and repose
without imposing, always afraid
of disposing and decomposing,
constantly proposing and supposing
the fecundity of composting (p. 2).
Leggo lives a life poetic, a living inquiry in the a/r/tographical sense – a life that is constructed, deconstructed and reconfigured in and through language. In a similar way, Prendergast (2012) assembles found poetry into short musings about the notion of ‘education as art’. Poetic inquiry, for Prendergast (2009), is a dynamic area of scholarly research where, “the best examples of inquiry poems are good poems in and of themselves” (p. xxii). *The Missed Encounter* parallels some of the ideas in poetic inquiry and like Neilsen (2004), acknowledges the limitations of language as, “we dance with impossibility each time we put words on the page” (p. 40). This impossibility is related to how experience can be captured and rendered in an artful way so as not to diminish the authenticity of lived experience. It is a question of interpretation (Leggo & Sameshima, 2014), of what meaning can be drawn from the research to elucidate the possibility of understanding phenomena as opposed to drawing conclusions or creating endings.

Scholars like Sameshima, Leggo and Prendergast write in ways that balance research and artistic sensibility across form and content. The unique creative practices of these researchers have influenced *The Missed Encounter* as well as other ABER PhD dissertations that use a/r/tography in a variety of ways. For example, Haskell (2000) uses a climbing and camping metaphor to explore outdoor education, Heron (2010) created a body of visual artworks that inquire into post/menopause, and in her research into the Holocaust, Dresser (2009) “desire[d] to grapple creatively with the issues of eyewitness memory, second-hand memory and inherited memory so as to make meaning of [her] own interaction with each facet of remembrance” (p. vi). Using writing and visual art, Dresser engaged with her artist, researcher and teacher identities within the context of high school curricula on the Holocaust, but also questioned how she engaged in the world. Like Dresser, Golparian (2012) engaged a/r/tographically in an inquiry, different in content, into the concept of home: “it is an aesthetic (and not anesthetic) self-exploration of my struggles of in-betweenness and unbelonging through and with/in multiple layers of my identity as a Persian-Canadian, and emigrant/immigrant artist, researcher, learner, and teacher” (p. ii). *The Missed Encounter* explores similar themes to Golparian’s research and brushes up against the idea of home through poetry and narrative. What the above dissertations demonstrate is a variety of approaches that reflect the uniqueness of the human experiences they represent.

Fels and Irwin (2008) suggest, “the emergence of arts-based research has infused scholarly
work with a multi-dimensionality of engagements that call into question who we are as scholars and researchers and how we engage in research” (p. 3). The implication for research is that the focus is shifted away from the quantitative and into the qualitative act of looking deeply into the nature of experience. McDermott (2010) highlights a tension that exists between the academic work and artistic work in ABER, offering the following three points to consider when evaluating the success of ABER work: “What purpose does it serve? Whom does it serve? And, most importantly, does it affect change?” (p. 7).

Using the above three points is one way to avoid getting too caught in arguments about how ‘good’ the art is as it keeps the conversation situated in the research (McDermott, 2010), which for ABER is key. For Barone and Eisner (1997), ABER strives for the “enhancement of perspectives” (p. 96) and the initiation of a conversation about the nature of educational policy and practices. As Leggo (cited in Sinner at al., 2006) reiterates,

The question shifts from ‘Is this good arts-based research?’ to ‘What is this arts-based research good for?’ The evaluation of the knowledge generated in arts-based research includes a critical investigation of the craft and aesthetics of artistic practices; a creative examination of how art evokes responses and connections; a careful inquiry into the methods that art uses to unsettle ossified thinking and provoke imagination; a conscientious consideration of the resonances that sing out to the world from word, image, sound, and performance (p. 1252).

This is where a/r/tography can help to focus the presentation of ABER work, as it is considerate of the tension in artful scholarly inquiry. A/r/tography as lived inquiry is crucial to the reading of The Missed Encounter and offers a framework within which the creative work (the artist’s book) can be read.

O.3 A/r/tography as living inquiry

In this research, I position myself as an artist, a researcher, and a teacher, and I seek to conduct “research inquiries through artistic means” (Irwin, 2004, p. 1). A/r/tography is a “methodology
of situations” (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong & Bickel, 2006, p. 70) and a living inquiry (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005) that combines the actions of art-making, research and teaching, through and with the identities of artist, researcher and teacher. At the heart of an a/r/tographic inquiry is the researcher’s creatively engaged life that embraces the transformative qualities of art (Springgay et al., 2005).

The Missed Encounter is a/r/tographical in process and product: the primary data source used – my adolescent diaries – represent a form of lived inquiry in and of themselves throughout my teenage years, a daily engagement with the creative process; and the creative yield of this current inquiry – an artist’s book – is the outcome of practice and research. Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles and Gordon (2013) define “living inquiry [as] a commitment to an embodied engagement with the world that often includes creative forms of interpretation and representation” (p. 3). This is referred to in the literature on a/r/tography as ‘becoming’ (Irwin, 2013), which, “happens in the space or place between the multiplicities of relations” (p. 202). Becoming in The Missed Encounter occurs in and through creative practice, in the telling of a difficult story, a personal story that is of my life experience. Here, the living practice is, “a life writing, life creating experience into the personal, political, and professional aspects of one’s life” (ibid, p. 903). Becoming is also an historical event located within my adolescent diaries and the phenomenological experience of writing in them; the diaries are the primary data that document a journey of becoming, from childhood to adulthood. Becoming, then, as an a/r/tographical construct, is both a process and product of an engagement with the creative process.

Fels and Irwin (2008) maintain that, “by weaving together theory, practice and research, arts-based research traditions (and innovations) create cases or stories that simultaneously or contiguously reveal several perspectives on a theme” (p. 3). In a/r/tography, the relationship between knowing, doing and making (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) creates the conditions where a multiplicity of perspectives can unfold and unfurl. The spaces in-between these modes of thought and moments of action facilitate learning and understanding through interpretation and transformation. As Leggo and Sameshima (2014) articulate,

we try to enter lived experiences with a creative openness to people and experiences and
understandings. Above all, we aim to make a story in collaborative dialogue with others, always aware that the story is one of many stories, one of many versions of the story (p. 539). The creative openness referred to above has been an essential attitude for my engagement with the research process. This living inquiry grew from this foundation and through a/r/tography it found nourishment and support. *The Missed Encounter* has not followed a linear trajectory, but rather a multidirectional journey, “that entangles and performs what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) refer to as a rhizome. A rhizome is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 106). Rhizomatic research spreads outwards, upwards and sideways, sprouting new connections in multiple directions between concepts and ideas. The rhizomatic links between the creative process and posttraumatic growth (PTG) (see Chapter E: Literature Review) in the context of a lived artistic inquiry in *The Missed Encounter* informs a broader methodological concern of arts-based research – of the role of creativity and art in the research process. ABER generally favours outliers and overlooked or underrepresented perspectives, as does autoethnography (Siegesmund, 2014), which is why a/r/tography is an appropriate methodology for *The Missed Encounter*. The ‘overlooked case’ is the missed encounter, the fractured relationship between mother and daughter – the binary of mother and daughter is disrupted in a situation where an understanding of the traditional roles is challenged through an almost role reversal in the narrative (daughter as caregiver, mother as child).

This is what Irwin et al. (2006) believe is one of the commitments of a/r/tographic practice, that understanding can be “relational, singular, and rhizomatic” (p. 72; my emphasis), rather than just one or the other. In a research situation where multiple, relational perspectives are under examination, which is the case in *The Missed Encounter*, a/r/tography provides a way to critically work between perspectives in order to reveal the complexities inherent in lived experience, specifically a living inquiry that is conceptualized in and through the creative process. This raises the question: how is a/r/tographical research to be read?

In the dissemination of a/r/tographic research, the term renderings is used in the literature to refer to concepts that help readers of a/r/tographical inquiry make meaning out of the research. Irwin and Springgay (2008) detail the six renderings of a/r/tography: “contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess” (p. 116). Each of these renderings offers
opportunities for participation, engagement and action at various stages of the research process and, “are theoretical spaces through which to explore artistic ways of knowing and being research” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). I have used the above six renderings to present and analyze the research findings of The Missed Encounter in Chapter U: Renderings, so I shall introduce their meanings and relevance below.

Living inquiry is explored above yet also represents a commitment by the a/r/tographer to an art-full engagement with education and creativity through inquiry (ibid). Contiguity refers to the doubling and simultaneous existence of the identities of artist, researcher and teacher (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). This doubling also is found in the folding together of ‘art’ and ‘graphy’, of image and text: “an unfolding between process and product, text and person, presence and absence, art and audience, teacher and student, author and reader” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 901). It is an uncomfortable in-between space bulging with anxiety, driven by the unknown – a relational process (ibid).

The third rendering, metaphor/metonymy, facilitates meaning making in a/r/tography: “metaphor through its substitution of signifiers and metonym through its displacement of subject/object relations” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 118). This leads into the fourth rendering, openings. The in-between spaces, the folds between artist/researcher/teacher identities, are the openings that emerge, the “cuts, cracks, slits, and tears” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 906) are an active invitation for audiences to engage with the research. Openings are encounters, and “encounters are meetings that involve surprise and conflict” (ibid, p. 907). In The Missed Encounter, there are multiple encounters on micro and macro levels – between writer and reader, mother and daughter, image and text. Encounters can illicit reverberations in a/r/tography, the fifth rendering, which is a vigorous movement that shifts understandings of the phenomena under inquiry, often deepening or disrupting meaning by not settling on absolutes (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 118).

The final rendering is excess. In a/r/tography, excess is an embodied practice that calls for transformation. A process devoid of factual declarations, excess “questions not simply material substances but also how things come into being, the philosophical nature of existence and meaning making” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). Gouzouasis (2006) sees excess as provocative and evocative and at the heart of progressive thought; excess is the absence of control and regulation
(Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In *The Missed Encounter*, excess exists in *language*, as both a lack and an overindulgence of words. There is a lack of words between the mother and her daughter in *M/other* that expresses itself as an overindulgence of words in the daughter’s diaries. These diaries are my personal archives of the intimate (Piper, 2015), an excessive lexical languish that borders on the obsessive, a sense making of the missed encounter (see Chapter U: Renderings).

The six renderings are interrelated and, “not simply static images or words captured on a page; they are visual, aesthetic, and textual performances that dance and play alongside each other, reverberating in excess and as openings” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). This is a process of ‘becoming’, of letting the research unfold, which is an idea that has defined this research journey since the very beginning. Leblanc et al., (2015) outline ‘becoming’ as, “an emergent immersive process that exists in the liminal multiple lines of flight and multiple encounters that encourage experimentation and improvisation” (p. 356). Building on Gilles Deleuze’s (1990) philosophical concept of becoming, the a/r/tographical conception of becoming exists in the liminal spaces within art education practice as a social practice, one that is in constant movement and flux (LeBlanc et al., 2015).

Irwin (2013) outlines three lines of becoming in a/r/tography as *becoming-intensity, becoming-event* and *becoming-movement*. These three modes of becoming, according to Irwin (ibid), seek to explore the question: “what does art education in practice set in motion do?” (p. 202). By examining the in-between spaces of an inquiry, the intricacies of process can be discovered and a space formed from which the research can surface. Irwin (ibid), through a dissection of the a/r/tographical study *Becoming Pedagogical*, found that, “an intensive capacity to affect and be affected resides in-between these lines of flight opening the way for art and art education to move in and through learning” (p. 212). *The Missed Encounter* enacts becoming in its emergent methodological design through a process of engaging in artistic practice, where the writing and image-making happened concurrently: “situated within the intensity of an event in constant movement—movement toward possibilities, toward an unfolding of that which is yet to be known, toward the potential of potential” (ibid p. 202).

*The Missed Encounter* has involved, “an ongoing process of art making [...] and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings” (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1224). This is why creative practices
are discussed here together, in dialogue, under the larger term of art-making and as a process of becoming. Creating the artist’s book titled *M/other* involved responding to my adolescent diaries, the intimate details of my own process of becoming, of moving from childhood to adulthood. As Leggo and Sameshima (2014) aptly reveal: “the real purpose of telling our stories is to tell them in ways that open up new possibilities for understanding and wisdom and transformation. So, our stories need to be told in creative ways that hold our attention, that call out to us, that startle us” (p. 540).

As previously mentioned, Irwin et. al. (2006) call a/r/tography a methodology of ‘situations’, made possible by the above renderings. Situations occur between renderings and are doubled in the a/r/t identities of a/r/tography. Irwin and Springgay (2008) remind us that, “although a/r/tography privileges the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher within its name one needs to be thoughtful about how these identities might be conceptualized” (p. 112). It is valuable here to un/tangle the identities of artist, researcher and teacher as they have grown and expanded within the context of *The Missed Encounter* research journey.

O.3.1 Artist / Researcher / Teacher

My identity as an artist bolsters each and every aspect of my life and colours this living inquiry. Research and pedagogy exist in and through the artistic inquiry of *The Missed Encounter* resulting in a “coming together” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900) of the three identities of artist, researcher and teacher. The order of the identities as they appear in the word itself – artist, followed by researcher, followed by teacher – represents their prominence in my life and in this work. It is through my artistic practice that I came to learn how to research, and it is now through my identity as a researcher that I understand my role as a teacher. Beginning with the ‘a’, the lens of the ‘artist’, traditional notions of scholarly research and educational practice can be challenged and expanded. In a/r/tography, defining identity is not the aim, but rather there is a yearning to understand how each of the three identities function and at what points during the living inquiry they emerge and intersect (Springgay et al., 2008).

The role of the body in research is key to understanding the identity of the artist in a/r/tography. Artists are embodied practitioners (Springgay, 2008), using their bodies to create artworks
for the transmutation of ideas in and through the creative process. Barbour (2006) believes, “embodiment encompasses an individual person’s biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural, historical and geographical location” (p. 3). An embodied artistic practice considers not only the product of creativity (the artwork) but also the factors and processes that contributed to the thinking, knowing, feeling and execution of an idea. Like Bickel (2005), “the body has been a constant teacher and home for me in the midst of an unstable, and often threatening and silencing world” (p. 10). Beginning in my adolescent diaries and continuing to the research work, the artist book, M/other, my body has been storing a narrative that at times has physically overwhelmed me in the form of migraines and muscle aches. This has forced me, at different times in the research journey, to rely on notebook and pen instead of computer and keyboard, as my body rebelled against the rigour of sitting down to work. Learning to listen to my body’s cues has been a surprising occurrence, particularly in the latter stages of writing and constructing this exegesis.

The body is a vital part of the research journey and is conceived of here in Deleuzian (1987) terms as, “dynamic, creative, and full of plentitude, potential, and multiplicities [...] as a series of processes, flows, energies, speeds, durations, and lines of flight” (Springgay, 2008, p. 3). The body is what makes possible the interchangeability and simultaneity of identities in a/r/tography. Moving between, climbing over and squeezing under the three identities of artist, researcher and teacher has been an embodied practice in itself, a methodological dance where, at times, all three identities moved together in unison.

As a researcher, negotiating the dominance of my artist-self has been challenging, especially in ABER where the emphasis isn’t solely on the creative process. I have learned that as an artist-educator, I am, “committed to ongoing living inquiry and it is this inquiry that draws forth the identity of a researcher” (Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. 112). The identity of researcher is in-between the artist and teacher – a/r/t – perhaps acting as a bridge between the two or a conduit for both. It is here, in the in-between, where I, “inquire and write with breath, with touch, with heart, with curiosity, with and through the arts within the academy” (Fels & Irwin, 2008, p. 3). Part of this scholarly work has involved gathering together concepts, ideas, theories and frameworks from multiple disciplines, such as the fine arts, positive psychology, the social sciences
and education. Franz (2010) stresses, “for the qualitative researcher, an arts-based approach enables rich engagement with the aesthetics of the phenomenon giving greater meaning to the notion of the qualitative researcher as *bricoleur*” (p. 217; emphasis added).

Bricolage, according to Johnson (2012), refers to “construction or (esp. literary or artistic) creation from a diverse range of materials or sources” (p. 356). *The Missed Encounter* embraces the process of bricolage as “a critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approach to inquiry” (Rogers, 2012, p. 1). I am what Denzin and Lincoln (1999) call a *methodological bricoleur*, a researcher who, “respects the complexity of the meaning-making process by allowing contextual contingencies to dictate which data-gathering and analytical methods to use” (cited in Rogers, 2012, p. 5). However, as Wheeler and Bangor (2015) point out, the term *bricoleur* is not a gender-neutral term and is conceptualised in the masculine. The researchers recommend that the feminine form, *bricoleuse*, be used for females engaging in bricolage. In this instance, I am a methodological bricoleuse (Cutcher, 2015), responding to the research as it unfolds, unafraid of bending and shifting, as the needs of the process require attention.

The third identity in a/r/tography is the teacher. I am not a professional teacher – I do not teach in a formal institutional setting – thus I follow Irwin and Springgay’s (2008) broadly defined conception of education, “to mean any contexts concerned with learning, understanding, and interpretation” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 112). I view teaching as a relational practice, steeped in reciprocity, an exchange, collaboration, a co-created space that exists much in the same way that artistic inquiry functions. My role as a teacher of this work is enacted through my teacher voice that tells the story of growth in M/other.

Through a/r/tography, I have come to understand the roles of artist, researcher and teacher as interchangeable and as different paths to action in both personal and professional arenas. In merging these roles, as Smith (2009) suggests, “an ongoing process of interconnected art-making and writing” (p. 265) can evolve, enacting the living inquiry that is a/r/tography.

**O.4 Creative Practices (Methods)**

The research methods for *The Missed Encounter* are the creative practices of writing, poetry, photography
and filmmaking. Central to understanding the choice of methods is the influence of diary keeping (4.3.1) and artistic practice (4.3.2) on my role as a creative researcher setting out on the journey towards creating a body of work that addresses the research aims and questions at the beginning of this chapter. Rereading the diaries (4.3.3) facilitated the production of an artist’s book; creating M/other (4.3.4) became a bricolage of creative practices and media. The creative practices outlined below have their foundations in my diary keeping practices as a teenager, which is where this discussion will begin.

O.4.1 Keeping a personal diary

Compulsive diary keeping is like a terminal illness [...] That which I really want to say, I don’t say at all (Roth, 1972, cited in Bradley, 2012).

The artist’s book M/other was created in response to my teenage diaries, a suite of ten books filled cover to cover with expressive writing, song lyrics, poetry, drawings, collages and personal artefacts. These diaries are the primary data from which the research was performed, the data that inspired the narrative and artwork within the pages of M/other. My teenage diarising process is a key component of The Missed Encounter. The process of creating the diaries is valuable here as it provides an insight into the content they hold and the struggles I faced after the trauma of living with, and then leaving, my mother. They demonstrate the beginnings of my interest in research and established the foundations of a daily creative practice that I continue to this day.

I began keeping a diary a few weeks after I moved in with my father and grandparents at the age of twelve, at the suggestion of a Kid’s Helpline counsellor I spoke to over the phone. I chose an A5 yellow spiral notebook from the supermarket and wrote the day, date and page number on the top line of the page. This basic structural addition of documenting continued for a number of years across multiple diaries as a way to mark time and as a reference point for future entries. The pens I used changed frequently – different colours and ink types – as too did each style of book. The paper was always lined even though I wrote in varying degrees of size and script. These specific details are important as they set the parameters and conditions under which the diaries were filled. This
safe space I created through the act of writing allowed me to ruminate on issues that concerned me, both good and bad, and to work through complicated feelings I had about what I had experienced as a child. Writing for me was, and still is, a form of catharsis.

I wrote obsessively every night before I went to sleep as a type of ‘brain dump’ – writing down the events of the day, how they made me feel and often including short reflections on life. The writing itself was a combination of fact and stream of consciousness as I would sit at my desk late at night and write until I filled one page. I applied some simple constraints to my practice, and I believe this provided some creative freedom and control, which at that stage was important for me to possess as I moved from childhood into adolescence. At the end of each entry, I noted down the time, right down to the minute. Once that time was down, I had clocked-off from the day, I could finally rest.

I relished the opportunity to express how I felt in a place that was just for me and for no one else, away from any prying eyes. I had complete creative reign over each page and as I moved into adolescence I used the diaries as a testing ground for ideas and artworks related to my formal schooling. I worked through abstract ideas I was exposed to at school and also penned one entire diary of poems, an A4 purple spiral notebook, and wrote more than one poem a night at times. The ritualistic nature of the diaries gave me a channel through which to funnel the range of emotions I experienced and to establish a routine amidst the chaos of adolescence and the new living situation I had moved into with my father and grandparents.

In my later teen years, I would take my diaries to school and write in them during lessons once I had finished my schoolwork. I would sit for an entire lesson if allowed to, head down and pen furiously scribbling, usually in the art room or music room, taking the time out to deeply explore aspects of my personality or history. I wrote a lot about my mother in the later diaries after she and I would meet for lunch on various weekends in a local shopping centre. The writing was emotional, frantic and full of questions about why I was feeling a certain way or how events transpired the way they did. The diaries were filled with moments of self-awareness and a questioning of everything I encountered, from my relationship with my parents to my hopes and wishes for the future. In the pages of each diary I wrote everything down to prove that I was alive, to prove that I could survive, and to prove that I did, in fact, exist.
The A4 diaries are less structured than the smaller, earlier diaries, penned from ages sixteen to eighteen (2001-2003). I still continued to write the page numbers on each page but entries extended beyond the previously strict rule of one page, sometimes continuing for up to six pages. I began to develop a rhythm with the writing each time I sat down and opened a diary, a type of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) where I lost track of time, missed meals and was completely absorbed in the process. Diarising kept me awake until the early hours of the morning most nights, even as my hands started to cramp and my eyelids became heavy. I wrote continuously because I had to get it all out of my head and onto paper before I could sleep – before I felt it was safe to go to sleep.

Diarising was a ritual and if for some reason I missed a day, I would write twice as much the following night, trying to remember the details of the day before after I had penned the current day’s entry. Writing, and later Art-making, was such a normalised part of each day in my
teenage years and I used most of my free time to engage with the creative process across different media. I also performed through Music and Dance, activities that I wrote about in my diaries with enthusiasm and joy. These creative practices required my body to perform them and the very act of using my hands or voice or body to express myself, was a method of expression I have carried into adulthood in both my personal and artistic practices, the latter of which I will outline here as central to the methodological underpinnings of *The Missed Encounter*. My artistic practices are the research methods and they also influenced the final form of presentation as an artist’s book.

O.4.2 Artistic Practice

The daily practice of keeping a diary as a teenager has influenced my artistic practice as an adult (see *Chapter U: Renderings*). It has been my artistic practice that has facilitated and driven the creative research in *The Missed Encounter* and spawned the artist’s book *M/other*. Creativity is a daily exploration in choosing curiosity over fear (Gilbert, 2016) that has resulted in my work being published in both print and online, nationally and internationally, and across a number of different creative media. I identify as a writer and an artist, thus my artistic practice can be discussed as a blend of the written and the visual, drawing on influences from literature, contemporary Art and design. I see no clear-cut distinction between my role as a writer and my role as an artist – what is fundamental to my practice is the perpetuation of self-expression through the distillation of lived experience.

My writerly practice shifts between prose and poetry pragmatically, depending on the context for publication and content under examination. Three main contemporary female writers influence my work: Cheryl Strayed, author of the memoir *Wild* (2012), researcher and storyteller Brené Brown, author of *Rising Strong* (2015), and American poet Sarah Kay, author of *No Matter the Wreckage* (2014). These three women write about difficult experiences through the lens of creativity and provide a vehicle for the discussion of topics such as death, grief, love, vulnerability and growth. Their writing practices are diverse – Strayed writes novels, Brown is an academic researcher, and Kay is a spoken word poet – all of which feed into my present artistic practice and mode of being in the world as a blend of all three.

Similarly, I am interested in the visual nature of the written word, a fascination that has
manifested as a daily drawing practice that is diaristic, depicting my daily life through small illustrations and typographical renderings (see Image 2). This style also features in this exegesis in the title pages for each chapter and throughout the document in visual marginalia. I am influenced by a number of designers who use their journals to showcase their work on social media, such as Lauren Hom (http://www.homsweethom.com/), Samantha Dion Baker (http://sdionbaker.com/), and David Milan (http://davidmilan.com/). Design is a powerful communicator and enhancer of the written word as it treats text as a visual element, not just a literary one. I draw from design to create artworks that are sensitive to the relationship between the content and form of written materials.

Image 2 Sample of my daily drawing practice, Marion Piper Copyright 2016, Reprinted with permission.

The above daily drawing practice blurs the boundary between my Visual Arts and writerly practices. I am a formally trained photomedia artist, working mostly in the digital space with photography and HD video. I am influenced by the work of Swiss artist Dieter Roth, who was an
avid diarist, Mexican artists Ulises Carrión, a conceptual artists’ book maker, and Frida Kahlo, for her confessional artistic practice and obsessive visual journal keeping (see Appendix A). Video art is a contemplative space for me as an artist and this contemplation began in my teenage diaries as I worked through, in words, the issues I faced on a daily basis. Through filmmaking I can manipulate time to create spaces for reflection in a way that I can’t do as a writer, and the reverse is also true – neither is more effective than the other, but when they are combined (as they are in M/other) there is more room for multiple interpretations, readings and connections (see Chapter U: Renderings).

The creative elements of The Missed Encounter are a full portrayal of my artistic voice in all of the media of my practice drawing from the materials of my adolescent diaries. I still keep a diary to this day and have diarised most of my doctoral journey across four A5 journals. I officially began the data generation for The Missed Encounter in May 2015 at Residencia Corazon, an artist residency program I attended in La Plata, Argentina. I chose this residency program in order to begin the creative work phase of the research in a supportive environment dedicated to the production of artwork. This also allowed me to gain some geographical distance from the painful and sensitive history that would become the basis for the narrative in M/other, the artist’s book.

I brought the first two diaries with me to the residency and had digitised the proceeding two. The process of rereading my teenage diaries was challenging, inspiring and insightful, and I will now outline it here.

O.5 Rereading the diaries

I knew that if I allowed fear to overtake me, my journey was doomed. Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me (Strayed, 2014, p. 51).

I chose to begin the research by rereading my adolescent diaries in chronological order, starting with an A5 spiral yellow book penned in the year 2000, when I was fourteen years old. I scoured each page searching for indications of the posttraumatic growth five life areas theoretical framework, namely: “improved interpersonal relationships, a greater sense of personal strength, new opportunities, greater
appreciation for life, and spiritual growth” (Lindstrom, Cann, Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013, p. 478). Additionally, I made a note of any reference to my parents to use as a reference point for the creative writing and poetry I would aim to produce at the artist residency.

The self-directed artist residency at Residencia Corazon in Argentina was one-month long and based in a residential house in the small town of La Plata. My living space included a desk to work from and access to a communal studio space shared with other resident artists. This immersive experience was vital to the beginning of the creative production phase of the research as it gave me the geographical and emotional distance I needed to begin to delve into the sensitive materials within my diaries. Due to the personal nature of my research I found it beneficial to be in a space dedicated to the creative process surrounded by other artists who I could talk to about my ideas, concerns and work. The other artists were encouraging and provided generous feedback on the initial works I produced whilst on residency. The research began a few days after I arrived with the first teenage diary.

The artist residency model, which is not new to Fine Arts creative practice, provided a framework in which I could safely conduct creative research. Lydiate (2009, cited in Hetherington, 2015,) believes, “residencies have a long tradition of offering artists an opportunity to escape their normal work environment and immerse themselves in new cultures (p. 2). The artist residency, as explained by Neidich (2012), is a space of experimentation that challenges dominant cultural ideas, language and norms. This has an effect on the identity of the artist who is free from their normal routines and identities. Immersion plays a central role to this process, as too does geographical dislocation; as a residency participant, I travelled from Australia to Argentina for the specific purpose of attending the residency. Immersion, in this context, offered the space and time I needed for deep creative excavation and production.

As a concept, “immersion is the subjective impression that one is participating in a comprehensive, realistic experience” (Dede, 2009, p. 66). Immersive environments encourage learning, exchange, collaboration and the generation of new ideas (Hetherington, 2015). As a non-formal educational setting, the artist residency I attended at Residencia Corazon provided a platform for a relational creative process (Glăveanu, 2009) to develop, whereby I negotiated difficult concepts with the creative and social support of other artists. In this experience, the art-making was fluid
and intuitive as the studio became a hive of experimentation, idea generation and play. I became a ‘reflective practitioner’ (Schön, 1983), engaged in the creative process for the duration of my stay, often vocalizing my experience over shared meals and studio visits with other residents. It was a process of learning by doing (Hetherington, 2015; my emphasis), a self-directed journey of discovery that unfolded day by day. It was a space outside of my normal life with less set rules and boundaries with had the effect of nurturing creative freedom.

Neidich (2012) likens the artist residency to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ‘body without organs’ (BwO), an evocative metaphor where the artist’s body, “is no longer subjected to the despotism of the a priori genetic plan and is released to express another side of itself” (Neidich, 2012, p. 6). Free from the pressures and commitments of everyday life, I began to delve into the first two adolescent diaries that I had digitized to bring with me to the residency (see above). Rereading the diaries triggered memories and I began to record my emotions and the associated imagery in a research journal.

Geographically removing myself from where I had shared a history with my mother allowed me to create distance between the sensitive subject matter and myself. As Neidich (2012) offers, “the Body without Organs is also a brain in a state of incessant remapping of its own neural connective logics as a result of the continual reconfiguration of its materiality and immaterial relations” (p. 12). This quote references the interplay between internal and external forces that impact upon the body of the artist in situ. In the sense, residencies are,

nodes in the networks of information flow that respect no borders, situated in cities that can infiltrate semio-capitalism with new languages, grammars and alterity that reverse normalized flows of information from dominating centralized hegemonies towards the periphery (Neidich, 2012, p. 27).

Under the residency model, traditional notions of creative production and conceptualization can be altered, moved, challenged and transformed. My experience at the residency supported my ability to dive deeply into painful memories as I had the space and time devoid of my normal responsibilities.

During my time in Argentina, I produced a number of poems and short prose pieces, and the month away allowed me to intuitively approach my research and embrace emergent methods as
they arose. According to Denzin (2010), emergent methods are, “an invitation to rethink terms that even a decade ago were settled, from validity to design, from praxis to reform. An open mind is required” (p. 420). This openness to the unknown has guided The Missed Encounter methodology through the gathering of personal artefacts and engagement in creative practice.

To produce the aforementioned poems and prose pieces, each morning involved a routine of reading journal articles and the work of other poets, such as David Whyte (1997) and Mary Oliver (2013). After lunch, I would walk down to Big Sur Café, a few doors down from Residencia Corazon, and I would write for upwards of four hours. Using excerpts from my adolescent diaries as prompts (see above) the aim of each writing session was to capture as many details as possible. The sights, sounds, textures, tastes and dialogue of memories were recorded using rich adjectives, unfiltered and unfettered, onto the pages of a cheap notebook. This intuitive way of working was not always easy; oftentimes the sting of a memory would excavate painful emotions, forcing me to retreat back into the residency studio. I learned how to predict when this may occur as each day passed, engaging in fifteen minutes of expressive writing daily (Pennebaker, 2004) to heal and comfort myself in the process. Anderson (2004) writes, “when we express ourselves through making art, we create something tangible to look at, hold, reflect on, feel, and try to understand in our minds and bodies” (p. 31). Articulating the world in image and text can be a powerfully healing process, as Howells and Zelnick (2009) report, “a growing body of experience and research is examining the transformative and healing power of art” (Cleveland, 1992; Kaye & Blee, 1997; Young-Mason, 2000; cited on p. 216). Whilst my research hasn’t been designed to explore the specific use of art as a therapeutic tool, it does acknowledge that there may be therapeutic benefits to making art. This is a rich area for potential future research.

During my time at the residency, I scoured each book and kept notes in separate Microsoft Word documents for each diary. I reread the first four diaries by the end of the second week of my residency in Argentina and I began to write to some of the passages I had drawn out by the beginning of the second week. I read and wrote in tandem as it was challenging to write through some of the more painful memories. I oscillated between a complete engagement with writing poetry and prose for the narrative and exploring the foreign city I was residing in; the juxtaposition of space and routine between the research and my immediate environment fostered a ‘newness’ that was expansive.
and inclusive. I felt safe and protected at the residency, able to explore painful memories as they arose in a space that was conducive to deep reflection, recollection and creation.

Reading the diaries became my morning ritual at the residency, an immersive experience that was self-directed. During the course of the artist residency, I sat with my diaries, scanning their pages for mentions of my mother. When I found a fragment of text, I wrote to that memory and explored to expand upon it. Like Leggo (2009), “I seek to dispel absence by disclosing possibilities for presence, knowing how spilling and spelling words can conjure steadfast hope, even, especially in the midst of despair and despondency” (p. 151). For example, in diary number 8, I found this passage: “I’m scared that if I stay here with dad I’ll never leave or get out, I miss mum […]” (p. 12). This provocative moment of disclosure spawned the poem *Ambivalence* that begins:

I mixed my feelings
like she mixed her drinks –
clumsily, vigorously
continuously [...]

(Piper, 2016, ‘q’).

I slowly built up a suite of poems during my time at the residency and two short prose pieces. I handwrote the written material into a notebook during time spent at a local café, or at my desk in my room in the residency house. Once I had a quote from my diary to work from, I meditated on the memory behind the quote and began to build descriptions around it in language, usually first in poetic form, then later in prose if I believed that part of the narrative required more space and explanation. Each evening I would type up what I had written into a Word document to edit and polish it. I didn’t put the written pieces into any kind of order until much later in the year as I wanted to create enough material to form a body of work, which is how I work as an artist, fleshing out a theme through a series of works to create a cohesive whole.

Towards the end of my artist residency, I filmed approximately an hour worth of footage in a rehearsal space in the Pasaje Dardo Roche, the cultural centre in the centre of the town of La Plata. I spent two days alone in the rehearsal space, first documenting in writing the specificities of
the space, then, filming its different features. I used a tripod to capture all of the footage, as I didn’t want to handhold my camera for technical and conceptual reasons. I wanted the footage to be still with no movement so it could be used as layers of video and audio in postproduction. During the time I spent filming, I had to be incredibly quiet so as not to appear in the footage or disrupt the atmosphere I was trying to capture. The space itself was empty, filled with light and accompanied by the soundtrack of the traffic on the streets below.


On the second last night of my time at the residency, I exhibited the video work Empty rooms in one of the bedrooms at the residency. The video was projected in an intimate setting on the wall above a single bed with a small bedside table holding a spoon, cup and plate close by (see figure 3).
This gave me an opportunity to get some direct feedback on the video work from the other artists at the residency, which is an essential part of my creative process as an artist. Exhibiting this work was an experiment to see what format would suit the suite of videos for examination. Whilst the exhibition format worked for this video piece, I was unsure as to how to incorporate the written materials into a large space like an Art Gallery. These types of decisions can only be made during the creative process once the work has been made and act as an important step in the research process by narrowing down the options for creative presentation.

Once I returned to Australia, the writing and editing process continued for both the written materials and the video footage. As I began to see the narrative as a story I realised there needed to be a stronger visual presence alongside the written pieces to reflect the visual nature of the journey. This is when I decided to take a fieldwork trip north to the Gold Coast, Queensland [QLD], to document the last place my mother and I lived together, which is the scene for the first poem, ‘a’, that appears in M/other.

I travelled to Benowa, QLD, and spent three hours in a small block of units called Surfers Palms, where I used to live with my mother. I walked through the complex taking photographs on my digital camera, the same camera I used in Argentina to film the rehearsal space. I walked from the local shopping centre to Surfers Palms, a walk I used to take as a child, taking photographs of the road, trees, street signs and buildings. I paid particular attention to the unit that my mother and I lived in, number twelve, and other features of the complex, such as the letterbox and driveway. Walking and photographing the area allowed me to gather more creative material to integrate into the already existing suite of poems, creative writing and videos.

Upon returning to Melbourne, I grouped the photographs into different categories based on their content, such as objects, signs, roads, and places. In postproduction, using Adobe Photoshop, I slightly adjusted each image’s levels to create a more consistent aesthetic across the entire image collection. At this point in time, I was planning to have an exhibition in an Art Gallery of the aforementioned creative pieces, but due to time constraints and space availability this was not possible. At the conclusion of editing the photographs, I started to experiment with placing the written and visual materials together in a Word document in order to see how they related to one another to contribute to the story of posttraumatic growth that I was aiming to tell. The combination of the above
mediums, when viewed together, looked like a book, so I continued to add poems and written work as I created them.

O.6 Creating M/other

Writing saved my life. Writing has been my window -- flung wide open to this magnificent, chaotic existence -- my way of interpreting everything within my grasp. Writing has extended that grasp by pushing me beyond comfort, beyond safety, past my self-perceived limits. It has softened my heart and hardened my intellect. It has been a privilege. It has whipped my ass. It has burned into me a valuable clarity. It has made me think about suffering, randomness, good will, luck, memory responsibility, and kindness, on a daily basis -- whether I feel like it or not. It has insisted that I grow up. That I evolve. It has pushed me to get better, to be better. It is my disease and my cure. It has allowed me not only to withstand the losses in my life but to alter those losses -- to chip away at my own bewilderment until I find the pattern in it (Shapiro, 2013, p. 227).

The creative body of work for The Missed Encounter became an artist’s book entitled M/other. It functions as both an artwork and a piece of scholarly research. The creative components of M/other were assembled using Adobe InDesign, software I had only used once before in the creation of my Masters of Art (Writing) project, a book of concrete poems called Glass Confetti.

Using a combination of online tutorials and advice from a graphic designer, I set about constructing the book. My motivation for using the book form stemmed from the look and feel of my teenage diaries – they were portable, tactile and unique. I chose to design the book at 210mm x 210mm, which is the width of A4 and square, rather than rectangular, for aesthetic and ergonomic reasons. This size is easy to hold and carry, lending itself to a more intimate engagement with the reader/viewer through its portability. The book itself lies flat when placed on a solid surface, like a table, so it can be viewed and read simultaneously as both a book and an artwork. This dual reading is intentional because of the combination of creative media – written, static, and in the case of the
digital copy, moving – designed to provide a multisensory experience of the research.

To begin the design process, I first set up some design rules to guide the production, including: selecting the font titled ‘Marion’; defining character and paragraph styles; choosing three layout strategies for the poetry - one column of text per page, two columns of text per page, and freestyle/concrete poetry; all scholarly quotes in the colour blue and italicised; and the creative writing pieces in a square block of text running over continuous pages. I had already assembled the written material into a specific order, so that was the first element to be placed into the book. Next, I added in the photographs, experimenting with their size and placement across the different page spreads I had selected for them to go into. I chose to use the photographs that pertained directly to the narrative or featured in one of the poems because I wanted to provide a clear context for the story and anchor the poems in an existing place, a place of significance to the narrative and to the research.

Next, I added images of pages from my teenage diaries to foreground their importance in the narrative as a constant support for my development. These handwritten quotes were the inspiration for many of the poems and are placed into M/other alongside images from my fieldwork trip and quotes from other academics. These quotes, featured throughout the book, refer to motherless daughters and the concept of missing, linking the themes present in the narrative and the research.

Following this, I finished the video vignettes from the footage I filmed in Argentina and placed them into the hard copy of M/other as video stills, and into the digital copy as mp4 files. I inserted them at different places with enough space between them to create short ‘breathing spaces’ in the narrative for the viewer. The poetry and creative writing contain sensitive information and the videos add some balance to the overall feel of the narrative by providing pockets of stillness for the reader/viewer to pause, reflect and absorb, whilst aesthetically engaged.

The last addition to M/other was the wallpaper-like patterned images of pages from my teenage diaries that feature at the front and end of the book. These spreads are designed to give an indication of how many pages and books I filled with writing as a teen. The different kinds of paper, books, pen colours and handwriting styles can be seen in these images (see Figure 1) that represent the vast amount of data I had to sift through during the course of my research. Similarly, I included some images of the front and back covers of some of the teenage diaries throughout M/
other to again reiterate their importance as a central component of the research process.

The resulting final artwork, M/other, exists in the two versions to accommodate the breadth of creative media involved in its creation. The direction of the narrative dictated this decision as each creative medium emerged from the process of rereading my teenage diaries in response to events I had recorded within the diaries. The overall method of performing the research was a creative practice – this research has been a creative endeavour from the beginning of The Missed Encounter and has even extended to the presentation of this exegesis using visual marginalia (see Chapter A: Introduction).

The creative practices (methods) described above were chosen in response to the research questions listed at the beginning of this chapter and also as an extension of my artistic practice. I began this journey with the knowledge that I wanted to perform creative research and use my skills as a writer and artist to investigate a social phenomenon pertaining to adolescent resilience. I have come to the end of this journey by creating an artwork that is related to the original idea, but has taken the form of something different that I could not have predicted until I began the research. This is part of the process of ABER, specifically the foldings and unfoldings of a/r/tography.

Similarly, I encountered a number of difficulties, both personal and research-based, that were part of the journey towards the creation of M/other. A discussion of the ethical dimensions of The Missed Encounter and the issues to be managed is explore in the concluding chapter below (see Conclusion).

O.7 Summary

Autoethnography is the central methodology behind the research in The Missed Encounter and is a way to investigate larger cultural issues through the lens of the personal. It is enacted through the ABER approach of a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004) that as a living inquiry has guided the research and facilitated a deep engagement with creative practice through the simultaneous workings of the artist/researcher/teacher identities. Through the concept of ‘becoming’, the rhizomatic research process was driven by the unknown, of what was to unfold and unfurl in the relationship between knowing, doing and making (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). Speaking to the six renderings, or concepts,
of a/r/tography, *The Missed Encounter* questions the preconceived understandings of the mother/daughter dyad, a questioning made tangible in the artist’s book, *M/other*, a product of the creative research and of the artist’s body. It is through the artist/researcher/teacher identities where the role of the body is examined and shown to be a crucial part of the living inquiry. It is *my* body that performed the research as a methodological bricoleuse, and the body is an integral site for learning and teaching, especially in the context of creative practice.

Both autoethnography and a/r/tography advocate for a reflexive and creative way of being in the world and for research that is artful and transformative. This is ratified through the choice of creative practices (methods) used to perform the research, which in *The Missed Encounter* is a woven tapestry of creative writing, poetry, photography and video. Grounded in my daily creative practices that began in my teenage years through keeping a diary, the rereading of these diaries facilitate the creation of the artist’s book *M/other*.

The creative practices of a/r/t and ‘graphy’ – of visual art and creative writing – occurred simultaneously and continuously as research. As a vocative text (Nicol, 2008), *M/other* enabled the blending of sensitive personal materials, deep reflexive observations and rich interpretive descriptions to tell a story of self-reported posttraumatic growth. Art and text distil and deconstruct ideas of grief and loss in and through creative practice, marryng form and content together to create moments of pause for the consideration of how these concepts function in our interpersonal relationships. ‘Becoming and making’ guide this process and wedge creative practice in the in-between spaces, opening up (as opposed to pinning down) the potential for multiple meanings to arise.

*M/other* yielded some significant research findings that will now be unravelled through the six a/r/tograhical renderings of contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/metonymy, openings, reverberations and excess in the next chapter.
Renderings
As mentioned previously, *The Missed Encounter* is an arts-based educational research project that, using the methodologies of autoethnography and a/r/tography, aims to explore and artfully portray a journey of diarised posttraumatic growth [PTG] in and through creative arts pedagogies in the context of the mother/daughter dyad.

It is helpful to return to the research questions that were formulated initially in order to contextualise the analysis in this chapter. They are:

1) What is the connection between posttraumatic growth and creativity?

2) What is the relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?

3) How can creative arts pedagogies, with particular respect to posttraumatic growth, contribute to educational practice?

The first question is largely a question of drawing from the extant theory, whilst the second question framed the research design. The final question is a culmination of both theoretical and methodological findings from the first two questions seeking to extrapolate the purpose and benefits of the findings for educational research. In this chapter, the theoretical frameworks of eudaimonia and posttraumatic growth will be applied in order toanalyse the findings. These findings will be expressed through the language and structure of the six renderings of a/r/tography that provide a framework to conceptually integrate the creative work with the analysis and presentation of the research findings. They are *contiguity, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, openings, excess* and *living inquiry* (Irwin, 2004), and are presented in this order to reflect the methodological unfolding of the research. Springgay et al. (2005) argue that these renderings “are theoretical spaces through which to explore artistic ways of knowing and being research” (p. 899) in the context of this inquiry.

Beginning with *contiguity* (U.1), the role of the creative work, *M/other* as an artwork and an artful piece of research will be discussed as a coming together of text and image, and meanings associated with the space of posttraumatic growth are actually the context of the research. A *metonymic* diarising process was used to create *M/other* and also yielded, through *metaphor*, insights into the nature of the mother/daughter dyad (U.2). The *reverberations* (U.3) of imagery, evoked by
both written and visual forms, appear in *M/other* as an excess (U.4) of language and create openings (U.5) for meanings to emerge and surface. Diarising, found to be a valuable tool for well-being in *The Missed Encounter*, is in itself a living inquiry (U.6) that contributes to the unique methodology behind the research. The six renderings bleed into and influence one another, and are designed to open up meaning; they powerfully demonstrate the interwoven nature of this autoethnographic, a/r/tographic inquiry. I conclude the chapter by answering the final research question stated above by offering some suggestions of applications of this research to education, including *M/other* as a curriculum resource in secondary and tertiary education, the unique methodological design of *The Missed Encounter*, and the benefits of the personal diary as an instrument for learning. The discussion will begin with the first rendering of a/r/tography, *contiguity*.

U.1 *Contiguity*

*Art* is breathtaking—it stops us—moving from past to future while disrupting the present (Springgay, 2002, p. 15).

As the first of the six renderings of a/r/tography, contiguity represents the coming together of the visual and the written, and the initiation of, “a research process that is fluid, uncertain, and temporal” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 908). This has been the case for *The Missed Encounter*, a creative journey that influenced and was influenced by the nature of its living and breathing content. The first research question (What is posttraumatic growth?) will be addressed in this section through a discussion of the position at which the pre- and post-trauma life situations meet, which is the space of posttraumatic growth. In *The Missed Encounter* and indeed in my adolescent life, this space was filled with diarizing and creativity, two valuable tools that contributed to my well-being and resilience.

Leggo et al. (2011) argue that, “from an a/r/tographic lens, research is continually unfolding, transformed by context, not convention” (p. 248). Contiguity is a concept that magnifies this movement to join together the separate parts of the research journey. There are two components to *The Missed Encounter*: the creative work, *M/other*, and the teenage diaries. Produced at different times of my life – the diaries as a teenager, and *M/other* as a 30-year old woman – the research is, “an
unfolding between process and product, text and person, presence and absence, art and audience, teacher and student, author and reader” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 901). A significant amount of time elapsed between the writing of these two suites of texts (almost twenty years), thus they are coloured by the combination of my memories and life experiences, each of which was used as a tool to perform the research.

My process was therefore rhizomatic as I moved between the rereading of the teenage diaries and creating the components that would, when placed together, form M/other. “A rhizome is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum” say Irwin and Springgay (2008, p. 106), and each of the creative media within the pages of M/other were produced at different locations contiguous to one another. The poetry and creative writing were penned during an artist residency at Residencia Corazon in La Plata, Argentina, in May 2015, through a circular process of moving in and between the teenage diaries and memory.

This part of the creative process was often times emotionally straining, but was managed through the supportive and encouraging environment of the residency. There were two women visual artists at the residency – a Mexican painter and an American printmaker – and an American male poet. Their support was crucial to my ability to feel safe during this difficult part of the process and this added to the productivity of my practice. The critical feedback they provided on my work as it was being produced was valuable, as I was able to work through obstacles whilst immersed in the work. What I discovered from this process is that in order to access the details of those painful memories - it was vital that I had the time and space to explore them completely, which is what the residency provided. It was at this nexus of memory and life experience, of the diaries and my artistic practice, where posttraumatic growth [PTG] dwelled, both in the creation of the original teenage diaries and in the subsequent meta-diarizing process that produced M/other. The dialogue between my adolescent and present selves in M/other was where the struggle of PTG is captured and interpreted. That is what makes my research process meta-diaristic.

The Missed Encounter was, “an ongoing process of art making […] and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings” (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1224). Upon analysis, what the suite of my teenage diaries revealed is the co-existence of both positive and negative responses of childhood trauma. 

1 Definition of ‘Ambivalence’ https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambivalence Accessed 13/02/16
(Terr, 2003). A positive response is one that recognises and articulates what can be learned from trauma and a negative response may appear as anger, fear or blame where the trauma is seen as detrimental. An individual’s struggle between the pre- and post-trauma worlds is the space where PTG is located and engaging the diary to manage this struggle is beneficial because it externalises the issues through deliberate rumination (Triplett et al., 2012; Calhoun et al., 2000; Taku et al., 2009). Actively reflecting and responding to emotions and events as they arise, as a daily discipline through the writing process takes intangible thoughts and makes them part of the physical world by documenting them materially and tangibly on paper. Seeing these thoughts externalised as a record, particularly with difficult issues, allowed me as a teenager, and later as a researcher, to see them as a text or narrative to be expressed, understood and reconciled. The literature on PTG doesn’t disregard the impact of trauma or offer that trauma is positive; it posits that it’s possible to experience positive growth after an encounter with trauma as a result of the struggle between reconciling the pre- and post-trauma life situations (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). PTG is paradoxical because of the existence of both positive and negative emotions that every individual will make sense of in their own way. Built into the paradox of PTG is the capacity for individual transformation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995), which I experienced as a result of an engagement in creative practice and diarizing as both an adolescent and an adult. Thus, a key finding of this research is diarised posttraumatic growth [DPTG]. It differs from self-reported PTG (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001) because DPTG is not for the purposes of psychological evaluation, but rather for the purposes of individually constructed and crafted positive well-being. DPTG is an active process of self-soothing similar to Pennebaker and Evan’s (2014) expressive writing techniques, and is powerful because it fosters self-discipline and encourages autonomy, an important developmental skill for adolescents (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

The key to the process of DPTG was the daily practice of diary keeping, the repetition of writing a page a day, right before bedtime and ‘clocking off’ by writing the time at the conclusion of the entry. What this practice fostered was a type of ‘brain dump’ where the contents of my day were taken out of my mind and recorded on paper, a process that was cathartic and precipitated rest and sleep. Diarising became a ritual I performed nightly, a way to check-in on my well-being and mental health that was entirely self-directed and self-controlled. It was this ritual that nurtured my personal growth and cultivated the self-discipline mentioned above, which filtered out into the rest of my life,

2 “Mothering”, Dictionary definition: http://www.dictionary.com/browse/mothering Accessed 02/02/17
particularly useful in my formal education, and beyond to this research. What diarising afforded me was an element of control over the day-to-day structuring of my life; I couldn’t control the events that happened or how other people acted, but what I could control was what I chose to record and write down on paper, in the safety and solace of my diaries.

Critical reflection became more prevalent in the later diaries as I matured and it is a skill I utilised in the making of M/other, a somewhat meta-diaristic process of analysing the content of my diaries for traces of PTG. The reason I use the expression meta-diaristic is because M/other mixes three different genres of writing (Hogan, 1991) – the confessional, the diary and the memoir. As a creative form of diarising, M/other re-stories my adolescence experience using creative media and is itself a diary, a type of installation (Lejeune, 2009). As a researcher, I approached the creation of M/other in an analytical way, searching for evidence of growth and my recorded relationship with my mother in the historical documents that are my diaries. The two moments of diarising – firstly as a teenager and secondly as a researcher – speak to my own need for stability and consistency amidst tumultuous life circumstances. As a teenager, I wrote everyday in an effort to support myself emotionally, and as a researcher, I wrote everyday (either in a diary or for M/other) to continue a commitment to a creatively engaged life. I have found that diarising joins together confession and discipline, observation and interpretation, through the consistency of a committed writing practice.

U.2 Metaphor/metonymy

In The Missed Encounter, my teenage diaries were extracted from their original context and used as inspiration for a new body of creative work – M/other – through a combination of rereading and memory. This metonymic and analytical process plays an integral role in the portrayal of DPTG in the context of the mother-daughter dyad: “metaphor through its substitution of signifiers and metonym through its displacement of subject/object relations” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 118).

Metaphor is used in M/other as a way to discuss difficult concepts. There are a number of metaphors that are woven through M/other, including: the body as a site for loss; creativity (particularly related to art-making and writing) as a tool for agency; and fire as a metaphor for addiction. I also propose the notion that mothering is a metonymic process grounded in ambivalence in the context
of the particular mother-daughter dyad portrayed in *M/other*. This idea influenced the naming of the artist’s book *M/other*, which refers to the concept that my mother is both mother and ‘other’, which I will unpack more fulsomely at the end of this section.

I concur with Pelias (2004) who sees arts-based research texts, “collect[ing] in the body: an ache, a fist, a soup” (p. 11). The most prominent concept in *M/other* is loss and it is used to critically explore the mother/daughter dyad in great depth. Springgay et al. (2005) write that, “loss can be visualized or imaged, for example a tear or a hole cut or worn into fabric. Loss is also metonymic, allowing knowledge to be split open, revealed, and ruptured” (p. 906). In *M/other*, loss is a concept woven through the entire artist’s book. For example, in poem ‘b’, loss is discussed in terms of its impact on the body: “what of the tingling / waves of feeling that hover / over stomachs and hearts / fleetingly forging paths / of knowledge / through the jungle of confusion / running deep, deep, deep / beneath muscles and sinew / in each and every body?” (Piper, 2016, p. 25). I use the body as a metaphor to examine the concept of loss throughout *M/other* because it is the vehicle through which sensation and experience occur. The body, in the context of the mother-daughter dyad, is where the relationship between mothers and daughters begins, at conception and the moment of childbirth (Douglass, 1999). The body is the instrument that creates, makes and allows individuals to connect to the world – it is the barrier between internal and external experience. For example, poem ‘a’ in *M/other* uses imagery of hands and feet to deliver the central traumatic event of my childhood, namely the day I left my mother. Through repetition, poem ‘a’ suggests that hands can be used for both good and bad activities. I viewed my hands as tools for creation, touching and survival; my hands would help me to save myself.

Loss in *M/other* is conceived of in physical and emotional ways as gaps, holes or empty spaces that exist within my mother-daughter dyad, which I loaded with an engagement in diary writing and art-making. The body features heavily throughout *M/other* and is used to describe both of my parents, particularly the severity of my father’s back injury and the prevalence of my mother’s alcoholism. The body is the site for loss, however loss is also depicted in other ways, such as the holes in fabric, which is in line with the Springgay et al. (2005) quote above. This can be seen in poem ‘d’, in the lines: “I pushed my fingers through the holes / in the fabric, I tore at the circles / like a deranged dog, clawing / at what I didn’t understand but knew to be true” (Piper, 2016, p. 30). Further, the cigarette
burn holes in the sheets on my bed from my mother are a metaphor for my worldview – hinting at a loss of innocence due to being exposed to my mother’s addictions. Loss is the physical absence of the mother I yearned for and the connection between her and I that was continually compromised.

Similarly, the photograph that spans p. 40-41 in *M/other* visually portrays a loss of words, as I digitally removed all of the text except the phrase: “Fuck, it’s not even a family. There’s love, sure, but there’s no unity” (ibid, p. 40-41). Loss is depicted visually in the suite of photographs in *M/other* through an absence of people or actual images of my mother and I. This was intentional so that the reader may place themselves into the narrative without the distraction of the visual representations of my family or myself. What this suggests is that even though my mother and I were physically separated, we were still connected emotionally, as I continued to process the trauma of living with her as I matured through adolescence. This processing is revealed in the pages of my diaries.

As a researcher, I created the metaphor of fire to represent my mother’s alcoholism in *M/other*, as from my rereading of the diaries I discovered her alcoholism played a pivotal role in my interpretation of the mother-daughter dyad. For example, poem ‘d’ uses the metaphor of cigarette burn holes to allude to my knowledge of my mother’s addictions and realization that my life circumstances were less than ideal: “I didn’t smoke but I was burnt in a way / that seemed to indicate / I had been through the fire / and lived” (Piper, 2016, p. 30). In the same poem, the second stanza holds a measure of optimism, an acknowledgment that there is some external support, but that it is rare. Additionally, in poem ‘i’, fire is used as a metaphor for anger in the form of the arguments and yelling between my mother and I: “I watched my words combust / like I was breathing fire / heat scorched life around me / my mouth darkened with soot” (Piper, 2016, p. 55). Metaphor is used in *M/other* as a way to show what certain situations feel like. Fire burns and leaves behind remnants, which in *M/other* take the form of holes in fabric (the cigarette burn holes described above) that indicate a loss of connection, a loss of my mother’s sobriety and a lack of continuity in my adolescence.

Grief and loss in the mother-daughter dyad are not simply processes or concepts to be explained, they also leave marks on the body and affect the ways in which the body functions. The loss of my mother’s physical presence in my life is conceptualised in *M/other* as a mark of love, as the space that love used to occupy between my mother and I. Loss is not only a feeling but also an
emotion and a physical phenomena, conceptualised best in Edelman’s (2014a) concept of motherless daughters, a life situation where a woman loses her mother to death or abandonment.

Edelman (ibid), a motherless daughter herself, believes that loss is a large and looming presence, often described as missing pieces, voids, empty spaces and holes in the lives of daughters, an experience I relate to directly. The interplay of the absence of my mother and the presence of her alcoholism and addiction colours M/other where both exist simultaneously in a metonymic dance. As Springgay et al. (2005) argue, “metonymical meaning is not intended to close spaces with singular interpretations but instead, allow for the ambiguity of meaning to shift in space and time” (p. 904). In M/other, the narrative moves between the past and the present to create a more nuanced and complex portrayal of the mother-daughter dyad that I experienced. I concur with Bojczyk et al. (2011), who found that ambivalence is a key feature of the mother-daughter dyad, specifically from the daughter’s perspective. Ambivalence can be defined as, “the state of having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something or someone”. As daughters age, they must separate from their mothers, a process called individuation (Charles et al., 2001), and to do this they must entertain ambivalence. Ambivalence was crucial to the maintenance of the relationship my mother and I shared; I identified with her biologically as my mother but needed to dissociate with her identity as an alcoholic in order to survive. For example, in poem ‘q’: “I learned ambivalence from her / the master of inconsistency / I folded love and indifference / hanging them anywhere and every- / where I could” (Piper, 2016, p. 87). However, I discovered as I wrote the poetry for M/other, that in the re-storying of my past I began to appreciate both the good and bad aspects of what I had experienced. I began to see the lack of my mother’s presence as a gift, which forced me to seek out other methods of support, which is an example of DPTG. Such is the power of diarising as it gave me the ability to develop equanimity and to accept the reality of my past – even though my mother wasn’t able to be the mother I needed, she did the best that she could given the circumstances. Developing the ambivalence I needed to survive as a teenager was nurtured by diarising because my diary was a safe space for me to struggle with the contradictory ideas I experienced about who I wanted my mother to be and the reality of who she actually was. This skill was particularly useful when my mother passed away in November 2014 as I had a place to go to work through the experience of motherloss in my own time and at my own pace, which was an example of accessing
DPTG during my research journey.

I have experienced motherloss twice in my life – firstly as a teenager when I left my mother to live with my father, and secondly after my mother’s death. Like Ruddy (2008), “I find my mother ever-present in my writing because she is the dominant leitmotif of my life, and I have no tricks of fiction with which to look at myself without seeing her shadow” (p. 41). I used my teenage diaries to connect with the part of me that was also a part of my mother. It was her presence in my diaries that enabled me to stitch our relationship together, in the writings of my daily life where our bond was maintained.

Diarising was a survival tool in adolescence, a metaphorical life raft that I used to navigate my way through and into adulthood. As a teenager, I used the diaries as a tool for mothering, as a way to self-soothe and contribute to my well-being. Mothering is defined here as an action in the context of diarising: “to acknowledge oneself the author of; assume as one’s own”\(^2\). Within the pages of the suite of diaries, I treated myself with the care and affection normally associated with mothering, performed from mother to child. Positive and encouraging language features heavily throughout my diaries; this had a tremendous impact on my well-being as an adolescent. \(M/other\) honours my adolescent struggle in its depiction of a dynamic mother-daughter dyad that was, at times, difficult, yet also underscored by the love and ineffable connection that a mother and daughter share. The mothering I performed as a diarist towards myself was a deeply creative act that was in itself metonymic – my diaries were a substitute for the relationship I could not share with my mother. I had to create the support I craved from my mother as a teenager, which I did in and through the act of diary keeping. In this sense, the diaries are a physical manifestation of ‘the missed encounter’ that was the mother-daughter dyad. Understanding the diaries as ‘the missed encounter’ yielded a revelation about the nature of their audience: my diaries were epistolary in nature, existing as a series of informal letters to my mother, an epiphany I experienced after my mother’s death that stemmed directly from my research. This highly significant finding is discussed through the third rendering, \(reverberations\).
Reverberations in a/r/tography, are, “situated within the intensity of an event in constant movement—movement toward possibilities, toward an unfolding of that which is yet to be known, toward the potential of potential” (Irwin, 2013, p. 202). In *The Missed Encounter*, the movement of motherloss reverberated the research, initially connected to the childhood trauma of leaving my mother, then again when my mother died at the end of my first year of candidature. As discussed above through metaphor/metonymy, both my teenage diaries and *M/other* are diaristic in nature and engage metaphor to communicate difficult concepts, such as loss. The revelation that my teenage diaries were in effect, actually letters to my mother is a finding that is significantly important to this research and to traditional ideas of the personal diary as a genre without audience (Leujeune, 2009). This finding will now be unpacked.

In a/r/tography, reverberations are the movements that bring about new meanings in a text (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004). This is a question of method, of the energy behind what is created, which in this research is the process that produced *M/other*. It was a process that began with the rereading of my diaries and as I moved through this activity, new meanings surfaced pertaining to the function of the diaries and their audience. In my diaries, as a teenager, I addressed an audience separate to myself, a ‘you’, by using second person language. This suggests the presence of an other - an audience beyond myself. The details I recorded were intimate and specific to my context, mundane and often factual; it was as if I was retelling the events to someone I thought should have been there to witness them. The diaries were extracted from their adolescent context for the purpose of analysis in *The Missed Encounter*, and it was from the distance of time and benefit of life experience that I could see beyond the surface of the content and deeper into the actual purposes of the writing. In the broader context of my life the diaries were a call for connection, manifest in a series of short texts that read like letters, because of the way I ended each entry (noting the time and offering a ‘sign off’). This pause at the end of each page marked the end of the day but also signaled a continuation, an acknowledgement of the progression of time. Further, the personal diary is similar to a letter because both texts record a moment in time, paying particular attention to details as the author customizes the content. In the context of *The Missed Encounter*, viewing the diaries through
an epistolary lens (Sameshima, 2007) speaks to the nature of the mother-daughter dyad – it was a foundational relationship for me and even in its absence it was an ever-present force, something I consistently wrote towards.

Conceptualizing the suite of diaries as letters to my absent mother alters the form of the personal diary entirely from a tool for self-expression to a method for connection. My diarising was a poignant cry for mothering, a comforting strategy that replaced my mother’s presence and called her forth into my daily life. In poem ‘w’ in M/other, I write: “I wrote to you / without telling you / without meaning to / at a time I needed you most / at a time I needed to go / and be one of the many” (Piper, 2016, p. 103). When my mother passed away in November 2014, a mere three days after my Confirmation of Candidature presentation, I returned to the pages of my teenage diaries and at once, their epistolary nature was evident. I realized in that moment that I was speaking to my mother directly, telling her of the life I was cultivating that was separate to hers, piecing together a narrative that was mine and mine alone: “finding comfort in story / I told myself everything / from art to love to family / I told myself everything” (ibid, p. 103). M/other thus reinterprets my adolescent experience through the lens of research to portray self-expression as an installation (Lejeune, 2009); how small acts, when performed as often as possible, can have a big impact on individual well-being.

I responded to the realisation of my diaries as letters to my mother as a methodological bricoleuse (Denzin, 1999), understanding that this significant discovery would need a new method of presentation that I would have to invent. What I discovered through this process is that the grief of motherloss is a multisensory experience that affects every aspect of life, from the way I perceived myself, to the physical manifestations of loss, such as crying. Motherloss in The Missed Encounter isn’t contained within the pages of my teenage diaries but lives within my daily experience of engaging with the world. Thus in order to express this, I had to create a new tool to portray this discovery: the video vignette.

I subsequently created five video vignettes to reference, in an visually theoretical way, the five life areas of posttraumatic growth, namely: a sense of new opportunities in life, an increase sense of personal strength, changes in personal relationships, greater appreciation for life, and a deepening of one’s spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). The videos are an offering for the
reader/viewer to engage in grief and loss as an event that extends beyond the pages of M/other, to step inside of my experience of motherloss. This is crucial to understanding how individualized lived experience really is. As an adolescent, I desperately craved a relationship with my mother even if it hurt me. As an adult, I understood that our bond existed as it was even if it wasn’t a positive influence. Motherloss became the way I connected and related to my mother as her alcoholism prevented us from engaging in the traditional forms of bonding, such as open conversation or the daily experience of sharing meals. By showing in moving image and sound, rather than describing solely through words, the contradictory and often jarring experience of the mother-daughter dyad I was a part of, meaning-making is an act of interpretation on behalf of the reader/viewer. It is my goal to facilitate meaning-making that is specific to each reader/viewer of M/other to directly reference how I made meaning out of my past, which was an action constantly in flux. Meaning-making is central to the concept of eudaimonia (Ryff, 2014) as explored in previous chapters, and The Missed Encounter is fueled by a eudaimonic ontology that views human beings as wired for growth where transformation is an essential part of life (Fosha & Schneider, 2008). In the literature on eudaimonia, engaging in meaning-making activities promotes growth and thriving for individuals (Fowers, 2012a) so it is my hope that readers may experience some growth and transformation in their own lives as a result of experiencing the meaning-making process embedded in M/other.

Time is an essential ingredient in the unfolding of the videos and, like Finley and Knowles (1995) I am, “especially interested to discover and make more explicit how artistic and aesthetic experiences and events have shaped thinking about research” (p. 110). It takes time to view these videos; I encourage a lingering with them, with headphones on in order to be immersed in the sound and the sensory experience of the audio. Reducing or removing the distractions of the immediate environment, I hope to encourage an experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) for the reader/viewer to mimic my experience of diarizing as an activity I could get completely absorbed in.

Similarly, it takes time to read the written materials, and to view the photographs. The photographs included in M/other document the last place my mother and I lived together, but they are also a metaphor for the passing of time and how we choose to remember the events we experience. Motherloss is an experience that is spatial as well as psychological, and the video vignettes are also contiguous, containing both spoken word poetry and moving image, as abstract depictions of loss.
and mothering. Combining text and image through a layering process suggests that motherloss contains multiple, often competing, parts, which can be disorienting and overwhelming (Edelman, 2014a). I seek to show the contradictory nature of motherloss through the videos and give the reader/viewer a more nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of what this kind of loss may feel like.

Reverberating through M/other as moments of pause between text and image, the videos rupture the traditional static nature of the book format. The videos allow for a ‘breaking open’ of the page through moving image and sound, two mediums that alter the flow of reading from left to write (how text is read) to move around the page (how artworks are often viewed). This is intentional and speaks directly to the ways I experienced the grief of motherloss – at times I would be overcome with emotion that seemingly arose out of nowhere, interrupting my normal routine and daily life. M/other shows these moments visually through the video vignettes, further supporting the idea that motherloss is an experiential and non linear experience; it is rhizomatic and expands outwards in perpetual motion, in waves of grief that peak and trough at various stages through the lifecycle.

M/other is a text in constant movement between the past (trauma) and present (research) that evolved inside of my life as an artist/researcher/teacher. The narrative shifts between the partially fictionalised details of my parents’ pasts, the reflections of my researcher-self in the present in the content of my teenage diaries, and the joining of these two processes for the purpose of pedagogy. The teaching moments in M/other are in the narrative and in the methodology – in what I am discussing (the mother-daughter dyad) and how I’m discussing it (the creative media). Like Leggo (2014), “I am always in motion, significantly energized by emotion” (p. 144). This movement manifests in the tone and style of the writing in M/other, traversing both prose and poetry, moving from the re-telling of my childhood trauma to reflections on the mother-daughter dyad in the present day (the video vignettes). The narrative is designed to keep the reading in-movement, since familial relationships are living, breathing phenomena where meaning is constructed relationally and over time (Faulkner, 2014). M/other is imbued with movement, as the spaces, places, histories and memories of my childhood swirl in and around the excerpts from my teenage diaries, echoing through each other in a situation where, “my research is my writing. I search, again and again, by writing into places that are both familiar and unfamiliar. I write in order to learn. I know nothing without engaging in writing” (Leggo, 2014, p. 145). Writing gave me, as a teenager, the ability to
search for my mother and to indeed create her in various forms, depending on what (and when) I needed her to be. She existed to me as a narrative, until I began this research then during the course of *The Missed Encounter* journey I came to accept her, as well as her alcoholism, as part of her identity and the mother I had but didn’t always like. Creating M/other was a cathartic process and writing has always been a healing activity for me. Writing is also a tool for learning and in *The Missed Encounter*, the type of learning under examination is both self-directed and personal.

I concur with Boud (2001) who asserts that the diary is closely tied to learning, regardless of content, due to the very nature of the writing process. The type of learning that occurred in my teenage diaries fostered self-discipline. The ritual of writing before bedtime and noting the time I finished each entry created consistency (Lejeune, 2009) in a life situation that was, at times, chaotic. Reflection is a significant element of the diarising process (Schön, 1983) and M/other involved this as I moved between the creative writing of my research and analysing the diaries. As Lejeune (2009) articulates, the diary, “does not purport to take in all of existence, to resuscitate the past, or read a person’s fate. For brief periods, it sculpts life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time” (p. 173). In my teenage diaries, the sculpting of life is done through mundane details about everyday life and lived experience that do not necessarily contain traditional narrative structures (ibid). Due to the intimate construction of the text, many of the contextual and descriptive details may not be recorded, which has implications for how these texts are read and therefore activated by people other than the author. This is where this research moves the emphasis away from the diaries and towards their importance during adolescence. As a site for self-expression and creativity, the diaries provided a foundation upon which I built my world, stabilised it and navigated the struggles of adolescence.

Reverberations unsettle meaning and allow for the interplay of creative media to produce new insights. In *The Missed Encounter*, the combination of poetry, prose, video vignettes and photographs was designed to render visible different aspects of the narrative. The prose pieces are portraits of my family and myself in dialogue with the poetry, which is primarily concerned with exploring the relationship of the creative process to growth after trauma. The photographs significantly, contain no characters or other living beings and ground the narrative in place in order to create a space for the reader/viewer to step into the story. The images are juxtaposed with the video vignettes that are
also non-figurative and offer moments of pause for the reader’s contemplation of growth and loss.
What happens in the spaces between the creative components can be understood through the fourth
rendering called *openings* that will now be discussed.

U.4 Openings

In *a/r/tography*, *openings* are the in-between spaces, the folds between artist/researcher/teacher
identities where meaning is negotiated between the a/r/tographer and their reader (Pourchier,
2010). My role as an artist supports my identity as a researcher and teacher, also bringing into focus
the relationship of creativity to well-being in *The Missed Encounter*. This rendering, openings, is a lens
that is useful in the construction of meaning from an a/r/tographic text. By looking at the meaning
produced between things – between text and image, between artist/researcher/teacher, between
author and reader – new insights and knowledge can be garnered and explored. In *M/other*, there
are two openings that will be discussed as important to the overall reading of the text: the poetry,
both with and without alphabetical titling, and the video vignettes. A key methodological finding
of this research is that words and text can be used in visual ways to alter how meaning is received
and this was achieved through the re-storying of the mother-daughter dyad.

The very first opening in *M/other* is on the front cover of the artist’s book where the ‘slash’
of *a/r/tography*, the oblique (Leggo, 2009), divides the title. Embedded in this titling is the familiar
noun *mother*, but the slash separates the word into ‘m’ and ‘other’, suggesting a dual role, that my
mother was both mother and other. It is also an identification with my mother, the ‘m’ standing for
my name, Marion, and the other representative of the relationship between self and other – that
mother and daughter exist in relation to one another.

The poetry in *M/other* is designed to represent a similar idea. There are poems that hold a
letter of the alphabet as a title, and four poems that do not. The untitled poems can be found on
pages 32-33, 57, 89 and 104 and they shift visually across and down the page intentionally, designed
to disrupt the traditional left to right, top to bottom pattern of reading a poem. The content varies
for each of these poems but the language is reflective and descriptive, offering breaks in the
continuous narrative for the reader/viewer to learn more about the characters and the context.
In contrast, the alphabetically titled poems unravel the primary narrative, using metaphor to communicate the visceral nature of motherloss. I have used every letter of the alphabet to reference the surplus of words that exist in the suite of my teenage diaries. As an adolescent I was obsessed with writing and what words could do. As a researcher, language has become my primary tool through which to explore academic ideas and to create meaning in a language I understand, which in M/other is the language of poetry. I use the poem as a vehicle to peel back the layers of the relationship I had with my mother and re-story our history in M/other. The re-storying allowed for a questioning of my personal history, a re-examination of the past in light of the present through an autoethnographic methodology. The use of the five life areas taken from the literature on posttraumatic growth provided a guide when rereading my teenage diaries and also a lens through which to create M/other. The general life areas are: a change in personal relationships where an individual can feel connected to other people who suffer while also experiencing closer relationships with others; an acknowledgement of new opportunities that were not there previously; a deepening of spiritual life or shift in an individual’s belief system; an increase in personal strength; and lastly, more appreciation for the life an individual has (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). I mined the suite of my personal diaries for evidence of these life areas and when I found excerpts that were appropriate, I extracted them from their context and used some of them as the inspiration for the creative writing in M/other. Using the PTG life areas as a model helped to focus my data collection and analysis. What I found was that these broad life areas were affected by the trauma I experienced as a child, specifically with my mother’s alcoholism. It was because of this trauma that I sought out deeper relationships as a teenager, particularly with schoolteachers and older women. I turned to art-making and writing as a way to explore my spirituality, celebrate my personal strength and ability to survive trauma, and to also create meaning out of what I went through as a child. The proposed DPTG uses the five life areas as a foundation and amplifies the benefit of deliberate rumination in the process of growth after trauma. M/other is an example of DPTG because it shows how the different areas of my life were affected in both positive and negative ways by the struggle I experienced as a result of childhood trauma.

M/other distils moments from my childhood and adolescence in order to examine their meaning. Opening up my personal history for others is an act of exchange, implying that meaning is
co-constructed between self and other (Faulkner, 2014). I concur with Springgay (2002) who writes, “creating art is the rewriting of what is private and what is public, the reversal and displacement of these realms and their opposition in order to actively assert, displace and assemble new ways of knowing and being” (p. 8). Examining how and why I navigated my adolescence in the particular way I did is a eudaimonic task, where “eudaimonia is conceptualized as a subjective, cognitive-affective condition, a feeling that accompanies right desire, that is, activities consistent with one’s best potentials” (Waterman & Schwartz, 2013, p. 104). Eudaimonia is concerned with a holistic view of one’s life (Fowers, 2012a) where life experience is individualized; what nurtures well-being in one person will be different for another. The writing and art-making described in M/other carved an opening for growth and thriving to occur for me as a teenager, not solely because of their presence in my daily life individually, but from the combination of the two activities. This is represented in the different poetic titling discussed above and the intentional focus on each alphabetical letter as a unit for growth, also creating forward momentum through the narrative – when taken together to form M/other, each letter is vital to the overall telling of the narrative. Similarly, the concepts under investigation – growth, loss, grief and trauma – are not isolated, one time events, but are subjective (Rendon, 2015). They arrive at various times during the course of the lifespan, thus cultivating daily practices is one way to create consistency and increase opportunities for well-being (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014). Another way to do this is to be exposed to the stories and struggles of others (Rendon, 2015).

*The Missed Encounter* offers my personal experience in the public forum of academic research in order to facilitate a conversation about lived experience that may not have existed previous to the work being shared. M/other functions in a similar way as an artwork and creative writing connect with the reader/viewer in a multisensory manner. In this vein, the research can be both rationally absorbed and viscerally experienced, taken into the life of the viewer/reader as an aesthetic moment that exists beyond the academic context. This can be seen most prominently in the openings created by the five video vignettes in M/other.

The video vignettes in M/other exist as still images in the physical, material copy of the artist’s book and as moving images (videos) in the digital version. The videos were created in response to, and in conversation with, the written materials, and were filmed on site at Residencia Corazon and
in a rehearsal room on the top floor of the Pasaje Dardo Roche, both in La Plata, Argentina. My experience of motherloss was disorienting and different to the trauma I went through as a child, thus filming the footage in a foreign country in a multi-purpose space that was empty when not in use was the most appropriate creative decision I could make. The videos portray grief and loss in an experiential way so it was vital that they look and sound different to the rest of the material in M/other.

There are five videos in M/other and they are defined as video vignettes. I have chosen to describe them here as vignettes because whilst they are an integral part of the artists’ book, they also exist as individual artworks that encapsulate different experiences of motherloss. As such they are both embedded and transcend the research text (Cutcher, 2015). There are five videos in total – Empty rooms, Hidden, Ruins, Little Fishy and Stairs – that will now be described because they each present a portrayal of what motherloss feels like from a personal perspective, which is part of the autoethnographic element of the research.

Image 4 Still image from the video vignette titled Empty rooms. Adapted from M/other (p. 37), by M. E. Piper, 2016, Unpublished artist’s book. Copyright 2017 by Marion E. Piper. Adapted with permission.
Empty rooms (2015) layers audio and video together in an abstract musing on the embodied aspects of memory. Two layers of imagery shift in and out of focus as a disembodied voice – my voice – calls to question the linearity of memory (Ellis, 1999). The title, Empty rooms, refers to both the physical spaces in the video and alludes to the metaphor of loss as an empty room, also mentioned in the literature on motherless daughters (Edelman, 2014a). Empty rooms was the first video created in the suite and portrays both the inside and outside of the rehearsal space in the cultural center. I chose to use the inside of the room and the audio from outside of the room to represent the multisensory nature of lived experience. This video is located next to a diary entry image and the poem ‘g,’ which expresses the ways I understood my mother as a combination of different parts that worked together to form the metonym I knew as ‘mother’. Reconceptualising my mother as a series of smaller parts, enabled me to work towards accepting our shared past and understanding that context played a large part in what actually happened during my childhood. In this sense, the suite of videos here are somewhat diaristic (Harris, 2016) and a method I used to cope with both my personal history and the weight of grief associated with my mother’s death.

The spoken word poem that overlays the visuals was written during the artist residency and references the difficult process of remembering past hurt, which in this instance refers to the rereading of my teenage diaries. The visuals demanded another element to connect them to the artist’s book and this is where spoken word poetry provides a bridge between the written and the visual, through the audio overlay. The juxtaposition of the sharp angles of the buildings with the softness of my voice reflects the dual nature of loss; multiple emotions and contradictory thoughts can exist simultaneously. Empty rooms is a reflective narrative on what loss feels like, specifically in the mother-daughter dyad.
In contrast, Hidden (2015) is a musing on grief. Using the image of a corner in a room to ground the work in physical space, words appear on the screen as a poem, unfolding. A layer of video appears – footage of light on a wall – as the poem suggests the ordinary places where grief might hide in daily life. This video is placed in the text on its own, occupying a full two-page spread, between poems ‘i’ and ‘j’. This intentional placement reflects the impact of the trauma on both my routine and body as I searched for ways to reconcile the old situation (living with my mother) with the new situation (living with my father and grandparents) that is the space of posttraumatic growth. What I discovered, particularly when rereading my diaries, is that the ordinary and often insignificant details of the relationship with my mother were the triggers that would induce grief and sadness.

The video ends on the line “what we carry in our bodies / we become” (Piper, 2016) again referring to the role of the body in how we experience the world. Words are used visually here in
a similar way to how they function as spoken word poetry in *Empty rooms*. Words bounce around the screen and around the space, fading in and out to mirror the way they are spoken. Inclusive language, such as ‘we’, is used to make the viewer implicit in the search for spaces to hide grief. *Hidden* visually explores how words can be used to hide or mask emotions, and this can be seen in the relationship between the words and the visuals, that blur and shift together and against each other during the course of the video.

Image 6  Still image from the video vignette titled Ruins. Adapted from *M/other* (p. 12), by M. E. Piper, 2016, Unpublished artist’s book. Copyright 2017 by Marion E. Piper. Adapted with permission.

*Ruins* (2015) is more chaotic and full of movement in contrast to *Empty rooms* and *Hidden*. This video takes the viewer on a journey through rubbish and enacts the metaphor of the ‘ruins’ of trauma. *Ruins* is placed in *M/other* after the poem ‘a’ that describes the trauma of leaving my mother. The footage shows abandoned objects and garbage using slow motion and layered imagery. The reddish tinge to the footage is there to allude to the past, to a painful experience that was disorienting, which reflects the first poem in *M/other*. Fading out to almost a complete white screen at 00:55secs, my feet briefly appear in the bottom of the screen in order to bring the viewer’s presence directly into the video. The perspective and continual panning back and forth is designed
to create the feeling of confusion – am I searching for something, or, am I lost and looking for a way out? The footage fades to black after lingering on a black plastic bag pinned to the wall and this moment of pause is included to create space for the viewer’s eyes to rest on a focal point after so much movement. The volume is very quiet deliberately to encourage silence and reflection. This video contains no poetry or words, as a way to counter the other videos, and to allude to the shattering of an individual’s worldview that often occurs post-trauma.

Image 7 Still image from the video vignette titled Little Fishy. Adapted from M/other (p. 106-107), by M. E. Piper, 2016, Unpublished artist’s book. Copyright 2017 by Marion E. Piper. Adapted with permission.

Little Fishy (2015) uses haunting audio and blue hues to create a dreamlike vision of a memory from my past. My mother used to sing this song to me as a child when I couldn’t sleep and it is repeated a number of times in this video. Little Fishy is placed between a photo of a diary entry and an image of the street sign where my mother and I used to live, St Kevins Ave. Little Fishy leads into the poem ‘v’ that explores the interconnected nature of mothers’ and daughters’ behaviours.
It begins with the muffled sounds of traffic as the video fades in to reveal the view of three windows side by side, and two ballet practice bars in between them. There is a fade between this visual and a close up of a scuffmark on the floor that represents the tension between mother and daughter, of my experience of being both inside and outside of that relationship as it unfolded in adolescence. It is a visual representation of ambivalence. My voice sings the echoing refrain of “don’t cry little fishy, don’t cry, don’t cry” as the footage continues to fade in and out. The sound of a vehicle’s breaks squeaks in the background and the video comes to a close as ambulance sirens howl symbolizing the moment my mother passed away.

**Image 8** Still image from the video vignette titled Stairs. Adapted from M/other (p. 12), by M. E. Piper, 2016, Unpublished artist’s book. Copyright 2017 by Marion E. Piper. Adapted with permission.

Stairs (2015) functions in similar ways to the previous videos. Stairs is a dizzying representation of the mother-daughter dyad enacted through the reversal of the footage and audio of a person climbing a flight of stairs. Part of the audio is my voice, a spoken word poem that discusses the ambivalence within the mother/daughter dyad: “difference breeds a diversity / that our eyes couldn’t
see” (Piper, 2017, p. 12). Using two layers of video and two layers of audio, Stairs includes a piano soundtrack that I composed to accompany the spoken word poem because both my mother and I connected over our love of music and singing, a point that is reiterated in the final poem in M/other. It is a light refrain that reinforces the search for understanding that the poem ultimately speaks of. My mother’s alcoholism was the repetitive refrain of my childhood, manifest as the repetitive piano refrain and video in Stairs, constantly coming back into view and disrupting any progress the two of us would make in our relationship.

What the above videos demonstrate is how fragile an individual’s self-narrative can be, particularly during adolescence. Each of the five videos represent the variety of reactions I have had to motherloss in the two events described earlier: firstly, the trauma of leaving my mother to live with my father; and secondly, the grief that accompanied my mother’s death in 2014, just days after my Confirmation of Candidature. The ambivalence I experienced during both of these situations is symbolized in the layering of video imagery and abstract use of audio that, at times, is chaotic yet also carries a softness or tenderness. This is the dual experience of motherloss and it directly impacted my self-narrative as I moved from adolescence into adulthood, from the daughter of an alcoholic to a motherless daughter (Edelman, 2014).

Self-narratives vary exponentially from person to person and, “they are always shaped by implicit theories of narrative and narration” (Neisser, 1994, p. 9). In the process of narrating our lives, elements of fiction may creep in and manifest through storytelling, as they have through the videos explored above and through the creative work. This method of working and creating through storytelling is relevant to posttraumatic growth because, “stories frame our social awareness and result in our social concepts” (Baker, 2014, online). My teenage diaries contain an evolving self-narrative mediated through creative expression, one that was in constant movement and depicted through words and imagery. M/other is an opening into my struggles as the daughter of an alcoholic and an amplification of the self-narrative I constructed as a teenager to survive adolescence. I told myself repeatedly through the diaries and later through the creative work in this research that I was strong, independent, self-aware, creative and going to ‘make it’ – this language nurtured my growth in adolescence and beyond through its positively geared optimism and its repetitive, written refrain. Language is an essential ingredient for growth in this research and through the final rendering of
Excess, the production of M/other from an overflow of language (from my teenage diaries), and the other ways in which excess exists in The Missed Encounter will be explored.

U.5 Excess

Excess is the spilling out of meaning from a text, the places through which meaning slips and seeps out into the world, the meeting point of interior and exterior worlds. This rendering explores how excess manifests in different forms in The Missed Encounter, focusing on the role of language and how McDermott’s (2010) three questions - “What purpose does it serve? Whom does it serve? And, most importantly, does it affect change?” (p. 7) – can be used to evaluate ABER projects. These questions were chosen because they directly address what meaning can be drawn from the research, why it is important and who can benefit, ensuring some potential real world applications of the research for the benefit of others beyond the academy.

M/other overflows with meaning, generated in the gaps and crevasses from text-to-text, text-to-image, and image-to-image. It is the physical page in M/other that is the ‘slash’, the oblique (Leggo, 2012), in a/r/tographical terms, dividing ideas and media by being in a state of perpetual movement and becoming as the pages turn. Excess is the a/r/t of a/r/tography, as Winters et al. (2009) argue, “the a/r/tographer not only moves between the identities of artist, researcher, teacher, and writer, she also continually shifts positions within the social context (e.g., action researcher/researcher as observer, teacher as guide/teacher as facilitator, artist/art critic)” (p. 5). My role in the research journey was one of excess; I was both the researcher and the researched (Finley & Knowles, 1995). It is in excess where the mother-daughter dyad resides, a complex amalgam of the good and the bad, the damaging and the uplifting, the known and the unknown, all balancing on the relational distribution of power and identification between self and other; the mother-daughter dyad is itself the missed encounter.
The mother-daughter dyad that I inhabit, which is unravelled in *M/other*, was an encounter mediated by the creative process. I agree with Berridge (2007) who writes,

as I wrangle my ideas, feelings and memories into words and pictures, my ‘true’ story alters through my choices of what to include, the inadequacies of language, the power of narrative and the slipperiness of memory, time and space. These in turn affect my body and brain, who I am, within the incessant feedback loop of my identity construction (p. 14).

In *M/other*, my adolescent experience is revealed through poems that are alphabetically titled to reference my obsession with language and reliance on my diaries. The longer prose pieces are designed as blocks of text to allow the viewer some time to absorb the multiple perspectives in the narrative. Additionally, the quotes in blue are the words of other people – other academics, writers, artists and so on – that are included to enhance the meaning of the written and visual materials they appear alongside. These design features are contained within the form of an artist’s book that, unlike the more familiar book format, possesses some distinct features and flexibility as an artwork. Language on its own was not sufficient enough to encapsulate the dynamic experience of motherloss I discovered through the research, which is why I expanded *M/other* to include the imagery and video aspects. This combination of media has the potential to generate a number of entry points into the text – an excess of paths through the research. I will outline the preferred, but not only, way to navigate the text, as purposefully designed.

The ideal reading of *M/other* is alphabetically through the text in a linear way, beginning with poem ‘a’ and ending with poem ‘z’, with moments of pause living between each letter as imagery or video vignettes. Each letter of the alphabet is to be encountered as a moment of curiosity, whilst the pages themselves function as oblique spaces, because, “like a/r/tography, the oblique is always leaning into the wind, falling forward, eager to become, hopeful for what is not yet know” (Leggo, 2012, p. 3). As the pages of *M/other* are turned, there is a movement forward, and backward if desired, a physical questing through the research/artwork, that seeks to portray the multiple meanings that arise from the interconnected familial web of my adolescence. Language is key to this unfolding.

The sheer volume of words retained in the suite of my teenage diaries was an attempt to
compensate for the absence of words spoken between my mother and I during my adolescence. This excess of language is mirrored in the alphabetised titles of the poems. The remaining concrete poems without letters for titles represent a breakdown in language, the moments where words were inadequate in the face of emotional turmoil. The missed encounter was the missed relationship with my mother; I had purposefully created what I yearned for in a maternal connection in the pages of the diaries by writing to my mother, both writing for her and writing her into existence. This is the living inquiry of The Missed Encounter that caused some friction between the creative work and the research. McDermott (2010) highlights a tension that exists between the academic work and artistic work in ABER, offering the following three points to consider when evaluating the success of ABER work: “What purpose does it serve? Whom does it serve? And, most importantly, does it affect change?” (p. 7). It is worth unpacking these three questions here within the context of the rendering of excess as it is concerned with the question of why meaning should be made out of this research event.

These questions are answerable. The Missed Encounter’s purpose is predominantly advocacy for Arts education, specifically for young adults. A deep engagement with the creative process was vital to my development as an adolescent and beyond, cultivating self-discipline and a criticality that can be seen throughout my teenage diaries. The purpose of M/other is to artfully portray a journey of diarized posttraumatic growth in and through creative arts pedagogies in the context of the mother-daughter dyad. It does this by delving deeply, using autoethnography, into my documented history drawn from my teenage diaries. Concurrently, M/other facilitates an aesthetic engagement with the research aim, moving beyond an intellectual exploration of the phenomena and into an embodied understanding of the lived experience of PTG and eudaimonia. It is through the lens of posttraumatic growth where positive outcomes can be identified (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and real change in the daily lives of those exposed to trauma can eventuate (Rendon, 2015; Danhauer et al., 2013). Similarly, educators may use The Missed Encounter as a resource to encourage positive reframing of trauma and facilitate an understanding of the often-fractured home lives of their students and how this may affect their formal education.

M/other, as a work of ABER, joins a growing body of creative work as research/research as creative work, as evidenced by the suite of a/r/tographical dissertations collected online by The
University of British Columbia (see http://artography.edcp.educ.ubc.ca/). Tied with this purpose is the question of Whom does it serve? This thesis can benefit researchers studying creativity, posttraumatic growth, education, social work, psychology or ABER, to name but a few. This research also serves educators, artists and researchers interested in qualitative inquiries into loss and the creative process. M/other also has the potential to serve young adults who may have had or are having traumatic life experiences within the family unit. The audience for M/other is broad and extends beyond the context of the doctoral research and out into the world. By sharing my experience, I create a pathway for others to do the same, as it is in vulnerability where interpersonal connection occurs most greatly (Brown, 2012).

The last question posed above – Does it affect change? – is viewed from the point of view of the function of M/other as an artwork. Change, as an event, is conceived of within an individual as a transformation of perspective or understanding on the micro level. M/other has the capacity to affect change on a relational level, in the liminal spaces between people, concepts, fields and creative mediums. It does this through the poetic, through metaphor and the marriage of image and text. M/other can be used as a teaching resource in Visual Arts education as an example of a cross-disciplinary artwork, or in sociology due to its exploration in to posttraumatic growth and the mother-daughter dyad. It is an adaptable text with both intellectual and aesthetic knowledge to communicate. What the above questions seek to avoid is the treatment of ABER work as ‘just’ Art or ‘just’ research, as it is both synchronously. By asking questions about the purpose, audience and effect of ABER work, an element of criticality is introduced that adheres to the rigors of academic research, yet also leaves room for the transformative power of creative work.

This leads into the final rendering, living inquiry, containing the methodological findings of The Missed Encounter and insights into the importance of maintaining a daily practice.

U.6 Living Inquiry

The creative process that produced M/other is a living inquiry (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004) that extended beyond the research design and out into my life as an artist, researcher and teacher. As the final rendering here of a/r/tography, living inquiry addresses the intertwined nature of research, art
and life; living inquiry is a life practice (Irwin, 2013). In *The Missed Encounter*, creativity was a daily practice that manifested in different ways – through my teenage diaries and subsequently the research design I created to address the research problem. Living inquiry addresses the methodological findings of the research, which in this instance relate to the benefits of daily creative practice; specifically how diarizing can be an important precursor to well-being. I will focus on this aspect of the research and the correlation between eudaimonia, diarizing and subjective well-being (SWB). To do this, I will answer the second research question: *Is there a relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?*

Living inquiry, in a/r/tography, involves a commitment, on behalf of the researcher, to a creatively engaged life (Gouzouasis et al., 2013). I have been committed to a creative life as an artist during *The Missed Encounter* through my daily practices of diarizing, creative writing, poetry and drawing. I have discovered that diarising is, “a way of living before it is a way of writing [...] a to-and-fro movement, an occupation” (Lejeune, 2009, pp. 153-154, emphasis in original). It is a way to structure thoughts, explore emotions as they arise, experiment with ideas, and record daily life. As a way of living, diarising has provided me an opportunity to focus on the details of everyday life and explore the ways those details affect my experience. Diarising, as an active process, is a living inquiry into the self and identity, made tangible on paper. It is a flow activity (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) and a type of emotion-focused coping (Gracanin et al., 2014) where I can be completely absorbed in the act of writing. I concur with Lejeune (2009) who views the personal diary as, “both a retreat and a source of energy in each person’s dialectical relationship with the world” (p. 164) used in the construction of self. It is a social microcosm created and directed by the author, and as was the case in *The Missed Encounter*, the diary provided a place for me to retreat to in order to process difficult emotions and come to terms with my new life situation, firstly as a teenager and later in life as an adult and researcher.

The personal diary is a liminal space of knowing/unknowing (Leggo et al., 2011), particularly in adolescence as a transitional stage of life. This makes it an activity possessing traits of subjective well-being (SWB). In the literature on well-being discussed in Chapter 2, the frameworks of self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and subjective well-being (SWB) (Diener et. al., 1998) are discussed as positive approaches to well-being. SWB is how a person evaluates their life
in terms of the values they deem important (Diener et al., 1998). My teenage diaries and *M/other* are both examples of SWB because in their creation I experienced what Diener et al. (ibid) believe are the predictors of SWB, which are a feeling of mastery, achievement of goals, immersion in enjoyable activities, and positive relationships. It was the combination or curation of my life that influenced and directed my SWB. This was evident in the pages of my teenage diaries as it also is in *M/other*.

During the course of *The Missed Encounter*, I discovered that diarising is a eudaimonic activity. This is because it promotes SWB through deep reflective writing. Fowers (2012b), citing Aristotle, notes that eudaimonia is found in human activity, in actions that are in alignment with an individual’s virtues. At the core of eudaimonia are the ways in which an individual seeks to make meaning out of life (Hallam et al., 2013), and this is also central to diarising as an activity that records and explores life’s experiences in writing on paper. Through the rereading of my teenage diaries and the creation of *M/other*, I found that diarising both the positive and negative events of my adolescence fostered personal growth and created a supporting framework from which I could thrive into adulthood. This is where the second research question can be answered, which is: *Is there a relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?*

The six renderings of a/r/tography explored above have actually been painting a picture of the relationship between creativity and growth through the act of keeping a diary and the piecing together of the research and creative work, *M/other*. There is a strong relationship between PTG and the creative process, one that in the context of this research is nurtured by daily practices that are consistent and creative. *The Missed Encounter* offers one such approach for growth and thriving but is by no means the only one or the right concoction. As has been stated previously, what works for one individual’s SWB may not work for another because of the diversity of lived experience and individual characteristics (Deci & Ryan, 2008). What is suggested here is that engaging in diary keeping ideally on a daily basis, or for a period of four consecutive days (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014) supported and nurtured my personal growth after a childhood trauma that perpetuated into adolescence. The self-directed expression and dialogue with my self in my diaries provided the consistency I needed to develop into adulthood.

In this sense, creativity offers a continuous way of life, one that facilitates growth through
exploration, experimentation, abstract thought and aesthetic knowledge. There is a synergy between PTG and the creative process as both support meaning-making as a central activity (Forgeard, 2013). Further research would be required in order to establish the direct similarities between the two processes, yet this research establishes a connection where there had not been previously reported.

In terms of PTG, the struggle of reconciling the pre-trauma world of living with my mother with the post-trauma life of living with my father and grandparents was enacted in the pages of my diaries, through the writing process. Therefore I offer that the connection between PTG and the creative process is strengthened ideally by the consistency of a daily practice of writing in a personal diary. If a daily practice cannot be maintained, an individual could try writing for fifteen minutes a day for four consecutive days (Pennebaker & Evans, 2014), using any materials they wish. This can be pen and paper, or multimedia-based, but should involve parameters set up by the individual. Topics for writing in a diary could include daily events, emotional disturbances, issues, concerns, worries or perspectives on an individual’s self-narrative. These are suggestions only and the real growth and progress may occur for an individual in the process of doing the work and figuring out what systems and specificities feel right for themselves and their present context.

U.7 Applications of this research to Education

The third research question underpins the entirety of The Missed Encounter, which is: What are the ramifications of utilising creative arts pedagogies, with respect to posttraumatic growth, for educational practice? As a work of arts-based educational research [ABER], The Missed Encounter is dedicated to the advancement and improvement of educational research. Driven by a deep engagement with creativity and artistic practice, the focus of this research has been the creation of M/other, a multimedia artist’s book that portrays a diarised journey of posttraumatic growth from adolescence through to present day using my personal experience. The research was performed through creative writing, poetry, filmmaking and photography, using a unique combination of creative media to unpack issues pertaining to well-being and growth. Thus, this research can be applied to education in three distinct ways: M/other as a curriculum resource; the unique methodological design of combining autoethnography and a/r/tography; and the benefits of keeping a personal diary as a pedagogical instrument for learning.
M/other is a text that can be read for pleasure or used as a curriculum resource in secondary or tertiary classes. For secondary education, M/other could be used in Family Studies, English or Visual Arts classes because of the multimedia content that includes creative writing and Visual Arts. Additionally, M/other could be offered to adolescents who may be experiencing difficulties at home as an example of a positive growth story despite childhood trauma. The strength of M/other as a curriculum resource lies in its use of poetry to, “cut through the clutter and jargon that weigh down academic writing” (Leavy, 2010, p. 178). The evocative, yet accessible language in M/other is comprehensible to a wide variety of audiences beyond academia and the inclusion of photography and video in the artist’s book add further layers of meaning that can be deconstructed by students, regardless of language competence.

For tertiary education, the mother-daughter dyad as subject matter, could be used in Feminist or Women’s Studies as well as in Visual Arts or Fine Arts courses. The most significant benefit of this research for higher education lies in the unique methodological contribution The Missed Encounter makes to ABER. Using an autoethnographic methodology supported by a/r/tography, this research integrates personal experience into the larger social issue of feminine identity, motherloss and well-being through the lens of creativity. Autoethnography and a/r/tography are complimentary methodologies because of their emphasis on the individual (Cutcher, 2015). Autoethnography is the study of self within culture and a/r/tography is a form of arts-based research that combines artistic inquiry with educational research. As Leavy (2012) comments, “arts-based research practices and a/r/tography allow us to get at, explore, and illuminate aspects of life that are difficult to reach in other ways” (p. 8). The Missed Encounter, as a research project, uses my experience as the child of an alcoholic to engage with the ways in which the Arts can be used as a tool for learning and growth in both formal and informal education settings. My self-directed diary-keeping nurtured self-discipline and extended into my formal schooling by improving my writing skills and creativity. Diarising was a vital skill I developed that became a tool for learning into adulthood.

As one of the most beneficial aspects of The Missed Encounter, diarising and the act of keeping a diary were a great support for learning during adolescence. The personal diary can be a beneficial tool for students and teachers alike in most educational settings as a pedagogical support because it facilitates expressive writing. This style of writing, according to Pennebaker and Evans (2014),
improves working memory, which is the, “general ability to think about complex tasks” (p. 11). By writing expressively about emotional upheavals that are concerning us, more space for working memory is created and thus we are freer to focus on the more problematic issues we face (Klein & Boals, 2001).

Following the work of Pennebaker and Evans (2014), M/other was designed as process that involved three key activities – the acknowledgement of both positive and negative emotions associated with the trauma, the construction of a coherent narrative, and the inclusion of multiple perspectives. These three aspects of M/other can be applied to the production of any piece of creative writing that pertains to an exploration of lived experience. Experimenting with expressive writing in formal and non-formal education settings is a valuable activity in the fostering of personal development and growth for individuals, and as Leavy (2010) articulates, “the arts can promote dialogue which cultivates understanding or critical consciousness, can problematize dominant ideologies, and can unsettle stereotypes. In all of these respects, the arts can be used to educate” (p. 178). M/other is a work of creative pedagogy that has the capacity to be used in the above contexts and it is also the beginning of my own academic research journey, one that will continue to search for ways to improve the lives of others through creativity and education.

U.8 Summary

This chapter engages the six renderings of a/r/tography to both deliver the research findings of The Missed Encounter and structure the discussion; the renderings are lenses through which the research can be understood. There are two distinct elements in The Missed Encounter: my teenage diaries and the artist’s book M/other. The interplay between these two significant bodies of work produced a response to the research questions (outlined at the beginning of the chapter) and suggests a strong correlation between posttraumatic growth and the creative process found in the daily practice of diarising.

The first rendering, contiguity, presented a discussion about the joining of image and text in research and how diarising and creativity contributed to my well-being as an adolescent. The research was a process of unfolding and becoming, a rhizomatic movement between rereading my
teenage diaries and creating M/other. It was also found that in order to access and reinterpret painful memories, distance was from my normal life and a place where I could immerse myself in the materials. In this instance an artist residency program in Argentina provided that space.

Loss is a central concept in The Missed Encounter and is drawn from the literature on motherless daughters, often described in terms of empty spaces, holes or gaps within the metaphysical body. Grief and loss are not a one-off event, they continue to haunt the body throughout the life cycle, and thus it becomes important to find strategies to cope and new ways to incorporate the emotions into daily life.

Additionally, it was proposed that mothering is a metonymic process grounded in ambivalence, particularly from the daughter’s perspective. The mother-daughter dyad in M/other is coloured by ambivalence and mediated by the creative process. As a daughter, I used my diaries to create, and bring to life, the type of mother I needed when my mother could not provide the nurturing I craved. Diarising was a survival tool and a form of catharsis for my adolescent self. As an adult, diarising still remains a constant in my life and it was a meta-diarising process that produced M/other. The daily practice of keeping a diary was vital to my experience of PTG in adolescence.

It was discovered that my diaries were also actual letters to my mother, a finding that alters the traditional conceptualization of the diary as a closed text. This finding reverberated throughout my research journey and offered the idea that the personal diary is not simply a tool for self-expression but also a method for connection. This prompted me to respond in a new way by creating the five video vignettes in M/other as a way to re-experience and synthesize grief and loss as an event that extends beyond the page. These videos – and the poems without alphabetical titling – were openings in M/other designed to disrupt the narrative, creating moments of pause. This act, of revealing my personal story in a public forum, is part of the autoethnographic mission of connecting the self to larger cultural concerns (Ellis et. al., 2011) and it can facilitate empathy, bringing new meanings to the surface and aesthetic knowledge that may have otherwise lain dormant.

Diarising is defined as a eudaimonic activity because it promotes the fulfillment of individual potential through a deep reflection of what matters most in life. Well-being is a difficult concept to codify because of how individualised human subjective experience is. Thus, the particular combination of artmaking and diarising in The Missed Encounter is offered as one way towards positive
growth; it is by no means the only way.
An excess of language through the diary keeping process is where the mother-daughter dyad of M/other exists. As both researcher and the researched (Finley & Knowles, 1995), my role in this journey was one of excess; I have used my personal experience to create a resource for other researchers, artists, teachers and adolescents that reveals how the creative process may positively nurture growth after trauma. M/other uses the poetic and the aesthetic to forge new connections in the liminal spaces between people, events, histories, ideas and concepts. Every word is important, every image is vital, and every sound has an impact. This is the living inquiry of a/r/tography, a commitment to a deeply creative life.
Conclusion
Tuesday 28 March, 2017

Dear Diary

I did it. I ACTUALLY did it. I finished the PhD thesis!

I had no idea what I was going to be in for when I started this project and, to be honest, I didn’t think this moment would come. But here we are. What an eye-opening journey! A lot can happen in four years and the serendipity of life has amazed me in both joyful and heartbreaking ways. “The Missed Encounter” has been my life vest, confidante, punching bag, friend, enemy and protector through the difficult times and the perfect epiphanies.

I remember when I wrote my PhD application from this overarching question:

Why and how did I survive the trauma of my childhood?

I had been using my own life in my artistic practice since high school, and I felt like I was at a point, with enough distance and time, to look further back into my past to trace back how I had managed to get to where I am today. As a teenager, I could have turned to drugs, sex, alcohol or crime to deal with the pressure of my mother’s alcoholism, but I didn’t. I wrote in diaries, I drew pictures, I took photographs... in short - I created. I created with everything I had. As an adult, my intuition (my inner voice) told me that my resilience and thriving as an adult was connected to my continued engagement with the creative process. I did really well in high school academically and socially, going on to study fine arts at university and even travel the world for most of my 20s. During my life I have always created despite often-tenuous circumstances. I find solace and survival by writing and making
art, even if just for myself, and have always felt a sense of relief and release when I see my worries and issues on paper. I don’t feel I would’ve made it this far without the safe space of my diary or the challenge of being creative. It was from a place of curiosity that I started asking more targeted questions when I started researching, like:

What is the relationship between posttraumatic growth and creativity?

Is there a relationship between posttraumatic growth and creative arts pedagogies in adolescence?

How can creative arts pedagogies, with particular respect to posttraumatic growth, contribute to educational practice?

These questions are listed a number of times throughout my thesis and are articulated in the introductory chapter as a way to frame the research and guide its direction.

As I continued on with my reading, Lexi (I talk about her as Dr Cutcher in my personal orientation) introduced me to the term posttraumatic growth after our discussions about resilience. We both agreed that I hadn’t just “bounced back” to normal after leaving my mother to move in with my dad at 11 years old – it was more than that. There was more growth involved. PTG, as its known in literature by Tedeschi and Calhoun in 2004, came as a revelation! It was as if a light bulb appeared above my head, or the penny dropped, or any other number of clichéd expressions for clarity. I needed to know what growth meant and how to talk about it because as an adult I was having trouble reconciling the love I had for my mother with the trauma she put us both through when I was a kid. I had all of these mixed emotions, still, plus the
weight of a stack of diaries full of verbose confused writing from 'teenage Marion'. It was the research journey that structured my exploration and introduced me to other ways of processing and approaching difficult concepts, like grief and loss. I discovered, thanks to reading Jim Rendon's fantastic 2015 book 'Upside', that PTG was about the struggle in reconciling the pre- and post-trauma life situations. That was exactly what I wanted to do in my own life and research, which to me are completely inseparable, but I'll get to that in a minute.

I always believed I was a resilient teenager because I always seemed to find a way to see the positive side of every bit of bad news and not let it bring me down. I flourished as a teen, really thrived, by developing a close-knit group of friends as well as relationships with significant adults, seeking spiritual connection and more opportunities to develop as a person. I did this consciously. But my research trails lead me to the philosophical concept of eudaimonia, and I immediately fell in love with the concept with the ferociousness of a teenage crush. Aristotle had some brilliant ideas on eudaimonia that contemporary positive psychologists like Huta delved into in 2014, labeling it as 'human flourishing' through 'activities in line with individual potential'. LOVE LOVE LOVE. I couldn't believe that I had found an idea that resonated so strongly with my ontological and epistemological position. Truly, I was stunned. However, alongside all of the beautiful and serendipitous discoveries like that came the realities of being both the researcher and the researched, both the art and the artwork, as Finley and Knowles said in 1995.

Living my research has been challenging. The task of maintaining distance from the research content in order to reflect on my journey as an adolescent after childhood trauma presented obstacles that at times felt insurmountable. There were events that happened in my life that I could not have predicted - like my mother's death in November 2014 from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), for one. Losing a family member is one of the most stressful things you can go through, but it was more than that for me. As a researcher, I was excavating the complicated relationship my mother and I shared in order to come to a greater understanding of the role creativity played in my survival as a teenager. This is where my research was at this time. In creativity, eudaimonia and PTG.

I had already lost mum once... and then it happened again for a second time, but in a much more permanent way.
Three days after my Confirmation of Candidature presentation at Southern Cross University. The build up to the significant milestone of Confirmation was a mix of trepidation and excitement for me - I was looking forward to getting feedback about my work to date, and getting the green light to continue, but also for it to be over so I could get stuck into 'the work'.

I got the call while I was at work. It was earth shattering. The days and weeks that passed after that were a blur, full of flights, funeral arrangements, tears, questions and anxiety. In a really weird way, my research into PTG and eudaimonia had prepared me for this moment - it had prepared me for the trauma that unfolded and was there for me as an anchor as I navigated the unchartered territory of motherloss - life without her, for real.

Lexi and I had a conversation in the departure lounge of Gold Coast Airport a few days after my mother’s funeral as I was heading back home to Melbourne, about the direction of my project and I had such an epiphany there. I realized that for the first time, I was writing my diaries for all of those teenage years to her - they were love letters to her, the mum I wanted and needed to talk to everyday. I was stunned by this realization. And then it all made sense.

I knew intuitively what I had to do - I had to tell our story, the story of my mother and me. It was a story so intimately tied to my personal development and the story of so many other women, as Hope Edelman uncovered in her 2006 research on Motherless Daughters. My story was one of creativity, a living inquiry to quote Irwin and De Cosson from 2004. After reading Carolyn Ellis’ 1999 work and Tony Adams’ 2012 autoethnographic writings I knew I had found my tribe.

The creative work “M/other” is evocative autoethnography, a branch of the methodology that Ellis describes in 1997, rather than the analytic autoethnography that Leon Anderson talks about in 2006. Adams’ 2012 writings on the concept of ‘missing each other’ were enlightening to me as my experience was exactly that: a ‘missed encounter’ I had been musing on since the start of my research. Tony and Stacy Holman Jones - particularly her 2005 piece called “(M)othering loss: Telling adoption stories, telling performativity” - were incredibly influential in my articulation of loss in “M/other” as the space that love occupies. Autoethnography provided
a way for me to talk about my personal experience within a larger social context (motherloss) and to design a research project that reflected my identity as an artist, an identity that fuels every other part of my life. Because of the importance of my artistic practice to my research, I engaged with a/r/tography as a supporting methodological structure because I wasn't just another researcher using the arts as tools for their research - I was living and breathing creativity every single day, so I couldn't separate my creative practice from my research. I used the six renderings of a/r/tography - contiguity, openings, reverberations, metaphor/metonymy, excess, living inquiry - to deliver my research findings in chapter U of my thesis because as Springgay, Irwin and Kind write in 2005, renderings offer unique opportunities for engaging and understanding the kinds of new knowledge produced by creative research. This was the hardest chapter to write because not only did I want to weave the six renderings into the presentation of the research findings, but I also had to talk about my relationship with my mother, which proved to be a grinding experience. It hurt - after she died in 2014, it was as if she was a ghost, haunting me through my research, and I had to delve deeply into that relationship in order to discover why the creative process was so important to my survival. I discovered, through the renderings, that my research was part of a rhizomatic web of connections with my life and creative practice. Everything I do, to quote Rita Irwin’s writings on a/r/tography from 2013, was part of a ‘living inquiry’. I couldn’t separate my relationship with my mother from my writing or art-making because on a fundamental level, she has a presence (through her absence) in everything I do. And she always has, really. Through the renderings I found that mum and I needed ambivalence in order to relate to one another because of how strongly we identified with each other as women. I also found that mothering is a metonymic process, one that I can actually give to myself. It was writing in a diary where I enacted my own personalised form of mothering, a place where I could invent the kind of care and attention I needed. Even before my mother died, I had a strong sense that I was my own mother for most of my childhood.

“M/other” is imbued with offerings of what mothering could look like and was created from the meta-diaristic process of re-reading my teenage diaries. Creating “M/other” is the em-
bodiment of the process I have named “diarised posttraumatic growth”, or DPTG, a self-directed documentation of growth that occurs within and through the keeping of a personal diary.

My own DPTG began by putting pen to paper, every night before bed, a way to clock-off from the day and finally get some much-needed sleep. Writing became my nightly ritual and gave me the opportunity to work through the things that were bothering me without having to justify my feelings to anyone else. It was peaceful, freeing, creative and verbose. My diaries were my lifeline, the tool I used to survive the tumultuousness of adolescence and to learn more about myself. Re-reading them was a surreal experience - it took me right back to that time of uncertainty, fear and isolation, but also a time of great growth, experimentation and learning. High school was my refuge from my family, from the pain of living with my mother’s alcoholism and my father’s chronic back pain. The pages of my diaries were like clean sheets, covers to hide beneath for warmth, protection and calm.

French researcher Philippe Lejeune’s 2009 book “On Diary” was the most significant text I found on the topic of diarizing, particularly his view of the personal diary as an ‘installation’ and diarizing as a lifestyle, not just an activity. Combining Lejeune’s poetic ideas of diarising with the practical offerings from Pennebaker and Evans’ 2014 book “Expressive Writing: Words that heal”, I found some strategies that I could refine and then offer other researchers or educators to apply in their work. Pennebaker and Evans suggest that writing for 15 minutes a day for four consecutive days will improve your health and well-being. I wrote in my diary every night for almost all of my adolescence, from 15 to 19, and I know this helped me in ways that I am still discovering now and will surely keep discovering, as I get older. In my experience and through this research, I have learnt that diary writing functions as a preventative strategy and helps to maintain well-being, even when life is good. The ritual of daily writing creates the structure that many people, especially teenagers, crave. I also wrote in my diary daily throughout the course of my PhD and it kept me focused and fostered self-discipline that, if you’ve dabbled in postgraduate work, you’ll know is essential!

This brings me to my baby, the artist’s book “M/other”. It is my last ‘living’ link to my mother Debbie and it’s still emotional for me to talk about it, even at the conclusion of this thesis. The artist residency in Argen-
tina in May 2015 was where “M/other” began. I had a whole month to delve deeply into writing and creating around the themes of grief and loss, plus I used my teenage diaries as inspiration for the narrative that runs through the work. The poetry came first, then the prose, followed by the video vignettes and the photography. It was an emergent method, as Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy discuss in their Handbook of Emergent Methods in 2010. I was lead by the work, by hunches and intuition, creating pieces of the narrative as I moved back and forth between reading, researching and art-making. My creative processes responded to the research, and my research responded to my creative processes, the two intertwining and becoming one enmeshed process. The way “M/other” came together was contiguous, a conversation between the written word and visual art about what it feels like to be motherless and to experience motherloss. The two versions of “M/other” - hardcopy and digital - represent for me the existence of mixed feelings within the research that stem from the complexity of my relationship with my mother. Predicated on her presence in absence, the two copies exist as twins - very similar in content but materially very different. “M/other” exists in both tangible and intangible ways, which is how my mother existed and still exists for me now. It is my hopes that “M/other” opens the door for other people who have been through similar traumas to begin that process of healing. From this point, I offer my experience as an example of one way to deal with painful life experiences - through creativity, reflection and a daily practice.

I feel as though I am standing on the edge of the research precipice, staring down into the valley that is the future below. Where else could this path lead? What kinds of ideas and artworks could be made next? I am still captivated by the relationship between posttraumatic growth and creativity, particularly in the broader social context for journaling and diarising. I would love to crack open “The Missed Encounter” and look ethnographically at what other people, particularly other motherless daughters, have experienced. Building on this idea and using the a/r/tographic framework once more, I could see collaborative art-making occurring between myself and other motherless daughters – we could write poetry, take photographs, perform, dance, sing … oh the possibilities!
Now that I have created “M/other”, I want other women (and men too) to experience the catharsis and process of healing that creative expression affords. I’m not saying it’s a guaranteed outcome or that it will solve all of the issues associated with past trauma, but what I have found is that it helps you to understand yourself in a much deeper way than before. When you start to peel back the layers of your identity and truly see what you are made of, you have the capacity to own who you are wholeheartedly. In my experience, ownership can lead to empowerment and although I will forever be a motherless daughter, I own this title and will continue to investigate what it means to me, as I grow older. As a motherless daughter, I know that although my mother isn’t physically present in my life, I have to make room for her spirit and memory in my own mind. I have to carve a space for her to reside, for our relationship to continue on, as part of my inner world. Speaking of which, after four years of reading, writing, reading, analyzing, making, crying, arguing, re-writing and crying more, completing this project leaves a bittersweet taste in my mouth. I will have my qualification, but not my mother.

However, in the words of Bassel Van De Kolk interviewed on the podcast “On Being” in 2017, I am a living testimonial to my mother, to all of the women who have loved and lost their mothers and I did this research about her, with her, and for her - my lady in red.

Right, time for bed.

10:37pm.
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