The images here form part of a body of work looking at self-representation in women's art, particularly where negotiated through subjectively-situated narratives of trauma. This was the basis for my paper at the ‘water-ways’ Symposium, University of Plymouth in June 2021, which explored how bodies—human and non-human—are inscribed and transformed by events or actions that often leave a mark. In this overview I highlight experimental studio work, engagements with old family photographs, and my ‘diffractive’ (Barad, 2007) methodological approach.

Using photographic still and moving-image I undertook a series of intuitively-led and structured experiments in my studio, for example, observing, recording, editing, and documenting the fluid actions of liquids - such as water, ink, and milk - as they were poured, dripped, and dispersed, in forms and formulations captured by super slow-motion moving-image (Figs 5-7). The experiments enabled me to think differently about: the impact or transmission of affective energies, seen as ripples pulsing out and intersecting in ‘diffraction’ patterns on the water’s surface (Fig 5); the temporal distribution of effects, leaving a material transcription of traces in the wake of events (Fig 6), and; the effervescent undercurrents of disruption, revealed in an indeterminate flow of transformation (Fig 7). These images suggest the way inscriptions are embodied in an ongoing process of transformation. Another strand of practice research involved looking at my family photographs, found abandoned in a farm outbuilding. The photographs were ‘entombed’ beneath flimsy layers of once-protective cellophane in various stages of decomposition; the colours bleeding, the pigments crystallising, the surfaces transferring and transforming. Using digital microscopes, scanning, and photographic technologies to survey the surfaces, it was difficult to determine what any particular image may once have depicted. The memoir function is gone, its trace more vibrant than ever. The once clearly-defined, frozen memories of my childhood, were ‘becoming otherwise’ in spectacular melting and abstract terrains, now re-imagined and re-presented in a symbolic gesture of reparation and restitution (Figs 1-4 and Figs 8-9).

A ‘diffractive’, rather than simply reflective, methodological approach is also integral to my process. As theorist Karen Barad explains: ‘a diffractive methodology seeks to work constructively and deconstructively (not destructively) in making new patterns of understanding-becoming’ (Barad, 2014: 187). Having lived through a disrupted and dysfunctional childhood—with all the painful psychological complications that inscribes and extends into the present—my diffractive reading (Barad, 2007: 71-94) of trauma through the lens of these fluid encounters and damaged photographs has been productive for theorising the ‘entanglements’ of matter and meaning (see Barad, 2007: 3-38), integrating practice, research, and process, to blur the boundaries of binary thinking.

In summary, considering issues around traumatic experience, which are often complex, multi-layered, and difficult to communicate verbally, my arts practice research strives to find a visual language that articulates the way trauma and post-traumatic memory manifest, to unearth the traces or ‘agential cuts’ (Barad, 2007: 148) enacted and inscribed through time and lived-experience. Re-opening painful wounds through engaging with material processes as a fluid form of inscription can re-think trauma as an always-already embedded and embodied, but evolving enigma. 

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REFERENCES
