

GRIEF AND LOSS; LIVING WITH
THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE.
A PRACTICE BASED STUDY OF PERSONAL GRIEF
NARRATIVES AND PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis develops work started on the MA in Multi-Disciplinary Printmaking. It addresses the question - Can personal grief narratives explored through contemporary arts practice, auto-ethnographic writing, and the participatory performative act of making and being in specific places result in access into the potentially, restorative space of mourning; moving between what continues to exist and what is missing in the physical world? This questions the Western societal idea of 'getting over' grief and presents an alternative model of walking with and alongside loss as well as providing opportunities for conversations and 'metalogues', following Bateson (1972).

An investigation follows, through a phenomenological methodology of repetition, into the functions of articulating loss and absence through stories that explore personal grief narratives, through contemporary arts practice and the participatory creative enacting of rituals in specific places which involve the interweaving of people, objects, place and story, so as to externalize emotion through creative activity to match the void of absence. 'Testing Foucault's (1989: 208) notion that "a work of art opens a void," an opportunity to question without always providing reconciliation or answers.

Through an interwoven exploration of theory and practice utilising Law's (2004) 'method assemblage' of presence, manifest absence and Otherness, the practice element creates both the representational and allegorical; objects and gifted objects (forms of presence), documentation of performance/ritual, some orientated around specific external sites thus allowing an examination of loss of place as well as loss of people, (forms of manifest absence) and one's response to and ongoing relationship with the presence of absence as ways of exploring grief and loss (what is hidden or Other).

The participatory projects and interviews with seven artists (across artistic disciplines) enable conversations and sharing of understandings of loss. They provide multiple perspectives, viewpoints, and voices for the thesis.

By extending the social science methodological framework within a practice-based artistic

context with the auto-ethnographic research practice a new methodological framework for artistic practice is created. New knowledge is also formed in the methodological and iterative dance between practice, reading and writing. The practice contributes to a pool of ideas and how knowledge is formed, it provides a constellation of reference points. The presence of absence becomes, to borrow a musical term, an ostinato through the repetition, variation and development of practice. Meaning is re-interpreted and transformed through evocation and noticing, allowing an examination of the pain of grief and loss. These combinations model new possibilities for enabling others by offering ideas and choices of how we might live with the presence of absence.

The thesis shows the power of metaphor and story to alter the self, give back a sense of choice and control and find equivalence to the intensity of grief. Through creating objects and rituals, writing and sexual encounters, through the examples of other artists' practice and the sharing of extended conversations, multiple layers of meaning are revealed, how they work in relation to what continues to exist and what is missing in the physical world.

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I will continue to tell stories of you both.

Davina Kirkpatrick 2016

FOREWORD

It is part of our human condition to long for hard lines and clear concepts. When we have them we have to either face the fact that some realities elude them, or else blind ourselves to the inadequacies of the concepts. (Douglas 1966:163)

Death who gathers all of us into his all bent arms in the end is gathering me but I am still alive. (Sophokles 2012)

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1 Cremated remains.

INTRODUCTION

Research question.

The doctoral project addresses the following research question:

Can personal grief narratives, explored through contemporary arts practice, auto-ethnographic writing, and the participatory, performative act of making and being in specific places, result in access into the potentially, restorative space of mourning between what continues to exist, and what is missing in the physical world?

Aims.

* To investigate the functions of articulating loss and absence, through stories and otherwise, in exploring personal grief narratives.

* To do so through contemporary arts practice and the participatory creative enacting of rituals in specific places which involve the interweaving of people, objects, place and story, so as to externalize emotion through creative activity to match the void of absence. In this way it will test Foucault's (1989: 208) notion that:

a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.

These particular aims are framed by the over-arching aim of the research: to explore an 'archaeology' (see Shanks 2001:50) of absence² through practice as a means to bear witness to loss, rather than an idea that we can 'get over loss'.³ This study draws on interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives from phenomenology, bereavement, death studies and narrative enquiry, as well as incorporating ideas of objects, place and collaborative, participatory practice.

Objectives.

Following Pearson's question: "How does place act as mnemonic?" (2007:14) The thesis examines the possibilities for creative mediation between absence, objects and revisited places.

2 This is informed by Michael Shanks (2001p50) definition of archaeology as "a hybrid and heterogeneous practice...an ecology of mobilising resources, managing, organising, persuading, of practices like collecting, walking and intervening in the land"

3 Darian Leader (2008:4-6) rejects the idea that we get over loss and talks of how creative process could enable a making sense of loss.

By exploring two preliminary questions that articulate the practical objectives of the thesis:

- What creative responses can be made that dance⁴ between presence and the presence of something absent?
- How the absence of the physical body/place in relation to loss be apprehended, understood and negotiated through artistic and related practice?

Why the project?

This thesis builds on creative practice undertaken on the MA in Multi-Disciplinary Print, at University of the West of England, completed in 2010. This explored personal narratives of loss, expanding the boundaries of my artistic practice to include performed papers at conferences and conversational exchanges. The doctoral study further develops these personal narratives of loss, alongside participatory work with people who have experienced grief, as a way of sharing and exploring the commonalities of loss and observing and acknowledging the individual subjective nature of grief.

The participatory projects and a series of interviews are used to explore narrative and absence through loss of people and place. The projects, orchestrated and facilitated by myself, have generated the following outcomes - a written thesis, the creation of objects that relate both to personal and others' stories of grief and loss, conversation and metalogue (following Bateson 1973:2000). A metalogue explores a problematic subject whilst showing a conscious, intimate, and subtle relationship between the structure and content of a conversation and its meaning. Additionally, the creation of ritual/performance in site-specific locations, documentation of these temporal experiences and performed explorations of extended practice and doctoral research as conference papers.

The project takes as one cardinal point of reference Mary O'Neill's claim:

I would suggest that stories are not just performed but are also performative. Stories 'do' rather than 'are'. Narratives of sorrow and pain do not leave us unchanged but can, in fact, motivate us to act. (2010)

4 I use the verb dance to imply movement, a constantly shifting and changing position .

Current concepts of grief have moved away from ideas that extended mourning is pathological (Freud 2005) towards more recent concepts, which have developed from theories of psycho-social development and attachment (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996). In particular, a multidimensional view of grief that includes cultural emplacement (Rosenblatt, 2000) and the ‘acknowledgment of death as the very condition and ground of life’ (Harrison 2003:70) have allowed perspectives and ways of attending to grief to broaden, including the re-invention of personal and collective rituals, within a more secular society, often related to specific places. This is in the context of modern Western society uncritically using the term depression as a blanket term that often smothers the ‘intricate structures of mourning.’ (Leader 2008: 7). This is explored more fully in Chapter 1 - Grief and Loss Part One.

A second point of reference is provided by work started on the MA informed by the experience of my mother’s death. Additionally the sudden and unexpected death of my partner in 2011 has brought a different nuanced personal perspective on grief and loss. As an artist, I wanted to explore through practice as research the role of creative engagement in grief and loss. Does “art dwell on the unintelligibility of death and underscore the vagueness of its boundaries” as González-Crussi (2009: 160) suggests? I also wanted to test my own experience of making and creating against Leader’s (2008) examination of how art can be a vital tool to make sense of loss allowing us to explore differences in interpretation and response.

Outline of the doctoral project.

In order to do justice to the plurality of voices involved, the thesis weaves together *auto-ethnographic text on desire, intensity, grief and loss (in grey and italics running through the thesis) that also creates a narrative arc of my own grief*; **extracts from my practice diary and journal (in green)**⁵; artwork that visually evokes and re-frames notions of the presence of absence; participatory rituals in chosen places (illustrations of this work are particularly evident in chapters 4 and 5); and *interviews with practitioners who have worked with themes of loss and grief in their work, the affect of this choice upon them and the responses they have received (in blue running throughout the thesis).*

⁵ I have cited with dates the auto-ethnographic texts, practice notes and journal extracts to provide an indication of when they were written but not included these within my bibliography .

The importance of creating opportunities for conversations to occur, to create “a dialogue of mournings” (Leader 2000: 85) to make explicit how absence is “interwoven with present experiences, with social interactions”(Meier et al 2013:426) flows through the chapters presented as extracts from interviews and conversational exchanges. The choice to have an extended conversation in the semi -structured interviews and provide extensive extracts from these was to act as a counter-balance to the lack of conversations about grief and loss within day-to-day life/society. This is starting to change with the death café movement⁶, festivals such as the Festival for the Living⁷ and a few programmes on radio and television starting to talk about death. These discussions are I feel still very much on the margins rather than what is permissible in daily conversation.

The structure of the thesis, the repetition of each chapter beginning with auto-ethnographic writing and the rhythm of the writing is a deliberate strategy to unsettle the reader, hopefully enabling them to ask questions of their own experiences in dialogue with the thesis creating another conversation, possibly confront assumptions and thus allow something new to be considered and for the reader to be changed. The thesis is positioned not only as documentation of the research but as an example through its structure of the non-linear nature of arts-based research and grief. It is important that the practice is embedded within the thesis to show the knowledge produced by the practice has equal importance and validity to theoretical knowledge and to avoid any suggestion of preferential or hierarchy of knowledge by having the practice contained within an appendix.

The disciplinary focus of the thesis is practice-based arts research informed by phenomenology, bereavement, death studies and narrative enquiry, as well as incorporating ideas of objects, place and collaborative, participatory practice. The literature review is not a stand alone chapter as this would have disrupted the flow of the thesis instead it runs throughout as my reading has been broad, diverse and extensive; into each chapter there are strategic themes and core texts introduced for each topic. Texts that have accompanied me from the beginning of my enquiry include Hallam and Hockey (2001), Leader (2008), Law

6 A social franchise initiated in the UK by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky-Reid, where people come together to drink tea, eat cake and talk about death, based on the ideas of Bernard Crettaz. <http://deathcafe.com>.

7 This included a weekend programme of events about death at The Southbank, London 27-29 January 2014

(2004), Speedy (2008) and Tanner (1996).

The warp and weft of practice, both personal and participatory, and theory weave through the PhD. These warp threads are the use of story, told in the third person, framed through the weft of narrative enquiry (Speedy 2008); auto-ethnography (Ellis & Bochner 2001), collective biography writing (Haug 1999, Davies & Gannon 2006); and A/r/rtography (Springgay et al 2005). These theoretically-informed methods importantly explore how theory rubs up against everyday life, how participants and I are effected and affected by events and our reflections upon them – including a reading of theory to provide a way “of learning to read/write embodied social selves”(Davies and Gannon 2006:7).

Particularly pertinent are my explorations through practice to the presence of absence and I want to cite Barbara Bolt's ideas that theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory. This double articulation is central to practice based research (2007:29). She talks of a tacit knowledge from handling materials and extends Paul Carter's term 'material thinking', which tends to preface the relationship between artists and writers/writing/talking to her term 'material productivity', which is about the relationship of artists to the “intelligence of materials and processes in practice” (Bolt 2007: 30). Hence my decision to include extracts from my practice diary. Bolt draws on Heidegger and Levinas – Heidegger's notion of circumspection in relation to how one comes to know through drawing, painting, writing - it is a way that the new emerges and Levinas “an original and originary way”(1996:19) - an understanding that originates through and in practice, apposite to my demonstration of new knowledge required for the doctorate.

Central to the practice led research is the use of narrative and the metaphorical to reveal multiple layers of meaning and how they work in relation to what continues to exist, and what is missing in the physical world, as Klement (1994:73) argues:

There is no precise language to name death, to accept death and our dead. Without such a language we cannot integrate it. Integration requires metaphor and ritual.

The inclusion of artists working with the identified themes contextualise and elucidate the

argument. They are indicative of a constituency of artists to whom the new knowledge created through the doctorate is relevant. Additionally this knowledge is relevant to professionals and academics within the fields of psychology and death studies as well as anyone learning to walk alongside grief and loss. The new methodological framework is relevant for artist researchers.

The Outline of the thesis chapters.

Chapter 1- Grief and Loss, Part 1.

This chapter provides an overview, situating and locating the argument within the worlds of vernacular customs, theoretical positions and psychological perspectives.

Although death is a universal and unavoidable fact it is experienced differently socially, psychologically and phenomenologically both across and within cultures. This thesis focuses primarily on female white Western Northern European experiences.

Bereavement, loss and mourning are different, if related, phenomena (DeSpelder and Strickland 1987:206). The linguistic roots of bereavement are Germanic, meaning “to rob, or seize by violence”, an action done to us.⁸ Grief refers to the personal, emotional and physical response or reaction to bereavement. (Leader 2008). Mourning is the process of incorporating loss and is often used to describe public rituals of bereavement and expressions of grief (Gorer 1965, Fagan 2004). However as Leader (2008) points out mourning is never an automatic process and may never happen for some people.

This chapter explores theoretically informed ideas of sudden and unexpected death, definitions of grief and mourning, dealing with the dead body and the presence of absence.

Chapter 2 – Methodology.

This chapter provides an outline of the approach, the reasons for this approach and issues that arise from these choices. My argument builds on Law’s (2004:84-85) notion of “presence, manifest absence and Otherness” and extends Meyer and Woodthorpe’s (2008:3.1) ideas coming from Law, that absence can be “spatially located...have some kind of materiality;

8 (<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Bereavement>)

and....can have agency (it 'acts' or 'does' things).”

My methodology is rooted in the relationship between theory and practice, a back and forth dialogue between reading, writing and making, and how I develop and work through ideas and emotions through choices in materials. The immersive and reflexive processes of making are revealed in extracts from my practice diary, written in tandem with making, concerned with practical considerations and reflections on choices and how the repetitive processes of making then dance between auto-ethnographic writings and reading and how this informs more ideas for making. Therefore artwork is included as part of my developing argument. The writing uses two voices - an academic and a personal - that helps explore the paradox at the heart of the thesis; that grief is both a universal experience and has personal specificity.

Chapter 3 - Grief and Loss, Part 2 and 3.

This chapter looks at creativity and mourning, ritual and mourning and artists who have explored themes of grief and loss; placing loss within a cultural perspective. It includes extracts from interviews with:

Louisa Fairclough (Artist)

Sue Gill and John Fox (Celebrant/Artist - Welfare State Participatory Art)

Gurda Holzhaus (Theatre Director)

Carol Laidler (Artist/Curator All day Breakfast)

Fern Smith (Volcano Theatre Co)

Belinda Whiting (Photographer/Artist)

These three chapters provide the linear argument and then the following chapters work across, into and through the argument.

Chapter 4 – Use of Objects/Images.

Hallam & Hockey (2001) argue that the use of objects is central to how people's grief and practices are presented, performed and understood. My own experiences bear witness to this. Indeed, Hallam & Hockey's study indicated that the most potent objects in terms of mnemonic capabilities are those associated with the body - although this category constantly

shifts as perceptions of the body and relation to the material environment, both in life and death, shift and expand. These ideas are expanded within Chapter 4.

In Chapters 4, 5 & 6 I explore how art and the processes of making and writing has agency and provides a counterpoint to Meier's (2013:423) comment on the processes of absence that they "involve more than mere matter". The making involves movement from one material state to another, from one place to another and this echoes the relational back and forth aspect of presence and absence.

These chapters which, for the structure of the thesis follow each other sequentially, have evolved in a back and forth dialogue between object and image making, performance in places and auto-ethnographic writing. They also present absence-presence as embodied, enacted, remembered, contested (Meier 2013: 425) and highlight that in attending to absence-presence we create opportunities to share the personal and particular, and prompt the consolation of self and others. Absence-presence as Maddrell (2013:505) suggests is greater than the sum of each part.

Practice included:

Presence of Absence, screen prints and litho prints.

Walking in His Shoes and *One Step in Front of Another* series, from residencies in Ireland and Germany.

The Height of Him, textile hangings.

Every Day for a Year, paperclay mourning envelopes project.

Creation of props for film *She Wanders/Wonders*.

Memorial Window.

Chapter 5 – Performance in Places.

Chapter 5 focuses on finding a place to place grief, this relates not only to the relational aspect of placing the deceased relative to our continued life (Walters 1999) but also to geographies of absence (Meyer 2012).

The creation of gifted objects (Richardson 2001) given to my co-collaborators shifts the idea of objects placed at memorial sites (Maddrell 2009) into a gifted object as a memory of a ritual journey that also calls to mind the presence of an absent person or an absent place.

Practice included:

Tying the Threads, monthly visits and documentation.

Embodied Absence, Hergest Ridge project collaboration with Rob Irving.

Fieldwork for *Remembering Fields* project with Owain Jones.

Memorial tattoo.

Film, *She Wanders/Wonders*.

Chapter 6 – Writing.

This chapter considers auto-biographical and auto-ethnographic writing, as well as discussing the challenges of auto-ethnography, and auto-ethnography and performance.

There is a re-examination of finding intensity equivalent to the intensity of loss through a different lens of heightened sexual activity, explored through ongoing auto-ethnographic writing.

Practice included in this chapter:

Autobiographical and collaborative writing.

Diary entries.

Reference own writing in *Collaborative Writing as Enquiry*.

Personal writing generated from retreats with collaborative writing group.

Writing generated from Tami Spry⁹ and Elyse Pineau¹⁰ workshops, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.

Conclusion

The conclusion provides a summing up of the argument, observations and additional questions that have arisen from the research questions posed. It highlights key areas of new knowledge created.

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CHAPTER 1 - GRIEF AND LOSS, PART 1

She feels speck-like, tiny. She wants it to be light she doesn't want it to be light because it's the first day without him. She wants to hover in this half-land not speaking to anyone, not moving forward, pretending it's a dream she will wake from, shudder and move on with the day. Everything has changed; everything has shifted and where is she?

The memories are so potent it's like holding the sharpest pieces of glass to her flesh knowing it will lacerate her skin yet unable to do anything except hold them tight and bleed. She starts to see why people try tearing down the familiar, give away possessions because everything is a reminder – yet this is how he survives now. His immortality is contained in the memories and stories she continues to tell. It doesn't give him back to her but it's all she's got so she has to work with them, rock them and hold them close - let them tear and struggle, shiver and slither around her body and mind. Kirkpatrick, D. (Oct 2012)¹¹

Introduction.

This chapter explores theoretically informed ideas of sudden and unexpected death. There are definitions, informed by psychology and psychotherapy, of grief and mourning. I present an argument in favour of attending to rituals connected to dealing with the dead body and examine theoretical ideas about the presence of absence in correlation with grief, loss and mourning.

Sudden and unexpected death.

The gap between the illusory belief that one is in control of life and the reality of sudden and unexpected death; the gap between dying and disposal of your mortal remains; the gap between the presence of an alive being and the dead weight of a cadaver.

I want to understand but there is nothing to understand. It's just what happens - death. I want to look for reasons and patterns because the random is too scary. It means I could go to sleep and not wake up. Death is so close, breathing on my neck, whispering in my ear – and it changes everything irrevocably. (Kirkpatrick 2012: 71)

¹¹ My auto-ethnographic writings introduce an alternative personal voice that articulates a different cadence and a personal specificity to the grief process.

Chapter 1 focuses on experiences of sudden and unexpected death because this has been my own experience of death and as such has influenced elements of the practice (auto-ethnographic writing, objects, images, performance and performed papers at conferences).

The experience of sudden and unexpected death of a significant other has a different cadence to the experience of death after a long illness, a death that is in some way expected/predicted. It has a particular quality of disquietude, of one's beliefs and certainty being thrown up into the air and that these then form so many arbitrary pieces that then land in a completely differently configured pattern. As Horowitz and Wakefield (2007: 32) point out, "the nature and context of the loss also shape the intensity of the response" as does the quality of the relationship with the dead person and the subsequent stresses of social and economic upheaval related to the death.

Death raises an ontological dilemma that confronts expectations of cause and effect and thus continuity, "with the ambiguity of a dead body with the perplexing discontinuity presented by death" (Lungi 2006: 34). This 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger 1957) can result in 'magical thinking', where one refuses to believe in the finality of death and instead has the conviction that the person will return or is still there (Kernberg 2009, Didion 2005, Lewis 1961), as Lungi says, "every paradox confronts us with the fear of magic"(Lungi 2006:34). The notion of something that existed existing no more, as well as where 'person-ness' is situated can be unsettling and overwhelming to the bereaved. However as Lungi points out, maybe it is only in rational pragmatic cultures that magical thinking is seen as deviant and requires to be cured.

Hallam, Hockey and Howarth (1999:18) argue that the reconstructive tasks on the agency of a body through promoting healthy living, fitness regimes and cosmetic surgery within the often conflicting influences of fashion, science and medicine "deflect awareness of a body that is also aging and inevitably dying, possibly because it threatens self-determination". The aging and inevitably dying body also challenges our notion of control, regulation, perfection and transgressing bodily boundaries. This is something that, I suggest, also requires to be confronted when faced with sudden and unexpected death.¹²

12 I explore more fully the personal impact of the issues raised by an aging and inevitably dying body in my auto-ethnographic writings and in Chapter 6

Littlewood (1993: 69) suggests that the often medical, pathologised approach taken by Western clinicians is in direct relationship to the fact that death rarely takes place within our homes but within hospitals and institutions. There is a related reticent to acknowledge that pain and sadness is an essential part of the process of mourning (Horwitz & Wakefield 2007, Leader 2008) and too often mourning becomes subsumed into a general diagnosis of depression (Leader 2008). Clinicians seem to want to hold at arm's length the extreme emotions, the feeling that one is falling into an abyss of grief and loss. The variety of ways that people adopt to try to avoid this are noted by the sociologist and psychotherapist Ian Craib:

Some might prevent such a collapse by continuing to work, staying home from work, talking or keeping silent, by smashing things, by screaming, by getting drunk; by leaving their wife or husband for their lover; by wearing the dead person's clothes or burning them. I don't think I have ever come across anything so intensely personal as grieving, and it often seems to me that the only attitude to adopt towards it is one of respect. (Craib 1994: 29).

Respect and acceptance of self and others would be helpful as would more explicit accounts of the lived realities of people who have experienced the disjuncture of the sudden death of a significant other. A welcome addition to the literature is Gibb's honest and pragmatic account of the sudden and unexpected death of her partner and her decision to try to go with her feelings, whatever they were even though she felt she had "no experience to draw on or tools to use. Much of it a guessing game, like stumbling through the dark" (2014:19).

As Hallam, Hockey and Howarth (1999:15) demonstrate, sudden death is the start of "a retrospective narrative reconstruction" for coroners and pathologists that relatives incorporate within their own knowledge of the deceased as part of a continuing story.

Definitions of grief.

Grief is an emotional reaction or response to loss. Psychiatry's proposed disorder of 'complicated grief' (Shear, M. et al. 2011) is defined by a person being significantly and functionally impaired beyond six months of the loss. The term 'complicated' grief begs the

question is there such a state as ‘uncomplicated’ grief and by whose definition? Strobe’s (2001) definition of complicated grief links it to grief that strays beyond the “bounds of a particular cultural tradition”; this is tricky to define in western culture when the cultural traditions have shifted with an increasing secular society. The term is time and intensity related, and has more to do with social mores and the cultural definition of normative grief.

A troubling aspect of the present cultural definition of ‘non-normative’ grief, given that what happens in America is often a precursor for trends here in the UK, is that the DSM-5 work groups (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, the classification and diagnostic tool of the American Psychiatric Association) have decided to call complicated grief ‘persistent complex bereavement’ and placed it in a chapter on conditions for further study in the new DSM-5. This could be seen to set a precedent that suggests that there will be a tendency to increase the diagnosis of more people’s grief as abnormal or extreme. As Granek and O’Rourke point out:

this is in a culture that already leads mourners to feel they need to just ‘get over it’ and ‘heal’.... The inclusion of the diagnosis would be less troubling if we lived in a culture that better understood the fact that grief takes time—and knew how to support it.¹³

Freud’s (1917) early ideas in his essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, that detachment from the lost loved object is the ultimate goal, still have a strong influence on Western cultural notions of grief and loss. ‘Getting over the loss’ is espoused by popular psychology (Leader 2008: 4), even though ideas of continuing bonds (Klass et al. 1976) challenge this notion and have been explored in the psycho-therapeutic community for the last decade. Freud himself included in later thoughts that ‘incorporation’ was essential, (bringing the loss into the body, to make it undeniably a part of the physical, solid and real person). I argue that walking alongside grief has been a more helpful framing, altering but most importantly continuing my relationship with the dead (Klass et al. 1976: xviii).

Strobe and Schut’s (2010) revised dual process model in which grief fluctuates between new

13 (http://www.slate.com/articles/life/grieving/2012/03/complicated_grief_and_the_dsm_the_wrong_headed_movement_to_list_mourning_as_a_mental_disorder_.html)

practical tasks and falling deeply into the pain of loss gives a non-linear model that conflates with the practical aspects of this study and provides an argument against the way that Kubler-Ross' seven stages of grief have been adapted by others from a rule of thumb guide to a tidy timetable and linear solution (Walters 1999:163). Linear stage theories, both of dying and grief, can be problematic as Kastenbaum (2012:131&368 2000:223) and Germain (1980:52) point out; they encourage ideas that deviation from this prescribed formula can then be viewed as abnormal.

Definitions of mourning.

Mourning is the active process, the actions one takes to come to terms with the changes created by loss and the cultural inscribed practices and customs expected of the bereaved.

Learning from past experience to enrich new relationships and being able to love again and yet still mourn a lost loved object, thus not trying to sever the mourning process seems a neglected aspect of mourning (Kernberg 2009). Yet this process builds on the results of studies by Rees (1971), Shuchter & Zisook (1993), Conant (1996) and Field et al (1999) that suggested that the role of a 'sense of presence experience' and a continued relationship with related imagery provided a 'place of a safety', a balm to feelings of helplessness that lessened grief related distress.

This is reiterated in the suggestion of Frommer (2005) that by experiencing the absence and continuing to grieve for dead friends allows an awareness of one's own mortality and the vibrancy of existence and creates connections with others who have experienced grief and loss, as Harrison states: "Through grief I learn to speak my death to the world" (2003:71). I suggest Freud's notion of 'the work of mourning' is helpful in this context; it suggests a commitment to process and time, and "involves the movement of reshuffling and rearranging" (Leader 2008:30) something I will return to in Chapters 4 & 5 in the thesis in regard to the iterative processes of making.

Lacan's notion of mourning differs dramatically from Freud's in that he argues that death creates a "hole in the real...a rupture that calls for symbolic reparation" and "we are only in

mourning about someone whom we can say I was his lack (j'étais son manqué)" (quoted in Leader 2008:162 and Boothby 2013:210-211). Death closes this 'open space of lack'. There is the physical lack of the person and this other infinitely unchangeable lack that was always present but now has no possibility of changing. It suggests we are always negotiating and living with what is inaccessible in the other and the 'enigma of the other's desire'. This in death becomes augmented, breaking apart the delicate balance of symbolic lack and desire. (Boothby 2013:210-211)

The complexity inherent in this resonates with my own experience of mourning; not wanting to idealise my relationship, to be very aware of what did not function well, what and where lack resided, the patterns that bound us together, almost to the detriment of acknowledging the positive aspects of the relationship. It took outside observers to acknowledge and provide examples of the love between us before I started to re-balance my thinking and feeling. I provide an example of this in the 'Tying the Threads' project in Chapter 5.

Freud makes no reference in 'Mourning and Melancholia' of the significance of mourning as a collective act rather than an individual task. This may be as Leader (2008:72) suggests because of the timing of the essay's writing coincided with the horrors of the mass body count of the First World War; certainly Gorer (1965) draws parallels between these events and the changing nature of public mourning rituals, which I further explore in Chapter Three. In this chapter, however, I want to explore the collective, ritual nature of attending to and spending time with the dead body.

Attending to and spending time with the dead body.

We lit candles, burnt sage and I gently let the smoke rise along his body, put Bob Dylan on the CD player. I removed my rings, his watch and cardi (that I've worn since returning to the house).

Therefore, we began, Mary and I, to wash his body - so gently and rhythmically. I let my hands linger longer as I gently pressed the flannel to his so cold and solid flesh; the skin had reddened where the blood had settled. We moved slowly, tentatively. I was scared to move his limbs, unsure how much pressure to apply not wanting to damage

the skin. He was already clean, having been washed after the post-mortem, so this was a ritual washing – more about love, care, touch, giving back the smell of his body wash. We dried him with soft paper towels pressing them so they absorbed the moisture we had introduced and the moisture that emanated from his skin. Penny drew us as we moved around him.

Dressing him was a more visceral, physically demanding task. It took four of us, Debbie the undertaker had joined us, he was so heavy and the damp, clamminess of his so cold skin meant it was a challenge. (Kirkpatrick 2012: 72)

accompanying a friend to see and spend time with her dead partner, being confronted with his dead body yet his obvious absence; it was so hard to accept the not there-ness. She kept imagining that his chest was moving, her friend said she kept thinking his finger moved. It seemed this reinforced that they couldn't let go of the expectation of life; accept that this is all there will ever be.

She remembered looking at her mum and that strange dualistic reality of it being her and not her, it felt like the desire for movement would somehow resolve the irresolvable other, that elusive unexplainable absence in presence; a sense of such vulnerability to an irrevocable, uncontrollable change.

We can bend and adapt – accept, because we are still here. We are part of an evolving change of state and he is a part of that so maybe he is less static than he appears. She feels he is a vessel, a shell but that emptiness still has a solid (a very solid and solidified) physicality- a dead weight- no mercurial lightness, no twinkle. Kirkpatrick, D. (January 2012)

There is an argument to be made for excavating old knowledge connected to the rituals of preparing the corpse for the funeral, as Doughty argues, “Corpses keep the living tethered to reality”(2015: 168). Lungi suggests that spending time with the corpse probably evolved as a way of reinforcing the reality of death but points out along with Hallam et al (1999) and Weber (1998) that in Western societies the ritual viewing or other contact has become less likely, as has the possibility to use this as a way of saying goodbye to the deceased loved one.

Current practices and rituals tend to distance the grieving from the corpse; these aspects have been taken over by professionals. “In this way, the ritual has ceased to be commensurate with

the trauma” (Lungi 2006:38). Doughty, through her experiences of working within the death industry, comes to believe that by distancing ourselves from corpses we are no longer forced to contemplate our own death and that is a “root cause of major problems in the modern world”(2015:168)

Sue: So the terminology then was undertaker, you got the undertaker he undertook to do the funeral but it wasn't this mega multi-million pound industry, the funerals industry. Gill, S. & Fox J (January 2015)

I am interested in how and why this situation has developed in Western European culture. From the horrors of two world wars, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the possibility of total annihilation from the Cold War Klement suggests “a barbaric void opened up”, that could only be coped with by denial and the embracing of youthfulness as a representation of life and “the eternal present.”(1994:73) The dead and dying seemingly have no place in this world order, where the beliefs and practices of dominant social groups and institutions reject the presence of the dead. (Hallam et al 1999:18)

As Klement posits:

Our belief in science and the rational doesn't permit the dead to play a role for the living. Death as a thread woven into the social tapestry has vanished. (1994:73)

By making the corpse the signifier for mortality and bodily decay there is then a social requirement for an expert to diffuse the potential to pollute the living that comes from this ‘messy and dangerous’ corpse. The professionalisation of funereal services has led to pseudo-scientific processes, for example embalming is framed as one such service and suggests that this process renders the corpse harmless and re-establishes the body's boundaries, rather than citing ancient or historical practices (Klement 1994: 128-29). Legally, the body needs to be buried or cremated in an approved way before it becomes a nuisance to public health (Cowling 2010) but one does not need to appoint a professional to ‘undertake’ on one's behalf.

However, the practices of funeral directors and embalmers to give back to bereaved relatives an approximation of the healthy once living person as “a memory picture” (Hallam et al

1999:15) may present the body as not quite there (Huntington and Metcalf 1979) which may not be helpful in dealing with the reality of death and the bodily changes this brings. Klement (1994:73) suggests that death is 'neutralised' by the practice of making up the corpse to appear to be living.

It may be more valuable that the bereaved are supported not just to view the body as suggested by Worden (2001:100) but to be involved with the body's preparation for the coffin, creating 'small rituals in a world that is increasingly secular' (Doughty 2015a). Weber (1998:37) examining the re-establishing of a tradition of laying out the body,¹⁴ argues that doctors, rather than clergy in these more secular times, hold a vital role in validating this process.

However as Hallam et al (1999: 62) point out, the strangeness of the dead body lies in it's visceral materiality, a materiality that is about smell, leakage and the possibility of infecting the living not about warmth, muscle tone, facial expression or speech; it is the antithesis of the living. Societal order is symbolised by decorum and hygiene in our bodies and environments, the messiness of a corpse threatens this order and stability. To paraphrase Douglas (1966:116), the body is a symbol of society and is a macrocosm and mirror of the powers and dangers ascribed to purity and dirt, order to disorder, life to death within a social structure.

Yet to be with a dead body, to touch it, feel how the flesh responds differently, the weight of a body no longer holding itself back from gravity, all helps in a tangible understanding of this process of dying; a "dwelling with death" that presents opportunities to witness "unbecoming and not-being" (Secomb 1999), to be in the presence of stillness and to find one's "voice in the presence of the corpse" (Harrison 2003:65). Doughty's (2015: 176) experiences of preparing corpses leads her to want to support relatives to wash the corpse, re-establish that tradition, enabling them to "take firm control of their fear".

The presence of absence.

Corporeal processes and emotional attachment give a power to absence and this compounds the pain of loss, the finality of not being able to touch, smell or be in the presence of the dead person. Frers' observation that people "fill the void of absence with their own emotions"

14 by relatives with staff assistance within palliative care homes in Germany.

because “they need to bridge the emptiness because it threatens established expectations and practices” (Frers 2013: 432) leads to a question - If visual arts knowledge threatens and destabilises established expectations and practices, as I have witnessed, through 20 years involvement with participatory art practices, workshops, teaching, and my own arts practice. Could such knowledge be harnessed and be transformative, as Sullivan (2005:100) and Leader (2008: 87) suggest, by allowing engagement in chosen creative embodied processes, “to provide a set of instruments to help us to mourn”? Leader (2008: 87). The thesis, particularly chapters 4 & 5, explores this further.

To paraphrase Frers, there is no paradoxical distinction between the presence of absence and the absence of presence, and the disruption and dislocation stems from expectations being thwarted. There is scope within object making, ritual journeys and performance in specified places to affect how everyday experiences are disrupted by absence, by paying attention to the flow of expectations, the effects and affects absence creates, and the relationship between an absent person, place and time.

Absence is more than disruptive. It can “delve into the flesh... raise the absent entity from oneself through emotions and longings” (Frers 2013:438). I am reminded of dreams I have of my dead partner, where I am aware even within the dream that he is dead and absent even though he is seemingly present, thus holding both the physicality of him and the knowledge he is dead.

There is a need to move beyond the binary of the antonyms of presence and absence to a more enmeshed and complex relationship between both as suggested by Maddrell (2013:5), and acknowledge the powerful presence that the phenomena of absence has “sensuously, emotionally and ideationally” on people. (Bille et al 2010). As I have noted elsewhere:

In Mapping Spectral Traces, Till talks of how past presences occupy the realities of our lived worlds (2010:2) What draws my attention is how past presences both reside in place and within us and how these presences are recalled, maybe an articulation of “splace”, after Badiou (2007). How mnemonic traces are inscribed, impressed, overlaid

(with reference to the metaphorical, artistic possibilities of Aristotle's wax tablet and St. Augustine's storehouse). The affect of mneme and anamnesis, recall and recollection (Ricoeur 2004), eidetic memory, affective/sense memory, "the otherness of memory" (Sheringham 1993), on the interaction between people, objects, place and story. (Kirkpatrick in Speedy and Wyatt 2014:43).

Memory affects and changes absence allowing what is absent to become present in an altered way in experiences related to traces and situations through the body and place (Meier et al 2013: 426). These fragmentary, time-altered experiences in turn allow a synecdoche of visual response that is important with negotiating how one continues to have a relationship with someone who is dead or a situation that is radically altered.

Dreams of presence emerge from absence....an infinite silence beckoning to be filled. This is the gravitational force of absence at work. The emptiness that calls for a voice to speak. (Rose 2009: 143)

This description befits the hopelessness, the pull toward an abyss I am afraid of falling into, that also speaks of movement and action as opposed to stasis and brings to mind the theatre director Gurda Holzaus remark about the *Embodied Absence* performance on Hergest Ridge:¹⁵

The ritual journey that you made with Rob continues to inspire me. Death is close, but not stifling, because it has come in motion." (Holzaus 2014)

Motion is an important aspect of this dance between presence and absence, hence my choice to use the verb dance in this thesis.¹⁶ Motion fuels my desire to be doing, making, writing, to create objects, images and words on a page to fill absence with a presence, that focusses and troubles at absence and the changing nature of my relationship to both the dead and myself. Carol Laidler reflected on her changed relationship with her dead mother and partner talking of taking into herself aspects of them:¹⁷

15 Discussed in Chapter 5

16 Dance also suggests playfulness and makes reference to one of the roots of our word play, the Middle Dutch word 'pleyen' meaning to dance. (<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/play>)

17 Parkes also notes this sense of the dead person being within the living. (1972:104)

I became stronger as a result of my mother, because of her strength and in a funny way I feel the same about Tom. That part of him, the way that he thinks has entered me. In the re-drawing of the way your neural pathways work, which I think happens when someone dies, your immediate response/thought isn't to that person, you are having to re-jig all the ways you think and in doing that I now feel that now I think differently, part of how Tom thinks is inside of me. I look with Tom's critical eye at things, which is a very curious thing and wasn't expected. Laider, C. 2014 Interview with Davina Kirkpatrick 19 Oct.

Maddrell talks of how the tangibility of absence engenders presence and creates a paradoxical state “an experiential and relational tension between the physical absence (not being there) and emotional presence (a sense of still being there)” and explores relational absence-presence. (2013:5). This thesis explores and extends her comment that this has intrigued artists and writers, through the practice elements and the interviews conducted with artists, explored more fully in Chapters 3, 4, 5 & 6.

Conclusion.

This chapter has examined the effects and affects of sudden and unexpected death and provided definitions of grief and mourning, examining the more troubling aspects of definitions of complicated grief and how these sit within a wider cultural context.

The chapter advocates how spending time with the dead body could be one way of allowing a tangible experience of the differences between life and death as well as incorporating elements of ritual behaviour for preparing for the disposal of the corpse.

Also introduced is how ideas of the presence of absence will inform the practice element of the PhD. The presence of absence will become, throughout the thesis, to borrow a musical term, an ostinato - a lyrical and poetic description of what the practice element of this doctoral study is aiming to achieve with repetition, variation and development. There is an exploration of bodily practices and material culture, which provides a view about the agency of absence. Through the interaction and transformation of processes and materials, absence

is experienced sensually “when absences become object-like”(Fowles 2010:27), fuelled by subjectivity and desire (Fuery 1995, Rose 2009) the made objects are something fixed, solid and defined amidst this maelstrom of loss.

Through creative practice there is a possibility of an easing of the pain of loss and as discussed by Anja Marie Borno Jensen (2010:79)¹⁸, “absence is not silenced, rather reinterpreted, transformed and articulated into something that can be rendered meaningful” through, I suggest, evocation and noticing. This will be further developed in the chapters that follow.

18 Her discussion is in relation to the relatives of organ donors but I think also has relevance to creative practice.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

She had sat all night not wanting to sleep because if maybe she didn't sleep that would turn time backwards. The clocks would not progress forwards into the next day and although it seemed her world did slow, did hover, the clock hands kept turning. It was as futile as trying to use a leaky egg cup to empty the sea.

The shadows in the room lightened, day seeped in with a tonal shift. She picked up the phone pressed in the number, heard the digital translation and the phone ring. She hesitated then spoke. The response astounding in its spontaneous, rooted, brotherly love "Stay there, I'm coming to get you."

Kirkpatrick, D (October 2013)

Introduction.

In order to further develop the ideas explored in Chapter One, particularly those around the presence of absence, this chapter presents the methodological thinking, by providing an outline of the approach, the reasons for this approach and challenges that arise from these choices, and how this has informed both the PhD and thesis.

Outline of approach.

My methodological framework is grounded in multi-stranded action-led research. It is broadly phenomenological in orientation, psycho-social in tenor, and utilises knowing/not knowing as situated enquiry employing narrative methodologies and arts-based research. The analytical element references feminist approaches, auto-ethnography and collective biography writing and knowledge in practice.

My understanding of this framework is informed by John Law (2004:161) particularly his "method assemblage" as generative or performative. An enactment of presence, manifest absence and absence as Otherness, based on Law's way of holding and working with creating metaphors and images for all that is elusive, slippery, complex "all ways of trying to open up a space for the indefinite." (2004:6)

The appeal of a methodology that purposefully holds the inconsistencies acknowledging the need for "heterogeneity and variation", "reality detector and reality amplifier", "constructed

at least in part as they are entangled together” (Law 2004: 6,14, 42) resonates with my own methodological moving between the specific, the personal, the collaborative and a wider cultural context of grief and loss.

Central here are Law’s definition of two forms of absence in method assemblage. These are:

Manifest absence is that which is absent, but recognized as relevant to, or represented in presence, and absence as Otherness is that which is absent because it is enacted by presence as irrelevant, impossible or repressed. (Law 2004:84)

Manifest absence is tethered to presence. Also important is his definition of Otherness as:

That which is neither present, nor recognizably or manifestly absent, but which is nevertheless created with, and creative of, presence...that which is both necessary to presence, but necessarily pressed into absence or repressed.” (Law 2004:85)

Absence as Otherness is adrift to presence; the paradoxical nature of absence as Otherness speaks to me of the paradox at the centre of grief, holding both love and hate, what has been, what could have been and what never will be.

Law states that:

method assemblage becomes the crafting or bundling of relations or hinterland into three parts: (a) whatever is in-here or *present*; (b) whatever is absent but is also *manifest in its absence*; (c) whatever is absent but is *Other* because, while it is necessary to presence, it is not or cannot be made manifest. (2004:84)

These definitions hold a fluidity that teases apart the ambiguity of a person or place being both present and absent through loss and death and by using method assemblage through my practice, I am testing and extending Law’s methodological approach.

My practice based work is about creating both the representational and allegorical; objects (forms of presence), documentation of performance/ritual (forms of manifest absence) and one’s response to and ongoing relationship with the presence of absence as ways of exploring

grief and loss through auto-ethnographic writing, performed papers at conferences and through the interviews (what is hidden or Other).

The method not only sets out to “discover and depict reality” but also “participates in the enactment of that reality” (Law 2004:45). This position also enfoldes Bennett’s idea of ‘vibrant matter’, when objects become things, the other, and when the subject experiences the object as uncanny. Bennett’s thing-power relates to the paradoxical nature of the presence of absence: “the items on the ground that day were vibratory - at one moment disclosing themselves as dead stuff and at the next as live presence.”(2010:5)

The decision to locate the arts based inquiry as central to the developing argument is supported by researchers from social science disciplines and through practice-based projects such as *Moving Voices*¹⁹ where the workshops, screendance and interviews are data to think with, “showing aspects of how loss matters, the ways in which loss is evidenced” (Allegranti & Wyatt 2014:534). Patricia Leavy comments that “visual art-based methods allow for ‘synergistic practices’ that foster a holistic view of the research project”(2009:228). The aim is to show the personal embedded within a wider social and cultural context, acknowledging the broader legacy of Rosaldo’s (1989) ethnographic research that reflected upon his personal experience (following the accidental death of his wife) to recapitulate the emotional force of death.

The engagement between practice and theory suggests two interlocking cogs that do not always interlink smoothly. The practice runs on one cog - collaborative writing, autobiographical writing, conversation, images and objects, participatory performance in places: running on the other cog is the theoretical framing of narrative inquiry, auto-ethnography, metalogue (following Bateson 1972), theories of grief and loss and cultural theories of the importance of objects and images, theoretical writing on site-specific performance. The theoretical framing needs to keep connection with the practice and this informed my choice to include a literature review of relevant material into each chapter rather than having it as a stand alone chapter.

19 This three year funded project focussed on working with people who had experienced the death of a loved one through workshops, interviews and screendance accompanied by a photographic exhibition.

Another methodological thread is the creation of visual artwork that responds to the questions that arise from reading and experience – allowing the questions to evoke a visual response, immersing myself in the creation of this and then asking the questions again alongside the visual response to see if my thinking has changed. This approach is informed by *A/r/t/ography as living inquiry through art and text*, (Springgay et al. 2005) a methodology of embodiment and rendering and “a doubling” where art and words “complement, extend, refute, and/or subvert one another” (Springgay, et al. 2005:900) and shaped my decision to include many examples of artwork produced over the course of the study. It is also influenced by Barbara Bolt’s ideas on the double articulation of theory emerging from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory and “material productivity”, the relationship of artists to the “intelligence of materials and processes in practice” (Bolt, 2007:29-30).

I am interested how these ideas touch, fold, intertwine, the use of repetition as method and praxis and the new knowledge that resides in the spaces between them. Sullivan (2011:93) notes that: “artistic research opens up new spaces that are created in the space between what is known and what is not”. I am concerned with how this particular set of components allows the ambiguities and paradoxes of holding both remembering and forgetting and of creating new re-memberance and of what remains unsaid, as well as investigating ideas about the linear/non-linear nature of grief and loss.

Paraphrasing Iain Biggs (2012), the challenge with a practice-led doctorate is holding the relationality between practice and theory, between the different voices and roles I am assuming – the poetic/methodological and vernacular. Adorno’s pedagogy “to make the very process of conceptualisation an explicit object of thought” (quoted in Bennett 2010:14) through utopian imagination, possibility and playfulness is an apt description of a practice-based PhD.

Reasons for approach.

My fine art practice involves being playful with materials exploring their potential to be repositories of metaphor. I am particularly fascinated with materials that have the potential to be transparent, translucent and opaque, allowing images to be visible, partially visible

or concealed. I take pleasure in repetitive, often meditative, processes of making and printing. The combination of thoughtful choice of materials, the potential for layered visual exploration, combined with my experience of creating work gives a tangible dimension to the processes of absence.

A window into this world is provided through extracts from my practice log, which grapples with the challenges of materials, the translation of ideas into visual responses, the transformation of materials through the processes of making and the refining of initial ideas in response to objects and images. As Sullivan (2011:90) critiques, artists exploring “the processes, products, proclivities and contexts” within creating work can provide new insights and knowledge; “practice is a site of innovation” (Davies & Gannon 2006:90). Although, as Leavy (2009:17) points out, “aesthetic evaluation is based on the value of the work in terms of research and pedagogical functions”, I also want the artwork I produce to be part of my ongoing, developing practice as an artist. However, I see no conflict in the questions she poses, as they are the questions I ask of any artwork I make - “How does the work make one feel? What does the work evoke or provoke? What does the work reveal?” (Leavy 2009:17)

My art practice however is multi-faceted; there is a dance between personal, individual explorations and responses and the collaborative co-created which subverts notions of the “professional exclusivity of the artist as artist”(Biggs 2012:2).²⁰

The participatory projects and interviews that I initiated, enable conversations and sharing of understandings of loss, something that although becoming more openly discussed in newspaper articles and through the death café movement²¹ is still on the periphery of many people’s experience. They provide multiple perspectives, viewpoints, and voices for the thesis, documentation of site-specific rituals, and the creation of gifted objects. The participatory projects importantly are orientated around specific external sites, thus allowing an examination of loss of place as well as loss of people.

20 I enjoy the challenges and delights of working with participants and have explored this throughout my career through theatre design, public art projects, socially engaged practice and teaching.

21 A movement extended by artist Jon Underwood and psychotherapist Sue Barksy Reid, based on the ideas of Bernard Crettaz, a Swiss sociologist and anthropologist who set up Café Mortels, to create moments that people can come together drink tea, eat cake and talk about death and dying. <http://impermanenceatwork.org/dc.html>

The collaborative writing workshops that I contributed to were important as they specifically included aspects of participatory practice and playing with strategies for “collaboratively investigating entanglements of subjectivity, discourse and materiality in lived experience through memory” (Davies & Gannon 2006) and the messiness that suggests. As I have stated elsewhere, “The collaborative projects became a ‘wondering’ and a ‘wandering’ around how we might write and work otherwise collaboratively.”²² (Kirkpatrick in Speedy & Wyatt 2014:249) Any writing included in the thesis generated during or from the workshops is my own.

A dialogue was enabled to occur with different audiences by showing aspects of the practice within a variety of contexts, for example the film *She Wanders/Wonders* as part of a collaborative performed, as well as a solo performed, paper at conferences²³ and as part of an exhibition installation, experimenting with display/exhibition of artwork in collaboration with, the curator, Carol Laidler within an exhibition space. Testing the work on an audience and writing up the audience response creates a space for dialogue, which as Leavy (2009:18) suggests is “vital to the negotiation of meanings and incorporation of multiple perspectives.”

Another route into a broader, more collective perspective on the issues under consideration is through the interviews. A number of artists were selected, across a broad spectrum of arts practices, whom I had identified had explored issues around grief and loss through their arts practice and I felt had a resonance to my own arts practice or who had self-identified by approaching me having seen and heard papers I had performed at conferences. This was a further example of my conference papers providing extended conversations on grief and loss. The interviews provide additional voices of experience and enable a dance between the particular and the general. I have edited the interview extracts included in the thesis to be sensitive to the personal nature of the conversations, help ease of reading and the developing argument. This is balanced with including enough detail to provide contextual information on the artworks the interviewees are discussing.

A semi-structured interview style for the interviews was chosen, as this would, as Drever

22 This also informed the title of the film ‘She Wanders/Wonders’, presented as part of Chapters 4 & 5.

23 Aninet Event, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol Feb 2015; Qualitative Inquiry Conference at Champaign, Illinois May 2015; Emotional Geographies Conference, Edinburgh, June, 2015.

(1995: 10) assesses, “enable people to speak at length and in their own way” . It encouraged a form of two-way communication as the interviewee could ask questions and the open structure could then “provide the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand” (Cohen & Crabtree 2006). It also seemed closest in form to a metalogue. A metalogue explores a problematic subject whilst showing a conscious, intimate, and subtle relationship between the structure and content of a conversation and its meaning (Bateson 1972:1).

The list of questions, or starting points for discussion, were of a mix of generic and some that varied slightly from person to person (see Appendix 2), depending on the work the interviewee’s produced. These were open-ended to facilitate discussion and allow a probing for detail. The interviews took place at the interviewees home or studio, because we were discussing sensitive issues around grief and loss, I wanted the interviewees to be comfortable and relaxed and felt this would be more easily achieved in familiar surroundings. The interviews took between one to two hours.

In response to the ethical considerations of the care of respondents, information on the project, contact information for my Director of Studies, CRUSE Bereavement Care and myself was given to the interviewees at the time of the interview and consent forms were signed; none of the participants requested anonymity. Sections of the thesis that incorporated direct quotation from interviewees was sent to each person so they could verify the words used and the sense inferred from them. As Newton (2010:6) proposes:

It is the power of semi-structured interviews to provide rich, original voices, which can be used to construct research narrative that gives the method its invaluable quality.

Within the thesis, different sources of writing are highlighted by a change in the colour of the text, to aid reader recognition of the changes in tone and content, and to provide a multiplicity of voices and positions running throughout the thesis. To reiterate for reader clarity the colour coding scheme mentioned on page 14 - auto-ethnographic text on desire, intensity, grief and loss is in grey and italics; *interviews with practitioners who have worked with themes of loss and grief in their work, the affect of this choice upon them and the*

responses they have received are in blue. Extracts from my practice diary and daily journal are in green. Artwork that visually evokes and re-frames notions of the presence of absence and the participatory co-created rituals in chosen landscapes examples of 'manifest absence' (Law 2004) are particular features of Chapters 4 and 5. I have chosen to embed the images, of the artwork produced and the participatory projects, within the text to aid readability and to keep an obvious relationship between words and images.

Challenges of this methodological approach.

The challenge of creating a linear argument that does not lose the diversity of approaches, that also allows the reader to see and experience the different forms of outcomes between the areas of practice and theory and give a sense of the doubling back and interplay between these and between the personal, the particular and a broader context, has required an ongoing attentiveness to the balance and flow of the thesis.

The choice to adapt and extend Law's method assemblage methodology is an attempt to manage the 'double-edged problem' that researchers in the field of artistic research face, "that of investigating not only an 'object' but with the aid of the 'object'" (Boomgaard 2011:70) As Boomgaard posits, the complexity of and inconclusive nature of an artwork, the fact that it requires a viewer to continue the dialogue, means it has "a closed form with an open end" that can allow an experience of the insight formulated in the text and "a forcing open the hermetic methodology of science" (Boomgaard 2011:71). The open-ended quality of the artwork intersects with Turner's notion of "multiple variability" in comparative symbology in ritual processes that importantly are concerned with complexity and "continuously changing social life, murky and glinting with desire and feeling"(1982:22-23).

Barrett & Bolt (2010:2) demonstrate how generative enquiry through practice-based study draws on subjectivity, interdisciplinary, diverse and emergent processes that arise from doing and the senses in relationship to theory to provide new knowledge. This new knowledge is "grounded in the multiple realities and experiences encountered within the lifeworld of individuals" (Sullivan 2011:89). I follow Guttorm (2012:595) allowing hesitancy and unknowingness to be explicit and to turn toward creative and poetic expression.

Conclusion.

This chapter has provided the methodological framework for the PhD, presenting how the theoretical issues have informed and are woven within iterative processes of making and documenting and how repetition will be used as method and praxis. The triangulation of personal artwork and auto-ethnography, participatory projects, and interviews provides both the personal and particular within a wider collective experience of mourning. The incorporation of method assemblage within the differing aspects of practice and within a broader exploration of grief and loss provides new knowledge on both the methodology in practice and the wider field.

This chapter has also explored the challenges presented by the non-linear processes of practice-based research, which echoes the non-linear experience of grief.

CHAPTER 3 - GRIEF AND LOSS, PARTS TWO AND THREE

Louisa: Formalities matter don't they?

Davina: They do, yeah, that's the madness..the madness that is being an artist (laugh)

Louisa: It is, it really is, isn't it? (laugh) that is summed up so well.

Fairclough L. 2014.

She had undertaken a series of drawings of her mum as she was dying. She needed to do something and it allowed her to go to a more objective space where her focus was recording what was in front of her. It seemed to calm her, it felt that time passed in a more meaningful way and she wanted to remember. It felt really important; she had never watched anyone die before and particularly not her mum.

She knew from setting out from Bristol that this was the end her mum wasn't going to recover so each moment was incredibly precious yet the time could really have dragged sitting by her bed, watching, waiting. She wanted to find a way to be here now and the drawing helped facilitate that.

She draws to understand, maybe everyone does and she wanted to understand how life slips away, if it would be visible in the drawings as it was in reality, and it was. She also wanted something to be in control of, it was something she could do, she couldn't stop her dying, she couldn't take away the pain but she could bear witness. Kirkpatrick, D. (2010).²⁴

Introduction.

In order to further develop the argument of the thesis this chapter explores grief and loss through ceremony and creativity as praxis rather than as therapy and the sense of community and connection this can elicit. By briefly describing the creation of my partner's funeral, my attendance at a Raza Boxes²⁵ workshop, and a ritual and ceremony training, I expand the ideas presented in relation to other artists' practice and the semi-structured interviews conducted with artists across different artistic disciplines. These interviews specifically examine mourning and intensity, conversation, time, writing and making the loss differently, placing grief in a specific chosen location, the transformation through metaphor, and the affect of making

24 Part of the paper 'Exquisite Pain; a proposition of the personal as a reflection of the social. A consideration of beauty and pain in relation to love and loss: the importance of (forgetting and) remembering through art', presented with Suze Adams and Penny Somerville at Beauty will save the world, Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference on Art and Social Change, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, University of Bristol 2010.

25 Richard Schechner's improvisation tool for actors.

work on personal emotional response to loss. I am interested in a diverse spectrum of artists who had worked with these themes and the effects and affects the making of the work had upon them and their audiences, the tension between the personal and the critical (Woodthorpe 2009). This chapter along with the two preceding chapters provide the linear argument and then the chapters that follow work across, into and through the argument.

Hallam et al. propose that deathbed photography enabled the dead to remain present they suggest that by:

Re-locating the corpse, through photographic images within the art gallery contemporary artists' strategies have aimed to confront the reality of death within wider public domains. (1999:37)

My intention is to extend this idea to include artistic interpretations of grief and loss, to confront these realities within wider public and cultural domains. Both within my own arts practice (in Chapters 4 & 5) and in this chapter by examining other artists' responses to grief and loss.

I start by introducing specific examples of work by Alec Finlay, Polly Gould, Kevin Smith, Rosy Martin, Suzanne Hutchinson, Emily Richardson, Zoe Leonard, and Ellie Harrison that are pertinent to the argument and give a flavour of current contemporary arts practice across a variety of different media that are engaged with issues relating to grief, loss and mourning.

I then utilise interview extracts from a series of interviews conducted with practitioners who have produced work after loss and grief. Extracts from these interviews follow grouped under a selection of headings that inform and add depth to the central issues of the PhD. The extracts are fulsome to include contextual information on the nature of the work the artists produced, links are provided in the footnotes to websites where images can be viewed, to circumnavigate copyright and thesis repository issues. The inclusion of artists working with the identified themes contextualise and elucidate the argument. They are indicative of a constituency of artists to whom the new knowledge created through the doctorate is relevant.

The artists interviewed were either self-selecting having approached me having seen a presentation at a conference, or identified as working with the themes of grief and loss through prior knowledge of their practice, or through published text or an online presence. I am aware that they are all Northern European white artists, as I am, which provides a common basis of cultural experience. They are also predominantly female, the gender of my interviewees has relevance to the topic of the thesis. I also wanted to particularly focus on female artists as they have been under represented historically in art history and I feel there is still a need to redress this balance.

Artists interviewed.

Between 2013 and 2015 I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with the artists Gurda Holzaus, Fern Smith, Louisa Fairclough, Carol Laidler, Belinda Whiting, Sue Gill and John Fox. The interviews explore aspects of the work of -

Gurda Holzaus and *muzietheater door theamus* production of *noem je Sheeum* exploring the grief of two mothers for their sons one a suicide bomber and the other the son killed by the suicide bomber. *Volcano Theatre's* production of *This Imaginary Woman*, exploring Fern Smith's grief for her dead mother in collaboration with Patrick Fitzgerald.²⁶ Louisa Fairclough's work on grief and the River Severn - *Song of Grief, Body of Water*; the installation *Can People See Me Swallowing* and the collaborative site specific performance *Compositions for a Low Tide* with the composer Richard Glover and performed by Rochester Cathedral choristers.²⁷ Carol Laidler's work on the project *The Human Book* and her own work, within her curatorial practice with alldaybreakfast.²⁸ Belinda Whiting's work *So near, so far, the distance between us, Obsession* and her book *Sophie's Story*.²⁹ Sue Gill and John Fox participatory artwork with Welfare State International, *The Dead Good Guide*, and *Rites of Passage Workshops*.³⁰

Specific examples of Artists' practice.

Alec Finlay's work *Memorial-remembrancing* is the collaborative creation of a National memorial

²⁶ http://www.bbc.co.uk/northamptonshire/stage/2004/this_imaginary_woman_interview.shtml
Because of the restrictions to publish images of others' artworks on the Research Repository I am including website references in the footnotes so visual images can be easily found and are located with the text they refer too .

²⁷ <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/fairclough/>

²⁸ <http://www.alldaybreakfast.inf>

²⁹ <http://belindawhiting.co.uk/home.html>

³⁰ <http://www.deadgoodguides.com>

for tissue and organ donors. The work is a sensitive blending of ancient rituals from Scotland and Greece in a public site responsive artwork in Scotland, stories told and translated into ephemeral offerings that enable a blending of personal memorial within the wider public space and a recognition of life in death. He says (on his website) “An image came and it stayed with me, of the stone as a natural counterpart to the human organ.”

let us prepare a space

In which truth

can be known

a space which remains open

a space in which

no word

no object

will close down meaning

or hinder feeling³¹

The creation of the blog, photos, poems, book and the explicit showing of the process of creation is as much a part of the artwork as the created space. It is an artwork that breathes and has a life because of the ongoing use of the “wilding garden”.³²

Polly Gould in linking drawings she made of her father dying to an Antarctic landscape explores searching for a place (“both imaginary or psychological”) to go to undertake the work of mourning³³ (Gould 2010:283). She questions whether imagining the future as another place could help with mourning. She suggests art can be a way of mediating absence and loss and seeking transcendence when the notion of an afterlife is no longer credible. (Gould 2010: 284). Her description of sitting at her father’s hospital bed drawing is reminiscent both of

31 <http://alecfinlayblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/memorial-remembrancing.html>

32 Finlay’s description of this designed garden that looks and feels like an uncultivated ‘natural’ setting,

33 making reference to Freud and his ideas around the work of mourning

my description of drawing my mum as she was dying³⁴ and of Berger's (2005:67) depiction of drawing his father's dead body.

Kevin Smith's drawings are like exquisite, delicate jewels. They are meticulously copied from found or personal photographs; one is not told which is which, so the stories are both personal and universal. He says he "asks questions which are never answered" and that the drawings emerge from this layered complexity, "in the space between"³⁵ (Smith 2013).

Tears sprung to my eyes when looking at the drawings of a father indistinct, obscured by glass or whose features are not rendered³⁶, having talked to him I knew this related to his own personal history. I remembered us talking about the part quiet, repetitive creative processes can play in paying attention after death and loss, as we sat legs dangling over an ancient cist whilst on a fieldtrip with PLaCE Research Centre. How the transformation from photo to drawing and the attentiveness of the drawing process can draw out the material memory, reviving and enlarging it. (Kirkpatrick January 2012).

The photography of Rosy Martin has a powerful emotional resonance. There is a pervading air of melancholy and absence before one even knows that the work is about the death of her father. It is born out of her responses to that experience and:

the desperate searching that goes with that first recognition of profound loss. The view-finder misted with soft tears and an ache that no image can assuage. Yet filled too with contradictions, remorse tinged with a longing to escape.³⁷ (Martin 1999)

Suzanne Hutchinson's multi-disciplinary installations and performances are focused on the marking of memory, absence and loss through collaborative practice and the use of image,

34 explored in papers 'EXQUISITE PAIN: a proposition of the personal as reflection of the social. A consideration of beauty and pain in relation to love and loss: the importance of (forgetting and) remembering through art', with Dr. Suze Adams and Penny Somerville at Beauty will save the world, Interdisciplinary Post-graduate Conference on Art and Social Change, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, University of Bristol 2010 and at Catchment/PLaCE Mapping Spectral Traces' Workshop and Symposium with related solo and group exhibitions; PLaCE Research Centre, UWE, Bristol 23 March 2011.

35 <http://www.kevinsmithdrawing.com/#!writing/alpu1>

36 These images featured in his Masters Degree Show at Duncan of Jordanstone, University of Dundee, 2013.

37 <http://www.rosymartin.co.uk>

object and space to mark a remembering. The three installations and performances *The Ministry of Kindness - A Conversation about Dying*, *Auntie Esme and Uncle Henry* and *Slowly you Leave* utilise illusion through the transformation of materials, devotional ritual through repetitive making and create a memorial space.³⁸

Loss of place in the work of filmmaker Emily Richardson particularly the films *Nocturne*, *Cobra Mist*, *Memo Mori* and *Rising 5th*.

The artist/photographer Zoe Leonard's, series of installations *Strange Fruit (for David)*, fruit skins sewn up and embellished with wire and thread, slowly decomposing. This work was a response to a friend's death and the wider implications of the Aids epidemic. She described it as a "way to sew [herself] back up" after the death of a friend.³⁹

The collaborative work of Ellie Harrison on *The Grief Series* uses the seven stage grief model as a starting point for creating work and working with other artists. This series is still in progress only three stages have so far been realised. She found in early iterations of her solo performance *The Etiquette of Grief* that talking about bereavement could be embarrassing for an audience, what was needed was a "contrast between bleak and playful, respect and irreverence" (Harrison 2013:5).⁴⁰ After this first work people wanted to talk about loss to her, as though she had "opened up a safe space to do so."

This informed the second work in the series a one-to-one performance *The Reservation* which evolved after a year long process of collaboration with Jayne Kearney. The project's starting point was the 'elephant in the room'. They identified that clear communication, a need for every detail to be considered and paid attention to was required for the audience to feel cared about and to address the ethical responsibility of dealing with the sensitive issue of grief and loss.

The third project, *What is Left*, has resonance with my own project *Objects of Loss* in terms of

38 <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/staff/suzanne-hutchinson/the-memory-and-loss-project>

39 <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/92277.html>

40 <http://griefseries.co.uk/process>

her ideas of linking story, recorded photographic image and gifting this image back to the participants. She acknowledges the importance of conversation both between the artists and between the artists and audience and the wider cultural implications of finding a space to talk about grief. She notes that *The Grief Series*:

takes some experiences that are negative and out of her control and transforms them into something with new life....that has genuine passion and intention” (Harrison 2013:5).

The performance company Nightswimming’s production *Blue Note* was a collaboration between theatre artists, musicians and architects and explored embodied grief and corporeal absence.⁴¹ It was an evolving installation and performance that presented a rehearsal of a now seven member singing ensemble approximately ten days after the death of an unnamed male member. It is part wake, part rehearsal, part performance, both individual and collective (in terms of performers and audience) responses to death and grief. Lucci (2011: 3) asserts that *Blue Note*:

guides the audience into relationship with the deceased...His presence is made manifest through words, music, images and object over the course of the performance....by intertwining both the notions of physical and phenomenological. (Lucci 2011: 3)

The production offers an understanding of the multiplicity of the experiences of grief and mourning through explicitly showing the process of creation of the performance.

The examples above show a diverse range of artistic responses to grief, loss and absence but all are grappling, as I am, with the issues of how to pay attention, create rituals, transform experience through engagement with object, image or space.

Ceremony and Creativity.

Just feel I can’t do this, haven’t got the strength to see it through, so much to attend to. I just want to cry out ‘help, I’m drowning’ This is why funeral directors take over, why people surrender the arranging to someone else – I don’t want to do that so there

41 <http://nightswimmingtheatre.com/productions/blue-note/>

is a choice, constantly putting one foot in front of the other. I have to not fall into the abyss not pull back the covers of the ever after and the jagged yearning hole of loss.

Kirkpatrick (2011) 30 October.

Pragmatically, I needed to project manage the funeral of my partner, not only as an act of care but because I have a wealth of skills gained from project managing public art projects. I could not bear to pay someone else to do it less well than I could myself. Through this action and by then attending a Ritual and Ceremony Course with Sue Gill and Gilly Adams in 2012, I reflected on the links between ceremony and creativity and this informed the collaborative ritual acts undertaken as part of the doctoral project. “In ritual doing is believing, a funeral is not a philosophical discourse, it is an action” (Gill and Fox 2004:131).

Many cultures have beliefs and rituals associated with ensuring there is an eventual separation through some form of ritual journey from the living world for the corpse (Quigley 1996:16, Baglow 2007:224) and also for those left living; although there could be a temptation to romanticise non-Western rituals, the allure of the other or a viewing of the people as “more natural”(Hockey 1996:16). As Leader (2008:119) posits “alterity with the dead replaces continuity” through such acts as the immediate destruction of the dead person’s possessions, a symbolic act of removing oneself from the dead. The thesis does no more than acknowledge these rituals exist, this is necessary within the word count constraints. The focus instead is on white, Northern European rituals.

The secularisation of Western society presents different challenges in terms of mourning. There is less attention paid to the rituals associated through religion to death and mourning. Northern European mourning rituals, after two world wars, had tended to be bounded by a regime of silence, containment, and emotional restraint possibly as a way to deny and suppress the fact of death (Ariés 1981; Gorer 1965). This is slowly being changed by more individualised rituals of separation, funeral and burial/cremation. (Walters 1994; Gill and Fox 2004), but there is also the aspect that our social mourning rituals have been eroded. Leader (2008) argues that mourning requires other people to provide support, a sense of shared loss and a powerful symbolic representation.

Sue: And of course the work is about serving the need of other people and the occasion, so it's not about ego, so that's (laughing) sometimes is a discrepancy with the arts...the professional arts world.

Sue: The power of the music was far more important than any of the words and it said what words couldn't say.

Davina: It's also about the temporality, the 'in the moment' experience.

Sue: Yes absolutely you have to be here to experience this.

Davina: yes I have to be here and the person this is for is actually absent and present so you really do rub up against the presence of the absence.

Sue: and I can't experience this at one remove later through a photograph or through a recording or something, I have to be present. When we gather together, the importance of that. Gill, S & Fox, J.(2015)

Paying a particular attention to rhythm and repetition are important elements of ritual, providing a different habitation of habit to delineate the differences between ritual and routine. Ritual works through you, is bigger than the self and serves a need over and above the primary function. There is an indivisible link between community and ritual Kirkpatrick, D. (October 2012).

The journal entry written whilst experiencing a ritual and ceremonies course suggests 'communitas' (Turner 1969) (allowing an equality of community) through rites of passage and liminality that something is changed. Ritual recognises the potency of disorder and that it symbolises both danger and power (Douglas 1966:95). Rituals and rites contain this disorder within a shared structure and in terms of rituals around mortality, loss and death help "to stave off despair and withstand feelings of powerlessness" (Wouters 2002:10) and "emphasise transitional or threshold rites" (Hockey 2010:212). Van Gennep posited that rites of passage had a supportive function for society as a whole. Key components within ritual as identified by Van Gennep (1960:39) are separation, transition, re-incorporation. Turner's refiguring of this schema - pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal - includes the idea that ritual has a creative function, "ritual is transformative, ceremony confirmatory" (Turner 1969:95). In collectively designing a ritual and ceremony on the *Rites of Passage Course*, the importance and power of paying attention to these components was experienced by the creators/participants. The

course embodied imagination, invention, “a bodily and communal enactment transforming and renewing the real.” (Grimes 2000:4). This informed the participatory ritual acts undertaken as part of this doctoral study that are explored in more depth in Chapter 5.

Another thread of influence was my experience of attending Richard Schechner’s *Raza Boxes*⁴² workshop at The Barbican in 2011. I experienced through the safely held ritual improvisations an ability to fall fully, bodily into and out of a variety of emotional states and respond to other peoples’. My partner died the same night I had attended the workshop and the memory of that day stood me in good stead in the weeks after; I felt more able to fall into and out of emotional states.

I did it, I crossed a line - in myself. I allowed myself to be fully present in an improvisational action. It was/is powerful. I can feel it working in me still but also I can feel the dance between the feeling states, feel their vibration in my body and yet also be observing that vibration now it is quietening.

I am so glad I was in the first workshop group, no preamble, no preparation, expectations were my own generated by my own fear and excitement. I wonder if I would have entered into Rasaboxes so freely if I had watched the films of others’ experiences first? This was commented on by the second group, they held back more. A regret I have is that I didn’t stay and witness the second group, be an observer of the actual in the moment experience rather than an observer of the filmed- is that different? I was moved by the films - horrified, joyous, sad, wondrous, loving.

From the outset, even in the drawing exercise on the floor, I tried not to think, let my hand move with the strokes that felt appropriate: Fear - purple face, arms overhead, cave enclosing, closed in trying to find safety. Love - expanding out, arms spread out, smiling eyes, flowing lines a circle around, hands touching the outer edge, lines radiating out from the centre. Mirth - swirls of lines joining and returning, swivelling and spiralling.

The students from The University of Kent demonstrated responding to the words individually before we moved into the demarcated boxes. That structure helped keep

42 Rasaboxes trains participants to physically express eight key emotions first identified in the *Natyasastra*, a Sanskrit text dealing with theatre, dance, and music

it safe and also the ritualising - shoes off, not stepping on the lines except if you were engaged in the process, chairs for observers; rules and boundaries both physical and metaphorical. Noticing my judgements - I don't believe, it's too extreme, but then becoming aware of them and letting them drift away, paying closer attention to the moment, letting myself be pulled into their experience.

The boxes were surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, sloth, courage, fear, love, mirth. I really let my body move me - to feel the emotion in my body especially sadness - I wept, wracking sobs; anger - in my belly and out through my feet stamping and slapping the floor; courage - my back straightened. arms opened, strong legs; mirth - laughter that loosened my spine, let myself roll and wriggle; love - I stroked myself, reached out, reached sensually, slowly testing balance, feeling love for myself and then letting it flow out from my fingertips; fear - I retracted, closed in shivered and quivered; disgust - too hot to touch, retching and twitching; surprise - stretching, eyes open, face upward.

We group worked in pairs - 'Siamese twins' with the students from Kent, having to keep contact at all times and allowing an exchange of emotion. I worked second time round with a girl who reminded me physically of an old friend (who I had judged as too extreme at the beginning) and a guy. I just tried to melt into them but also be aware of the flow between us as we moved from box to box both separate and together, intimate and yet as soon as we stepped outside the boxes separate again. I regret not thanking them. Kirkpatrick (2011) 22 October

There is artistry to weaving together a ceremony and ritual that, like a theatrical performance, takes the participants through a process of witnessing and being witnessed (Grimes 2000:320), sharing focus and intention and allowing an infusion of spontaneity.

Sue: Definitely going back to what you were saying at the beginning that you suddenly felt that whilst you were arranging Chris' funeral that you were accessing some ancient knowledge and that thing about, which may or may not include art but it's including a wisdom.

I just remembered I'd got a quote here that I picked up from Resurgence saying,

and this is a woman called Barbara Hubbard, “through ritual we can access parts of ourselves that are not available to us in any other way when we join together either in small groups or in festivals or large gatherings we hold the code to more intelligent and loving life right here and amongst us now”

We do actually know these things and particularly when people consciously come together to collaborate on something that everything we need and all the knowledge that we need is inherent within us and I think that to just tease that out and for people to work intuitively and that the sorting the decisions that they will offer and come up with the place that’s coming from to serve whatever the occasion is.

John: The hard thing, and also the good thing about art, is that you have rules to do with the quality of its making, the harmonic physics of it all, whatever genre you use there are rules within each one. What does art do if it’s any good? It elucidates the bigger mysteries. Gill, S. & Fox J. (2015).

There was an interesting cross over in the interviews from creating rituals for specific events like funerals to creating artwork/performance that had come from a place of loss that contained ritual elements and how these engaged the audience.

Gurda: What I did with inventing these rituals and talking it over doing improvisations on the attack the three of us cried a lot together and a lot of grief came free and a lot of mourning and so we told each other our stories of grief and mourning. Holzaus, G. (2013).

Louisa: I think (your) comment about shamanic ritual is really, really interesting, no one has ever said that to me before but actually I have talked about it in terms of, and this is probably also very influenced by our time in Groningen⁴³, but the notion of it becoming an alternative ritual for mourning and consolation. I’m interested in that it actually is that and the same for this next body of work.

43 We both presented papers at The International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Emotional Geographies, 2013

This next work that I'm doing at Whitstable, which involves the procession out to the sea with the choristers and another film sculpture but actually it being an alternative form of mourning and consolation but also that it's not about this one loss it's something more universal, that one loss can affect many, you know, that through this, it can not be about my loss, because I don't think it is any more. Fairclough, L. (2014).

As Cornell (2014:308) suggests "These are places we are not meant to venture alone."

I explored through the interviews the fostering of a sense of community and shared connection, how the creation of performance or artwork enabled a community to be created that shared the experience, this was much more explicit in the theatre performances.

Gurda: To deal with it together to share it and this part of sharing that was for me so important because I think I missed it in my own moments of grief and mourning.

Gurda: and you don't stand still with the fact that it might do something with you. I think that's good you shouldn't realise that, because then it becomes a purpose and that is not the purpose. The purpose is to make a nice play, but me as a director of course I wondered why this theme was for me the most important and it became a kind of theory of me, that I found out that mourning together is so important that it can overflow any...apposite meanings or apposite tensions of people, so go into the mourning deeply and find a way of expressing is... really relieving.

I think the arts are very important to realise some emotions and get through it but in fact I was surprised by the reactions of the public, because for me that's difficult to... think about in the beginning. It's just a process, I'm going in with the actresses and it's a very personal process and of course when I am directing I'm always thinking of the audience and how they will look at it but it's just an idea you can't really experience that until it happens.

Gurda: There is this very moment after a death you come, if you wanted to or not, you come very close to each other and you want to make something beautiful for the person who is going to leave you or who left you. Holzaus, G. (2013).

Fern: So I suppose Volcano had always got into trouble....but I think there was something not about ...a societal upset but it felt like something about a deep personal upset. There was something too about *An Imaginary Woman* that we played to an audience of individuals rather than we played to an audience, because often we met them afterwards. As we were putting the stuff away at the end people would come and literally talk to us for an hour about their own...either they were going through it then or they had maybe gone through it a few years ago and yet wanted to connect with us.

So both me and Patrick we witnessed so many people in the audience come and just search us out and tell us their story, after we'd told them ours. So it did always feel that we were connecting with people as individuals knowing that each of them might really have, not wanting to inflict more on people, but we did have a sense (and I know that in all of the theatre we had done) that art really can be transformative and can offer a vessel. We go into and come out changed and I felt that with *An imaginary Woman* we can help people through their grieving process, you know we can offer this so it's greater than this piece of theatre...and also because I think Patrick was a doctor it was a funny thing that I kinda felt like he's wedded to death and dying really, with the work that he's doing. Smith, F. (2014).

Carol: What came out of the writing eventually was *The Human Book*⁴⁴ which I took part in. It was a group event, my book was called *We will always have Amsterdam a story of love, loss and survival*. Doing that performance intervention was a fantastic thing for me. It was exactly two years after he died. It was really helpful because it just involved having conversations with people about loss and death. It was very good for me and very good for the people who came to talk to me. It just felt wonderful. Laidler, C. (2014).

Mourning and intensity.

In the context of this chapter and Chapters 4 & 5 I am exploring trying to find equivalence to

44 'The Human Book Project', was part of In the City, produced by The Showroom Projects and Wunderbar "where books are people and reading them involves sitting down for a conversation." MAYK, Theatre producing, Bristol. (<http://www.mayk.org.uk/portfolio/in-the-city-human-library/>)

the intensity of grief through the experiences of making, in Chapter 6 I return to the theme of mourning and intensity in relation to auto-ethnographic writing and sexuality.

There is a dissonance between the continuing bonds model⁴⁵ in Western psychology and bereavement counselling and the fact that death is largely absent from everyday social life. There is a need to be able to make meaning and find ways of coping with the emotional, physical pain of loss (Heath 2014:299).

As Didion (2005:189) says:

nor can we know ahead of the fact (and here lies the heart of the difference between grief as we imagine it and grief as it is) the unending absence that follows, the void, the very opposite of meaning, the relentless succession of moments during which we will confront the experience of meaninglessness itself.

The interviewees expressed a need for the creative process to enable emotional changes, relational movement that works in opposition to the stasis and finality of death.

Belinda: I think that I'm aware that as the years have gone on I don't experience that loss like I did. So the impetus to make work in that way has shifted and changed. The word that comes to me is appeasement: finding correlation with something that is created visually out there that seems to appease something in here. It's like its found an expression and it can go out into the world and maybe, as I say, someone else can see that very moment. It can appease something for them too.

Belinda: And this appeasement happens only in the intense moment of making the work, when it matches the intensity of the pain and loss, then something is eased.

Whiting, B. (2014).

Conversation.

I asked the interviewees about the conversations that were generated through the process

45 A relatively recent model largely from 1990 onwards.

of making between collaborators and also with the audience of the finished artwork or performance. Both Louisa and Fern recounted encounters where the artwork was instrumental in significant exchanges.

Davina: So...so that interests me because it something that happens to me when I show work is that people tell me their grief stories (laugh).

Louisa: Yes that's happened before at the opening night of the show at Danielle Arnaud, opening day in fact before the show opened. A young woman, interestingly enough she was Muslim had a headscarf, it was culturally different from my own place I kind of found that intriguing. But she lay between Song of Grief for hours. Two speakers 'wwwaaaahhh' and when I arrived Danielle said "ooh Louisa you might want to talk to her she's been here all day and she's left and come back" and then she brought her over.

Then this young woman, who was probably eighteen or nineteen, she asked me first of all "Can I ask you, what motivated you to make this work?" And I said actually can I ask you, you've been here all day what's that...?

"Well someone forwarded me the press release," (she might have been an art student I don't know), "someone forwarded me the press release and it really closely...and you talked about this voice, throwing this voice this grief out of you into the river" and she said "I feel like I can't...my parents died very recently and I've been all round London looking for a place to... scream, to throw this grief out of my body" those weren't her words exactly, "and you can't, I've gone from Rose Hill and you can't, you can't it's a taboo. So I have found this by lying here I found this...found this emptying.... therapeutic process" and that was like amazing and she said "I hope you are going to do it really big?" and I said "YES, I AM" (laughing). So, that was a kind of moment of thinking oh that's really meaningful that's happened. Fairclough, L. (2014)

Fern: I started doing the CRUSE course...and then we consciously really worked with the stages of grief. I suppose when we were making the songs and then trying to find

an order and then also saying are we allowed to do this on stage, put these emotions that are so strong that they might bring up emotions for other people? How can we responsibly do this?

Ok, let's return to Kubler Ross' grief structure and go actually if we are taking people into this then actually by the end of it we need to be able to deliver them and ourselves, actually we were thinking them more than ourselves at the time, into a place where they can walk out the door and into the theatre again and be ok or as ok as they can be. So that was the thing we thought that would give us permission to do this. Yeah, that was a real conversation – we were going “Can we do this? Are we allowed?”

Fern: Thank goodness we had those people coming up and saying “thank you, this is amazing and it means yeah I'm gonna go away and write my own story now”, a lot of people said that to us “I've always thought about doing this and now I'm going to do it.” It wasn't even that they were going to make a book or publish it or sell lots but it was something about knowing that writing something out and putting something out there was valid and actually it contributed to a sense of greater wellbeing by being able to talk about it rather than I shouldn't talk about this and no-one wants to hear. Smith, F. (2014).

Time.

There was for most of the interviewees a period of some time between the original loss and grief and the desire to make something. Often it was stated that this delay was important because something unresolved had remained with the person. Gurda in talking about her sister said,

Gurda: Well she died in 2002 and the idea of the play came up in I think 2006 or 7 or something. Holzaus, G. (2013).

Davina: When did your sister die?

Louisa: 2008....she died in June the 26th or the 27th, we are not sure which, probably the 26th 2008.

Davina: And how long was it before you started to make the first lot of work?

Louisa: Nearly a year, yeah I couldn't make anything for quite a long time. Fairclough, L. (2014).

Fern: I think I'd had quite a major time in a way I knew I couldn't have done it earlier, those seven years and it is quite interesting that it was seven years. It almost sounds like something quite mythic doesn't it? It's like there's a certain measure, I'm sure there is something about every seven years you have completely new cells in your body, kind of thing, so everything replaces itself. So something almost like a cycle I had gone through, which I think I did do a lot of grieving and a lot of acting out and had quite a lot of opportunity to be very dysfunctional in that time and of course a lot of that went into the Volcano shows as well. The kind of life in-extremis emotions, you know, that sometimes that you can't really put into your everyday.

I can't even remember what were we doing 'cos there was...we were in South America doing *Love, L O V E*, so that was quite an extreme show and we did that on and off for quite a few years and then we might have done *Macbeth*. Yeah, so there was often an opportunity to kind of glue the grief that was coming through me into a kind of constructive outlet for my work.

So by the time we actually got to address all of this stuff, and also because I think I had the CRUSE bereavement course I did read and read and read and I loved it and I felt that there was something about making sense then of what was happening to me, in those seven years.

And I did think, actually, a little while after mum died I just thought - my god this is such a massive thing to go through grief why doesn't anyone tell you? Why does everyone walk around like normal human beings when there is this in life? How can people do it? So I think that whole sense of dislocation and completely walking around disassociated from yourself and anybody else and all of that crashing extreme grief that you live with and yeah I don't think I had anybody else close to me at the time who had ever spoken to me about that. Smith, F. (2014).

Writing and making the loss differently.

The interviewees made reference to ideas around using the creative process to write/make the story of loss differently and how they had been changed through the process.

Gurda: Yeah. And let's be clear I thought it was all over my grief and I think because we always had to be strong and be there for her you can't give to your own grief then, because we were also feeling very little and...

Davina: Yeah vulnerable...

Gurda: Yeah and we had...(crying)....to be always strong and I had my children at home, life goes on, so you can't stand still all the time with this other feeling of grief. It came back in the play...in choosing this theme within the story and within the play and that I choose...to let them make together rituals and invent new rituals in the play.

Holzaus, . (2013).

Louisa talked of funnelling her sister's energy.

Louisa: I feel absolutely and I still do feel removed from it. It feels like a formal process and sometimes I feel a bit guilty like I'm just using her work or her...it feels formal and removed which is why I can say I don't picture her at all while I am making the work but it feels like a really clear set of instructions which I've got to follow (laugh) so it feels like, remember I said earlier, it feels like I'm making work with her energy...

Louisa: It's a peculiar feeling that making all this work has removed from my sister. I've almost created this fictional character and loss that isn't her. It feels disconnected in some way. It feels absolutely like it funnels...it's does feel like I'm almost channelling her..that her voice is...I don't want to say that word 'cos it's not right... but her voice is funneling through me but I don't...

Davina: So are you creating a presence of her absence?

Louisa: Am I? Yes, yeah. Something created her in this work. I do think...it's a quite unconscious driver for a lot of it. I think the formal elements make the work and I'm meticulous about it, you know, but when I'm clear, there are misty times when it's not

clear, with this. I guess she never showed me that book. So the Hetta I knew is quite separate from that book. So it is something I never knew she had done. Fairclough, L. (2014).

Fern described an intuitive writing process that her collaborator identifies is about grief and specifically the death of her mother.

Fern: It was wonderful because also there were triggers either I'd read something and then write something immediately, so in a way I was also in dialogue with something else, or I'd wake up and just write about a dream. So I didn't know what I was writing to Patrick and then we had a date in the diary, about six weeks time we were going to meet again, and I'd written every day in that amount of time and he'd collected all these letters in brown envelopes and when we got together I just thought oh we are going to have a couple of days of going ooh what shall we write? and he just said " It's writing itself, the subject is your mum and her death and how you responded to that and her life and her death and her illness but it's also about grief "

And I was very surprised, it was almost like something had written itself I wasn't aware of. Smith, F. (2014).

Carol reflected on how her partner's death affected and changed her thinking.

Carol: I just think that losing Tom gave a simplicity to how I was thinking about my work at that time it gave a focus, a clear thread. Laidler, C. (2014).

Belinda explored the relationship between dance, movement, metaphor and grief.

Belinda: When Sophie died I don't really know whether it was because she was still with me, or what, but I started dancing and it was actually mainly through dance that I got through the bereavement. Because I just danced and shouted and danced and cried and danced and sang and just danced. And I think that repeated physical expression moved me to another place and every time things got difficult I just put the music on that really touched me and I danced. I had been given a video camera to use to help with Sophie's developmental progress since as she had Down's Syndrome this was somewhat delayed. And after her death I started using the camera to record myself

dancing. I have only ever used myself as a model in my work: other people dance their own or somebody else's dance. I wanted to record that expressive working and make something of it as a process of staying connected with her.

When I look back on that video work now, and it's two or three months after Sophie died, I can see on my face an incredible joy as well as a searching for something seeking expression. This led up to the first piece I did which was called "So near, so far: the distance between us" which involves a dance along a limited area of white wall to a particular piece of music. What I tried to get in touch with was the sense of the first moments after being told of Sophie's death. "Could we just go into the side room?" And I knew what that meant. And suddenly this great black wall was between me and the idea that I would never, ever see Sophie alive again. So that idea of the wall - the thing that you can never, ever, ever get beyond that you rail against, but eventually have to come to terms with. That's what the dance was; moving along the wall and against the wall and with the wall and so on, on and on, on the wrong side and forever separate, but having to finally come to accept it.

The second part of this body of work was a series of bromoil prints called "Obsession" which again involves dancing in an empty room. Now there is a door which is closed and a window at the side and the images give a suggestion that in its three dimensions there is a potential for something ... another space and the possibility of moving outside of it. So this was a development of the bereavement work and that went on to the final part of my MA which was an exploration of how a body, with its own emotional history, life and memories, interacts with the domestic space of an old house which also has its own presence and memory. The house is over 200 years old and I have been here 25 years now. Like a bird in a nest the body affects the house with the scuffs of daily life while the house shifts and encloses its occupant. The space within the house and the small details like the creak on the third step, or the little nick on the banister, become part of an internalized map carried within the body and then explored through dance. Whiting, B. (2014).

The use of repetition.

Belinda Whiting talked about the powerful ritual of repetitive process. I experienced the meditative quality of repetitive process with producing the artwork 'Every Day for a Year' (which I discuss more fully in Chapter 4) and the ideas around producing something where each object produced is subtly different as a way of reminding myself that each iteration, each moment can never be the same.

Davina: There is something about paying attention and the repetition and the repetition and the repetition.

Belinda: Absolutely.

Davina: It struck me that a lot of those kind of processes that you talked about in your statement and that I saw in the work. I respond to this I understand this and this use of repetition...

Belinda: I think of the ritual in grieving like swimming out at sea and then a wave comes and knocks you over and you're drowning but then you surface again for a while. Then maybe five minutes later or five hours later or five days later another wave comes and it's all repeated and you're right underneath it and you feel you're going to die, that sort of feeling, but then you come up and can breathe again. Bit by bit in this process of slipping under the water and then coming back up you get washed along the shore and although you went in there on the beach (pointing) you find you come out there (pointing to a different place) and something has changed. So in that process of repetition the same thing happens but every time it's slightly different and it moves you to a different place. And then you realise you've gone through that and have survived and come out changed. And the repetition changes, it is not the same thing, it slightly changes every day.

Particularly with photography and especially with bromoils, there is a lot of - in water and out of water and different chemicals - rubbing and soaking, rubbing and soaking; that kind of repetition that shifts things before the image can emerge.

Davina: There is a kind of interesting balance there in terms of controlling something and not being able to control.

Belinda: Yes absolutely, the image is appearing, its coming towards you but then you

need to work with it and it is that interface that is so engaging. I find that the straight photo is only a beginning. The interesting thing for me is the site of the interaction between the trace of the image emerging in that alchemical process with the tactile working on the surface or within the image, that I then bring to it. I can't work with an empty canvas; I don't trust the marks I make. I want something that is coming to meet me to work with and its that marriage of the two that is so important. Whiting, B. (2014).

Placing grief in a specific place and transformation through metaphor.

The relationship between place, transformation and metaphor within the artwork produced was explored by the interviewees. They all talked about the power of metaphor and beauty to enable an audience and themselves to stay with something potentially uncomfortable.

Belinda: So the last part of my MA was this exploration of the whole house now. I've gone from the one dimensional space along the wall, through the space of the enclosed room, and now into the whole house and up into the attic. I wanted to explore that erosion I talked about, through my own dance movement while using a video camera as witness. And so I would set up these small performances.

I used to set up the video on a tripod in the spaces of the house and dance, or hold the camera and record the exploration of the house with my other hand as I was touching and feeling the surfaces. In total there were three layers of analogue video playing together over each other with images coming forward and retreating, like fragments of memory echoing. Then I made Polaroids from the video and peeled them open, collaged them, scanned them and dipped them in wax, lots of processes to give them them this sense of something being worked in, eroded and layered. All this work was dealing fundamentally with the idea of loss really and a yearning for connection. Whiting, B. (2014).

Gurda talked of discovering the power of a repeated motif and metaphor, that of a watering can.

Gurda: “Watering can yes, and it’s in every graveyard” and I said “That’s it” and this became the landscape and I thought well I have to do a lot with it because maybe it’s a funny view because in fact we had 50 of them (laughing).

Davina: Watering cans? (laughing).

Gurda: Yeah, all green and they were hanging on the stage and everywhere watering cans so we also need water to come out...and they were not actresses so this was very tough hard for me, will this work out? How can I let them have a relationship with a watering can? Is this possible? Well, they didn’t believe it either until I gave them some exercises - the watering can became their grief, the person they were mourning about, it became the water of living, it became everything, so you can see in the play the Turkish woman is singing and she holds the watering can and it is so believable...

Davina: Like it’s a baby?

Gurda: Like it’s a baby and all they did with it, the audience accepted it because they made a landscape out of it...out of the watering cans and besides that they had little purses, that is the only thing you bring when you go to a graveyard so everything you need is in it...so each of them had a little cup they could make a coffee ritual because they poured water from the watering can. They could with the watering can wash each others’ hands or feet...and in their purse one of them had little rose leaves, so all the things they use in the play come out of this purse or out of the watering can. And we made most beautiful rituals out of it

Davina: Yeah, yeah.

Gurda: And it was abstract enough to be able to accept it. Holzaus, G. (2013).

Louisa exploring the motivation for making the work cited the lack of a place that linked to her sister now she was dead.

Louisa: Something that also drove this work, that goes back to the first question of motivation and answering that question, was that my sister didn’t have a marking or gravestone or anything and there was nowhere to really visit her, which is probably why I went down to the river.

I have proposed this idea of a notional collaboration and in some ways maybe that is just a conceptual wording but it is also a very truthful statement, as in I did say this

extraordinary correlation between her thoughts and drawings and what I've been making; it did feel like I was breathing her work and breathing her thoughts.

Davina: So it becomes a kind of invocation?

Louisa: An implication?

Davina: An invocation

Louisa: Invocation, what am I invoking? I think that's lovely - invocation - really lovely. I like it. It's close to intonation and they are intoning. Invokes, invokes, invocation, invokes, sorry I have to think what people are saying, invokes her. Yes, I think it does. That's really brilliant Davina, that's brilliant. It is, it's invoking her voice but there's this very particular aspect of her that was quite hidden. Fairclough, L. (2014).

Fern talked of a need to leave her home be in a different place and landscape.

Fern: And there was something about a place that could heal and again I thought this wasn't a process, a conscious process I just felt there was almost an intolerance maybe in grief as well. Yes you can have a conversation...but when you think you can't...no you can't have a conversation any more, no I need to just go It was almost like maybe those more subtle buffers aren't there so much and, I don't know, but there was some kind of magnetic drawing out of Swansea and I just wanted to move.

I felt really drawn to landscapes, big, old landscapes. I suppose in the seven years after mum's death and then I went and just rented this little cottage out, half way between Swansea and Brecon, in the Beacons area and after that I moved up on top into an old quarry village and something about the landscape it felt really, really nurturing. It was bigger, it was older than everything and anything and so I knew then when I got there what was making me go, leave Swansea, and there can be a billion and one reasons to leave a place, but I think it was something about that the land could hold this. The land actually helped the healing and made sense of it really.

If you create a place you can do stuff in it and maybe the grief cycle is like a place it is a structure on paper it goes here, here, here, here, here, here and that's what we thought we were doing and really clearly marking it out on the floor. Smith, F. (2014).

Carol talked about the power of metaphor, of finding a form that allows the audience to bring their own story to it.

Carol: I think any act of remembering is an act of fiction. As soon as an action has passed, an experience is over, in the recounting in the telling it is transformed into a fiction because it is filtered through you.

That's one of the things that as an artist you're working with, a form that makes it palatable for other people and what we were talking about earlier, that allows them to open the door and go as far as they want as an audience and then withdraw again. It doesn't just become an outpouring because the audience doesn't know what to do with an outpouring and it doesn't want to be therapy because that isn't ultimately an art. It's uncomfortable for people, so trying to find a form that allows me to express, not sure that is a very good word these days, to formulate something and allows a receiver/a viewer to not feel overwhelmed by somebody else's grief. Because it's got to be something where it touches the viewer and makes them look at their own life, that's the point isn't it?

Because it's about the viewer coming with their own history and the clues or pointers in the work will prod, provoke thought and memories in their own life and if it is too strong then that makes that difficult. Then you're looking at a spectacle. So that is one of the dilemmas I consider when I make work - how not to close the narrative so the person is just presented with a whole thing, rather how they can be pulled into the narrative and become part of it. I think that's where *The Human Book* worked, it wasn't just me talking at the viewer, they were telling me stuff as well, it was an interaction, an exchange.

I think that partly the temporary nature of the work, the transient, the ephemeral is important. The idea of placing words in a landscape that will disintegrate within a week, the fact that they disappear, that they enter somebody's consciousness, they are memory but they no longer exist, that's part of what I do.

When you are considering the nature of impermanence and existence, then the structures that disappear are important. Laidler, C. (2014)

The effects and affects of making work.

We also talked about the effect and affect of making the work on one's personal emotional response to loss.

Carol: Then you become a viewer as well but I think that's true of any art form, of the forming of art. It takes its own form and then you can step away and it stands alone. And it may be perceived quite differently from when you were in it. That's the thing about having a little bit of distance and looking back at the work, seeing different things in it. I think that's what makes it art rather than art therapy, that ability to stand back and away from it. I think that's what artists do, find a form for the emotional things 'cos that's what they are familiar with, that skill. Laidler, C. (2014).

How the artwork opened the possibility of a different response.

Gurda: I have since a few months I have the photograph of my sister in the room, I never had a photograph of her and now I felt like I see her more often standing there...

Davina: That's interesting.

Gurda: Yeah.

Davina: So you think, do you think there's a connection between...

Gurda: Yeah.

Davina: ...doing the play and being able to do that?

Gurda: Yeah

Holzaus, G. (2013).

Louisa: Something I felt with *Bore Song* what I was doing was recreating her moment of death but making it beautiful, so with *Bore Song* I hung the loop as she'd hung herself and I hung it at the height where her body would have been. And I've done this again...this is a very, very long loop so it doesn't relate to the body in quite the same way...

Davina: Well to me that's a transformative process.

Louisa: I think it is, yeah. *Bore Song* I think is full of joy it's deep and mournful but it's also a joyful thing to do, to throw this breath and this single note into the river. This is

a far more...this is a haunting work (referring to *Can people see me swallowing*) and I feel really pleased I'm about to make this work in Whitstable that is absolutely joyous and that I'm working from one of her drawings full of colour, vibrant pitches...but this little drawing this one uses a spool, it's a very painful little drawing I guess it couldn't be anything other than painful this piece of work. As I said I thought the singer was performing it as neutrally and tightly and tautly as possible and still this...I actually wonder if it's playing at slightly the wrong speed, it's very slow actually I might change the belts round..but it's more mournful than I remember her sounding.

There is something I should tell you about the formal qualities of this that matter to me, as we were saying earlier, that the formalities of work and that it works, absolutely works, matters to me. It is really structurally simple in many ways, all I gave the film lab was six digital recordings one which was four 'Oh gods' in different pitches, the drone that is one and a half minutes long continuous with breathes and this and said could you just put... (because I want to work with the actual fundamentals of film which is darkness and light) so the film strip should be dark/black and when the voice is printed for the film strip to be transparent it's as simple as that.

Davina: How do you negotiate that absence?

Louisa: Well I think you said something earlier that seems to really make absolute sense...you said I negotiate it through making it present through this work that's making her present through this work, that's lovely, I think that's.... I mean I wonder how she would feel about this and I think...and this really matters to me I think she would really like it and when I made *Song of Grief* I thought she would love this aaarrggghhh really physical roaring work. Fairclough, L. (2014)

Fern: And I'd say yeah I'm kinda of acting and I'm not but all it's doing, it's allowing me to come back to something without re-traumatising me and I know the difference between doing something when it's actually re-traumatising you and it wasn't even like I had to do it as an exorcism. I think I'd had seven years of exorcising and doing 'strange' things in that time, but it was just a wonderful thing to do and for me it was a real in life marking of something in terms of ritual and marking a moment.

There was a picture, ah that seems to work so well, so if you draw a circle and you say that's me there and then if you ask people now draw your grief within that circle, they draw a big, big circle of grief and you say to them in five years time that big, big circle of grief won't get smaller but potentially in order to live your life you need to get bigger and I know talking about it is hard to explain it but drawing it is very, very easy and I know that is what has happened since and everything I have done in my work and what I'm interested in now has all come from the experience I went through after mum dying.

So it was an amazing, an amazing gift in a way to go through grief because I suppose it enlarged my self, or my sense of self, not in a 'oh I'm very confident' kind of way. I suppose some people would call it in terms of the ecological self, so there also has been a sense of greater interconnectivity as well. So all the things I'm now doing with *Emergence*⁴⁶ and sustainability and everything is connected back again to that choice of going - maybe you can stop living after something like this or you can make a choice to walk on again. What makes it possible to walk on and for this stuff to be a meaning-making thing rather than a meaning-less thing? So it could be that it just becomes the thing in your life that stops you doing everything, that you can't do anything because you are carrying this grief around and I think definitely for awhile you can't really move away from that. I think there is something that it does that I wouldn't even know the word for it but there is a decision and I suppose in a way reflected in the last thing - I will live, not just going I will carry on, that I will, like Anais Nin, choose my life and for it to be a creative act. Smith, F. (2014)

Belinda: One of the aspects about all the work and particularly this idea about taking photographs off the video is that you can stop the video, unlike life, and replay it - move it back and move it forward. You can find those places that exist between that and that, something you can't normally see or experience. Something is either going or it's coming and that idea really interests me, that fleeting transition. And in terms

46 Emergence is a "term comes from systems theory but its modus operandi is more often deeply poetic or improbably transcendent. This word reminds me that the world is not merely material. It is a participatory universe that continually seeks to orient towards balance and health." Smith, F. <http://www.emergence-uk.org/>

of how we inhabit a body I have the same sense of being both inside and outside it, being present and absent as it were. It's as if my hand out there (tapping the table) is something other and yet at the same time I can feel it from the inside - so where am I, particularly when I'm moving because I do a lot of dancing. Dancing is something really important to me. I dance, but sometimes I know I am danced and that happened with the work. Its like the moment when you feel the body, weight, gravity everything pulling towards the earth but then spirit is actually moving up towards heaven and when these two come together you're lost, you are neither on the inside or the outside, you are just at one in that. It's like when you're meditating, I lose the edges. Whiting, B (2014).

The effects and affects of audience response.

The power of witnessing both on the participants and audience allows a mutual recognition and a shifting of position, possibly an opportunity to "re-story aspects of their lives." (Allegranti & Wyatt 2014:538).

Fern: And for other people to witness it and I suppose that's the wonderful thing about theatre that you've got witnesses rather than audience and the position of witness is so much more powerful than one of audience. Smith, F. (2014).

Louisa: So to go to the audience reception of the work,⁴⁷ what is really exciting about what happened for that piece over the weekend is that really, really, really resonated with people and that's terrifically exciting in a way that *Bore Song* and *Song of Grief* and *Body of Water* did that and it's kind of nice because I was not thinking at all about that I was just thinking about formally how to make this work. I did not imagine it was going to sound so.....it sounds far much more sorrowful and haunting than I imagined...I did not imagine that. It does not do that when you listen to it digitally on a Final Cut Pro timeline, they don't sound so like that because they are performed straight. So the fact that it sounds mournful is...that's to do with the space and the way the pitches are coming together, I think.

47 'Can People See Me Swallowing', presented at Spike Open 2014

Davina: And so you said that piece of writing in the mezzanine that had the explanation.

Louisa: Yeah.

Davina: Was not up on the Friday?

Louisa: No it wasn't and actually I had the most response before I had it up but the people experienced it on Friday night in the dark.

The interviews also raised the issue that exploring issues of death within the framework of art maybe allows a different response because the audience is more receptive.

Carol in talking about the *Human Book Project* said,

I just thought all these things that people want to talk about but there isn't a door that they can easily open. But in that situation they had made a choice to come into the shop. It was an art event, it was a very particular choice that they made, therefore the way that we could talk about it was very intense.

There was a sense that this particular event opened the door, so people could go in then go away again you see, they weren't stuck with you at a party or over dinner or next to you on a bus they chose to come in. It took a very short time, within 15 minutes the conversation was extreme and deep. It allowed people to go there for that amount of time and then go away. So what happened was a series of different conversations, by the end of the day I was exhausted but I felt that it had been a really, worthwhile experience. Laidler, C. (2014)

Belinda Whiting talked about the challenge of publishing a book *Sophie's Story* that had been part of the International Photography Exhibition, *The Dead* and how it was received differently as part of the exhibition and then in the wider world.

And the exhibition there was quite extraordinary. It was amazing. I have never been so moved in an exhibition. It was so clarifying, all the things that are in the back of your mind about the unknowns in death that are all this kind of dark difficulty, like what actually goes on in a mortuary; what would it look like; what do they do there

and how? All the answers to these questions were just laid out in photographs, difficult to look at. And there were some, I remember body bags from Sarajevo, but they were printed in such a way that they were like strange gothic figures. They were in black and white, very, very beautifully printed, incredibly aesthetic and dark and they were awe-inspiring. They were imposing like something out of a cathedral, these dark, dead figures in their shrouds.

The whole exhibition was incredible and it was all about death and dying, but in the middle of it all, like a little island, was this little life - Sophie's Story. Of course it was very noticed because it was amongst all these other images of death, this book that was a straight from the heart little book about a child's life and death. And it was easy to access because it was written in language for a child and had photos from the family album. It was talked about on Kaleidoscope (on BBC Radio 4), on the World Service, written about in The Independent and so on. It had quite a life of its own.

The exhibition showed for three months in Bradford, then showed in Denmark and Canada so literally thousands of people saw the book. Then a year or two later I got a letter saying that Channel 4 was making three programmes about how photographers deal with taboo subjects. The first one was about the body, the second about photographing children and the third was about death, and they wanted me to take part in that one, which I did.

But now the book is finally published I find there is a different response. When first seen the book then was a dummy copy of the original, shown in exhibition and on television primarily to an art world, where people were prepared to look and to be moved. Now the book is available and going out into the real everyday world, where most people are not so open to thinking about death, particularly of a child. They don't want to be reminded and don't want to have to think about dark things. It is very hard to get past the gatekeepers.. Whiting, B. (2014)

Conclusion

As signalled at the beginning of the chapter, I have explored links between creativity and ritual. I have presented examples of artists' practices whose work resonates with my own practice. I have shown how artists utilise grief and loss as an impetus to create artwork, the effect and affect upon them and the work produced. This has developed the argument and is a challenge to Western mainstream psychology/psychiatry through exploring rituals and mores of mourning and death. This demonstrates the potential creative practice has for a sharing of experience and extending conversations, presenting multiple examples to others of living with loss, something Leader (2008:99) assesses is the power that artists and writers possess. It explores one's response to and ongoing relationship with the presence of absence as ways of exploring grief and loss through the interviews and provides one iteration of the hidden or Other aspect of method assemblage. The ideas presented in this chapter will be continued in the next chapter as I introduce my own practice in the context of objects and images showing another aspect of method assemblage, forms of presence.

CHAPTER 4 - THE USE OF OBJECTS/IMAGES

Grief may be located in the space between the body and the image (Tanner 2006:90)

Another absent body, lost boy, enchanted swan.

The objects are the ones for next week, she justifies, she feels she has cheated and broken the rules brought more than one but wanted the top and toe of his absence as they are what went with her to Ireland.

She is both comforted by their presence and appalled at how, particularly the slippers, visually give such a profound experience of his absence. Is this because they are worn, have the mark of his heels, his toes or are they a marker of time? Of the rituals of him putting them on in the morning, going out to let the chickens out, moving from room to room, stoking the Rayburn, putting on Bob Dylan, the soundtrack of Radio 4 in the kitchen.

The shoes are a physical, visual representation of his absence the hat an olfactory one. In the inner crevasses it still smells of vanilla and Nag Champa and an elusive Chris smell that is still in the house but is changing, growing into something else- dissipating, losing some particularities but gaining others.

She catches herself and questions when she notices the smell asks why at this moment she needs the reminder, the olfactory presence.

In science fiction she could imagine rebuilding him from the imprint in the slippers and yet already she would struggle to remember enough detail to make him whole. There would be gaps, hazy areas of soft focus – fog, ectoplasm. Does she want him here?

Another absent body, lost boy, enchanted swan. Kirkpatrick, D. (2013).⁴⁸

Introduction.

The theoretical underpinning of this chapter considers the role of objects in our lives. This chapter is also grounded in making and practice (both personal and participatory) the creation of artwork and objects, and the transforming of materials, demonstrating how artistic research enables a different framing and interpretation (Sullivan 2011:93, Leader 2008:103) to reach

48 This text is part of a performance at The Very Small Literary Festival organised by All Day Breakfast in 2013.

understanding about grief and loss, transforming emotions and returning a sense of control. It is informed by the work I undertook on my Masters in Multi-Disciplinary Print, my experiences of drawing my mum as she was dying and the subsequent work that came from that alluding to the meme that our souls weigh 21 grams. As my dad and I sorted through her possessions, we weighed articles and found single items or collections of related objects that weighed 21 grams, so there was a physical representation of her absent soul. This was a ritual that seemed to help mediate the difficult task of assigning possessions to charity shop, dump or as particular gifts to family and friends. I returned again and again, during my MA, to the themes of loss and physical absence, 21 grams as a mnemonic for continuing presence and also exploring ways of placing my grief within a childhood landscape and dreamscape.

The chapter begins with examining a series of co-curated exhibitions with Carol Laidler at Back Lane West, Redruth, Cornwall that bring together three iterations of artwork created in response to the research question. I then explore each individual artwork in relation to the questions identified in my objective. What creative responses can be made that dance between presence and the presence of something absent? How do you negotiate the absence of the physical body/place in relation to loss?

The specific projects are -

Presence of Absence, screen prints and litho prints.

Walking in His Shoes and *One Step in Front of Another* series, from residencies in Ireland and Germany.

The Height of Him, textile hangings.

Every Day for a Year, paperclay mourning envelopes project.

Creation of props for film, *She Wanders/Wonders*.

Memorial Window.

Objects and our relationship to them.

Our relationship to objects is complex and laden with the baggage of materialism and fetishism (Turkle 2007:6). Yet I know, through my own grief process, that physical objects provide a location for a “sensory memory that measures present absence against past presence.” (Tanner 2006:178) This develops Miller’s argument that:

People sediment possessions, lay them down as foundations, material walls mortared with memory, strong supports that come into their own when times are difficult and the people who laid them down face experiences of loss. Having banked their possessions in the vaults of internal memory and external possession, they cash them in at times of need, at times of loss.” (2009:91)

The use of objects is central to how people’s grief and practices are presented, performed and understood (Hallam & Hockey 2001). Objects and relationships can be viewed as integral and inseparable (Miller 2009: 280) and there is a reflexive dance between people creating objects and the objects providing the particularities of human experience (Appadurai 1986).

Additionally the relationship between exchange, gift and commodity especially the nuanced, ‘polythetic’ argument, (practice as a process constructs objects of knowledge) espoused by Bourdieu (1977:171) and the transformative nature of gift explored by Hyde (2007:48) adds another layer of interpolation that is explored through gift-giving in Chapter 5.

In wanting to create words, objects, moments of meeting and site-specific artworks I am endeavoring to find control and structure, that involves “critical inquiry, context and transformation, the making manifest” all aspects defined by Fortuyn (2011: 171) as aligning artist researchers with researchers from other disciplines and as mentioned in Chapter 3 to find equivalence for the intensity of grief.

The transformative and paradoxical power of ‘thing-ness/of vibrant matter’ (Bennett 2010) touches on an important aspect of making – the transformation of materials into something else, something other, that echoes the capacity knowledge has to transform understanding (Sullivan 2011:92). Transformation is a key element that I want to explore through practice, working with the ephemeral and also making objects that materialize my grief through transforming materials, as ‘agreeing to.....or submitting to a transformation’ (Butler 2004:21) is a supportive view of mourning.

Making becomes an intermediary, transitional space, and parallels with Santino’s (2004)

‘performative commemorative’.⁴⁹ Where playfulness allows me to slip between emotional states and identities giving relief, if only temporarily, from discomfort; promoting feelings of safety, peace and the assuaging of un-pleasure – all definitions ascribed to consolation.

Probing the question of linear time is an important element of consolation and Stein (2003:806) argues that music has particular qualities to evoke distant memories, provoke future moments and “suspend time’s ineluctable forward movement”⁵⁰. I relate his words to my understanding of making and creating artwork, time slips and dips, akin to experiences I have had of being ‘out of time’ whilst meditating:

Consolation implies a period of transition: a preparation for a time when the present suffering will have turned. Consolation promises that turning.”(Frank 2009:2).

The capacity to console not only requires self-awareness, self-knowledge and experience (Stein 2003:803), but also authenticity, openness and a non-judgmental attitude in communication with both myself and other people.

The use of visual and material metaphors to explore grief, loss and absence has a potent power that enables me to spend time with uncomfortable and contradictory feelings and emotions and communicate these to and with other people. “Metaphor is the only true way of bridging the gap between oneself and another” (McMillan and Pahl 2014).

The practice is presented first with the exhibitions as a result of my residency at Back Lane West, to provide how the artworks work in conversation with each other and the conversations they stimulated and then how each particular project informed the next. The identified themes of control and structure, transformation, intermediary/transitional space, troubling at linear time, the use of visual and material metaphors and intensity weave through the projects.

Residency and exhibitions at Back Lane West.

I tested the idea of creating a space where greater communication of grief and loss could

49 I will discuss further in Chapter 5 in relation to the ‘Tying The Threads’ artwork/ritual.

50 I return to this relationship between music and mourning in Chapter 5 in relation to the soundtrack to the film ‘She Wanders/Wonders

occur through a residency and a series of exhibitions at Back lane West⁵¹ co-curated with Carol Laidler. I presented three iterations of work and launched the project *Objects of Loss*. My main intention for doing the residency was to finish and document the work in exhibition mode; it places it within a relational context.



Figure 1. Exhibition poster.

Exhibition 1- *Tying the Threads*.

Reading the comments, written in the comments book, people responded to the work, were moved by it. The private views elicited a sharing of stories of loss, the conversations felt more personally revelatory than I have often experienced at such events. I also received positive feedback verbally on Saturday and sold a piece of work. The combination of the prose writing *A Moment in Red* with the *Tying the Threads* and *The Presence of Absence* images gave an added poetic and emotional dimension to the images.



Figure 2. Exhibition 1. *Tying The Threads*.

⁵¹ Back Lane West is a non-profit, artist-led residency, project, and meeting space in Redruth, Cornwall.



Figure 3. Exhibition 1. *Tying the Threads*.

It is important to show the images, taking the time and attention to present them sympathetically to expand their impact. Even though I find the process frustratingly time-consuming and difficult, because I am aware of a vulnerability in exposing the work to public scrutiny, I could also see the work finished, complete and in the context of exhibited work.



Figure 4. Exhibition 1. *Tying the Threads*.

Five people brought objects for the *Objects of Loss* project, which I began at the opening of the exhibition. The chaise and the chair from home gave the space a comfortable intimacy and focusing on the held object brought poignancy to the conversations and a powerful point of focus that took us immediately to the specifics of the loss. A deep invocation of these lost

people followed. Conant (1996 :182) found in her interviews with widows that “imagery acted as a substitute for the private relationship that was lost”. I was attentive to how they held the object, let my focus rest on their hands so could then describe that action in the image the camera captured. The act of photographing also signalled a conclusion, possibly a step back into the outer world. The objects are both “signs and material markers of grief” (Tanner 2006:184).



Figure 5. *Objects of Loss, cutlery.*



Figure 6. *Objects of Loss, compass/signet.*



Figure 7. *Objects of Loss, empty space.*

The participant in Figure 7 had no objects connected with the absent, dead person so instead we talked about the absence, gave it a size and shape that had meaning to the participant and their connection, there was a strong emotional response to being able to give a form to this absence of object.⁵²

Exhibition 2 – *The Height of Him.*



Figure 8. Exhibition 2. *The Height of Him.*

52 This is akin to a Gestalt exercise I learnt to help reduce and relieve headaches.



Figure 9. Exhibition 2. *The Height of Him*.



Figure 10. Exhibition 2. *The Height of Him*.

Carol arrived on the day before the second exhibition and immediately started to tease out different possibilities for altering the space and getting the different pieces of work to be in conversation with each other. She is excellent at judging how placement can have a profound affect on the work and the viewers' experience. This allowed me to see the validity

of the work, the pieces really had power and presence and people were engaged and moved emotionally but also they physically moved amongst the hangings engaging in conversations with others and myself about life and loss.

A couple of people remarked that the glass pieces displayed on plinths reminded them of icons or ritual objects and those raised Catholic recognized the monstrance imagery and had their own responses and memories of a monstrance being used in Eucharistic ceremony.



Figure 11. Exhibition 2. *The Height of Him*.

Exhibition 3 – *Every Day for a Year*.

Re-reading the notes from the first curatorial conversation Carol and I had, I stated:

“I want to make an exhibition that touches the viewer and brings the presence of absence to them. Stirring their emotion.” The three exhibitions did this but the third iteration, *Every Day for a Year*, also created a powerful immersive experience.

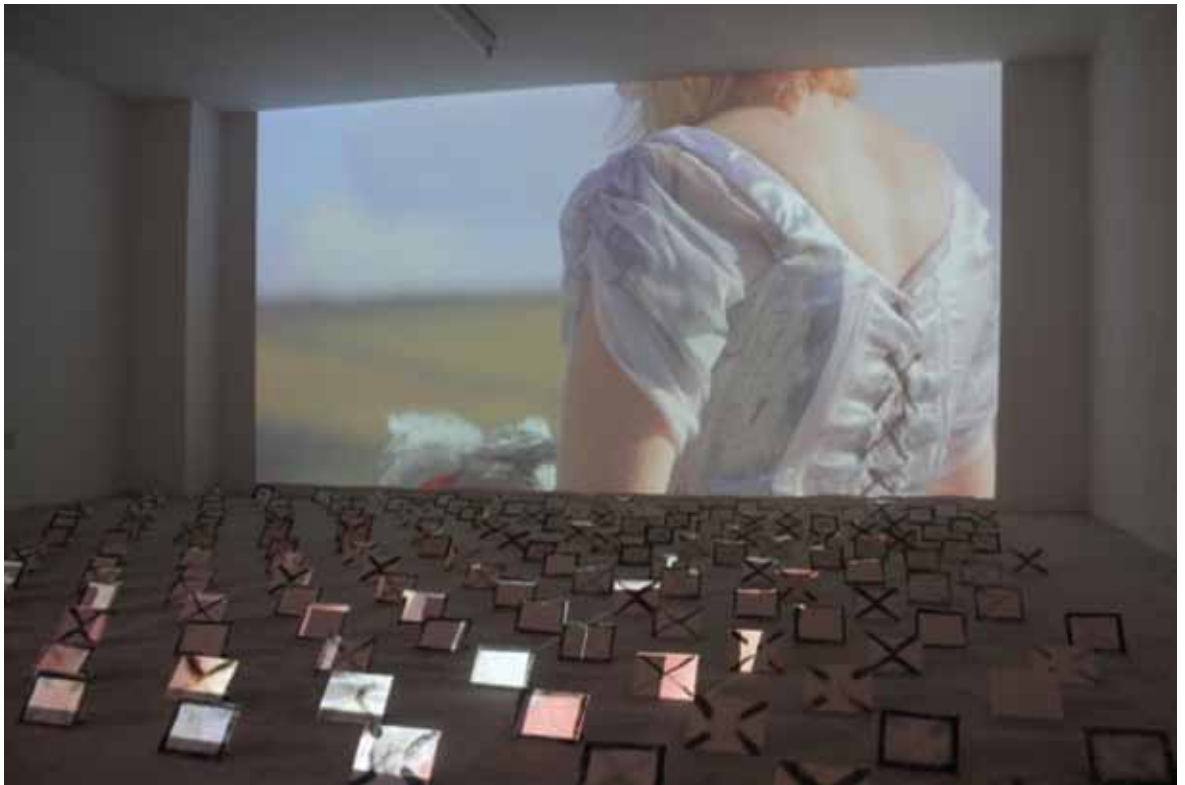


Figure 12. Exhibition 3 'Every Day for a Year'.

The use of the film *She Wanders/Wonders* projected from the floor entirely filling the back wall of the space and allowing the film to play across the surface of the porcelain envelopes combined with the soundtrack played quite loud and having the two rooms lit by one powerful spotlight created an immersive and contemplative atmosphere.⁵³ The film was looped with 10 seconds of white light. People stayed watching the film play over and over. Feedback referred to the meditative, dreamy, hypnotic, in-between space people felt the work took them too. One person felt the pace of walking and the deliberate placing of the feet of the glass dress-clad woman added to this hypnotic, ritual quality.

The envelopes seeming to act as small monitors or screens picking up the films movement and imagery playing across them, both animated them and paradoxically emphasised the stillness of these 186 objects. Carol had cried as she laid them out, placing them against the folded cardboard corners (another form of envelope she had suggested to act as stands for them) moved by the repetition and experiencing the volume of 186 fragile yet strong objects that held both Chris' name and my own – "memorial markers" was the term she used to describe them.

53 This can be viewed in the attached DVD. Chapter 1

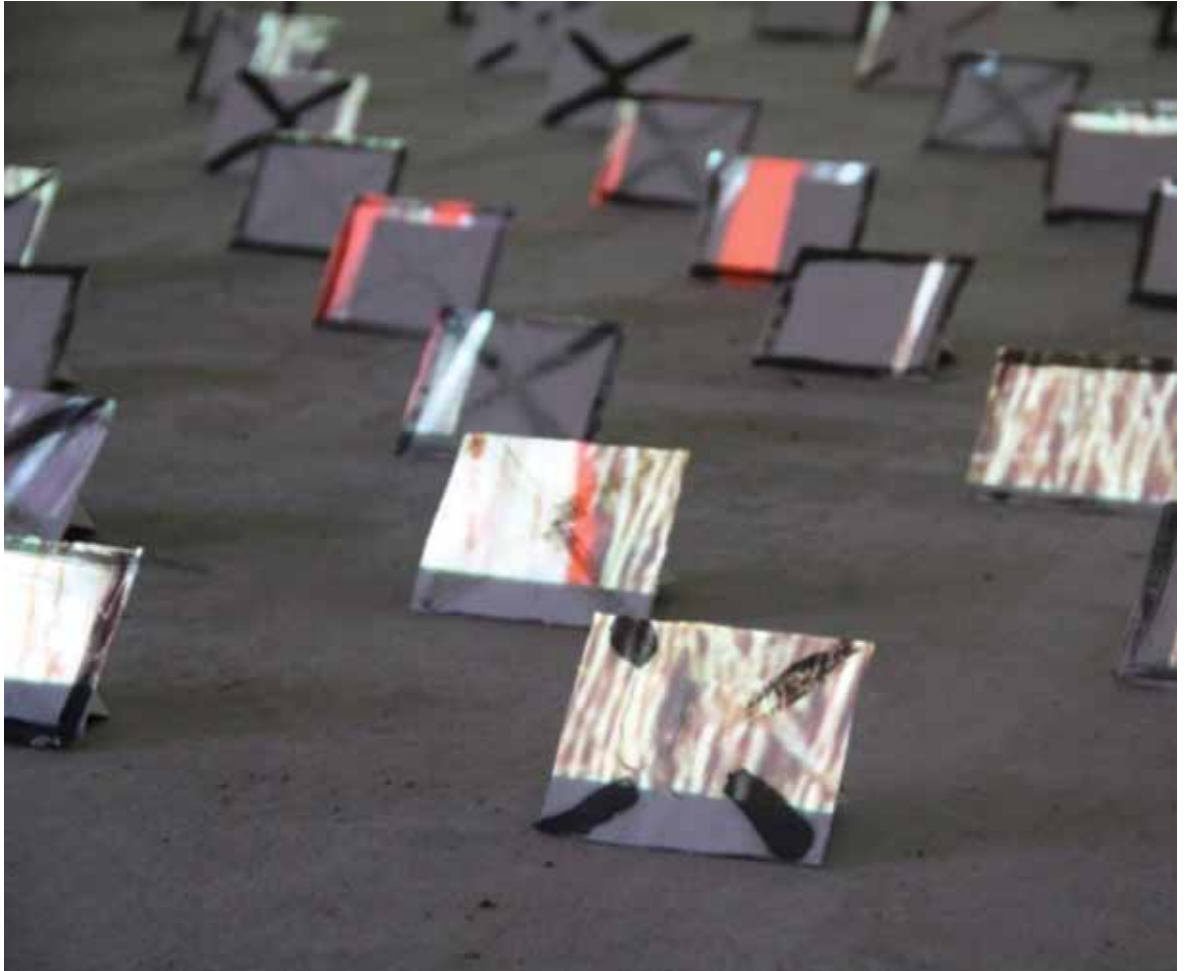


Figure 13. Exhibition 3. *Every Day for a Year*.



Figure 14. Exhibition 3. *Every Day for a Year*.

Figure 15. View Installation of film *She Wanders/Wonders* on DVD - Chapter One.

Presence of Absence, **screen prints and litho prints.**

I developed these into screen and litho prints from photos taken whilst in Cambridge for the Creativity Forum at CRASSH (Centre for Research of arts, Social Sciences and Humanities), of illuminated coat cupboards, that had an unnerving sense of absent bodies; the darkness of the surrounding evening street contrasts with the illuminated light from the cupboard windows.

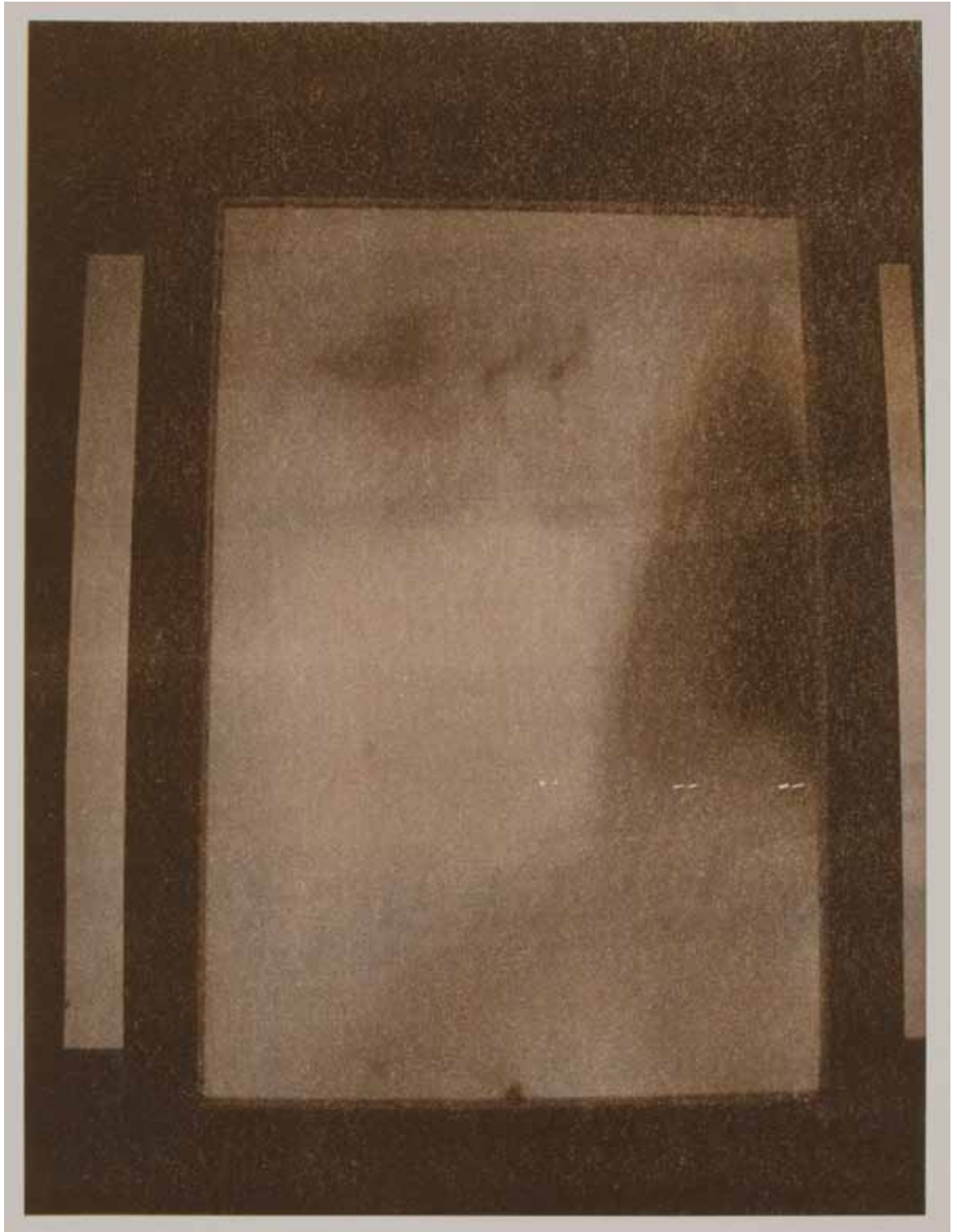


Figure 16. *Presence of Absence I*, sepia duo-tone screenprint.

I think I did blast some of the image off when I mistakenly used the power wash rather than the spray after exposing the image! The prints were subsequently very textured (It was interesting to then show them to Angie who came from a different perspective, not print perfection and what they suggested to her. She likes the texture, the quality of there and not there, that the images are indistinct). We talked about the interesting textures created by the duo tone. I pondered on changing the colour way to silver and Paynes Grey with a little blue added and experimenting with printing onto newsprint as the image sits on the surface of it rather than sinks in to the expensive Arches 88 paper. I also like the off white colour of the newsprint. Kirkpatrick (2013) 4 October.



Figure 17. *Presence of Absence I*, duo-tone screenprint.

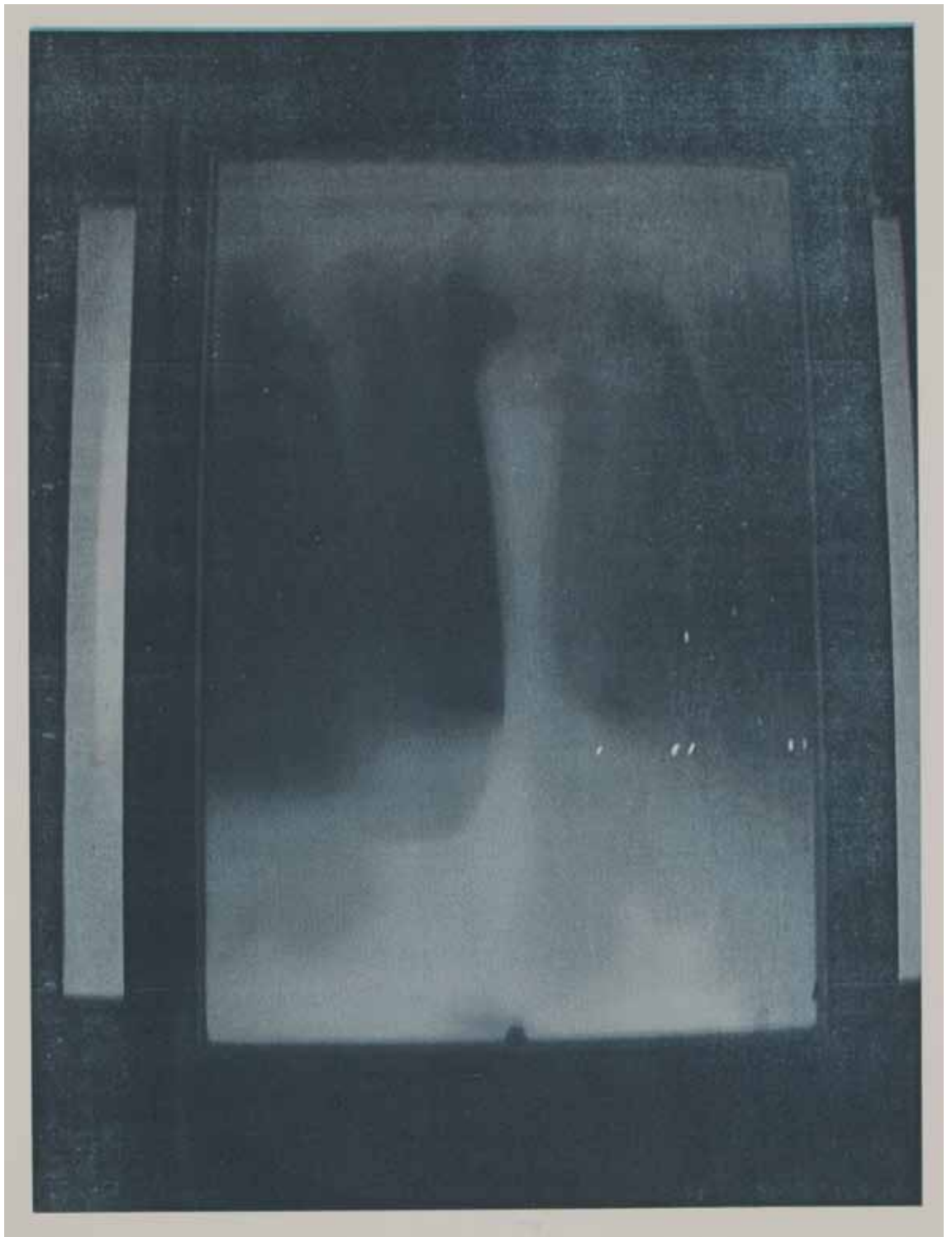


Figure 18. *Presence of Absence II*, duo-tone screen print.



Figure 19 *Presence of Absence III*, duo-tone screenprint.

I reprocessed the screen print images:

These worked better. There was more image on the screen, even though I did two pulls. I was using a 150-mesh screen so I needed to pay more attention to a stronger pressure and the angle I held the squeegee at, the skill slowly returns! I do like their there/not there quality. I may try digitally printing the images, after playing with them in Photoshop and maybe doing them as much smaller images or even much larger, more pixellated images. I wonder which would emphasise fragility? ⁵⁴

It was good to reprint the third duo-tone again on a 120 screen rather than 150 and get Dave to print one or two. It is like my body echoes his, holding the squeegee at a more acute angle and pulling with more strength and confidence. Letting my thoughts get lost in the repetitive process of screen printing. The results gave a clearer, more defined image possibly easier for an audience to read but still holding some ambiguity. Kirkpatrick (2013) 6 December.



Figure 20. *Presence of Absence*, Chris, offset litho print.

54 I also talk about these issues in my blog post 29 October 2013.

Photo litho is such a Zen process, compared to screen print where one needs to print quickly so the ink doesn't dry in the screen this is oil based so one can take one's time setting up the litho press getting registration correct. That combination of wetting the plate with just the right amount of water and then inking with three or four forward and backward rolls of the roller has a meditative quality. I reflect upon my relationship with Chris as his name appears in the image growing stronger with each inking.

Kirkpatrick (2013) 30 November.

The shadow prints of coats hanging disembodied in illuminated cupboards are an absent presence. They make reference to ideas around photography materializing the impalpable and giving "tangible shape to light" (Moholy-Nagy cited in Johnson 2004:77).

I had a long conversation with a teenage exhibition visitor at Back Lane West, about what he saw in the images, ranging from a small tent in a vast landscape, to creatures hidden in the shadows, which led onto an interesting conversation about aloneness, loneliness and loss that was prompted by the title of the works and how he related what he saw in the images to his own experience of the presence of absence. The combination of text and the ambiguity of visual images, their ability to convey multiple meanings and messages, is useful in teasing out others stories and responses. As Mary Bateson says: "Ambiguity is the warp of life, not something to be eliminated." (1994:9) There were multiple examples of the titles and the ambiguity of the visual work prompting personal conversations about loss and experiences of the presence of absence throughout the exhibitions.

One Foot in Front of the Other and *Footfalls* series, from residencies at **CAKE (Contemporary Art Kildare) in Ireland and Bildwerk, Frauenau in Germany.**

The residency in Ireland was a challenge, it felt that maybe I'd taken on too much only ten months after the death of my partner.

I wrote in my diary:

I am out of my place, have purposefully displaced myself and it will be interesting to see what comes from that. Virginia Woolf says in *The Hours*, in response to Leonard's question "why does someone have to die?" "Because then those that are left appreciate

life” – and maybe that is also a part of my frustration of being here. I don’t feel I am embracing life, but maybe I needed this strangeness, this emptiness, this sojourn in suburbia to start to make some work about loss; specifically the loss of Chris because maybe the scaffolding of order and routine and friends and distractions would allow me to evade the hopelessness, the freefall, the loss of illusory control. Kirkpatrick (2012) 5-14 July.

I only took a small amount of materials with me, this constrained my working methods that was frustrating but eventually enabled some interesting results. I used Chris’s slippers and the bag of some of his cremated remains that I had carried in my very small suitcase and my own footprints to create cyanotypes on the prepared fabric and paper I had brought with me. The slippers are a powerful reminder of both his presence and his absence and resonate with a Didion quotation:

We might expect if the death is sudden to feel shock. We do not expect this shock to be oblitative, dislocating to body and mind. We do not expect to be literally crazy, cool customers who believe their husband is about to return and need his shoes.”
(Didion 2005:188)



Figure 21 Cyanotype with sunflower.



Figure 22 Cyanotype with sunflower.

I also used purchased washers to create objects with spaces and holes in repetitive patterns and sunflowers with their centres removed inspired by the sunflower/sun designs of monstrances⁵⁵, after a visit to the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. The monstrances were powerful symbolic objects the clear glass centres that would have held the host seemed to hold both absence and presence and related to Chris's Catholic childhood. I had the photos processed and photocopied them so I could play with scale and layering whilst collaging with them. I was playing with real objects altered - the sunflowers with their centres removed, altered representations of objects - the photocopies of photographs, changing the scale and shifting from colour to monochrome and the cyanotypes that are created from the shadow of an object.

⁵⁵ A monstrance is the vessel used in Roman Catholic, Old Catholic and Anglican churches to display an object of piety, such as the consecrated Eucharistic Host. It is also used as a reliquary monstrance for the public display of relics of some saints. The word monstrance comes from the Latin word monstrare meaning 'to show'.

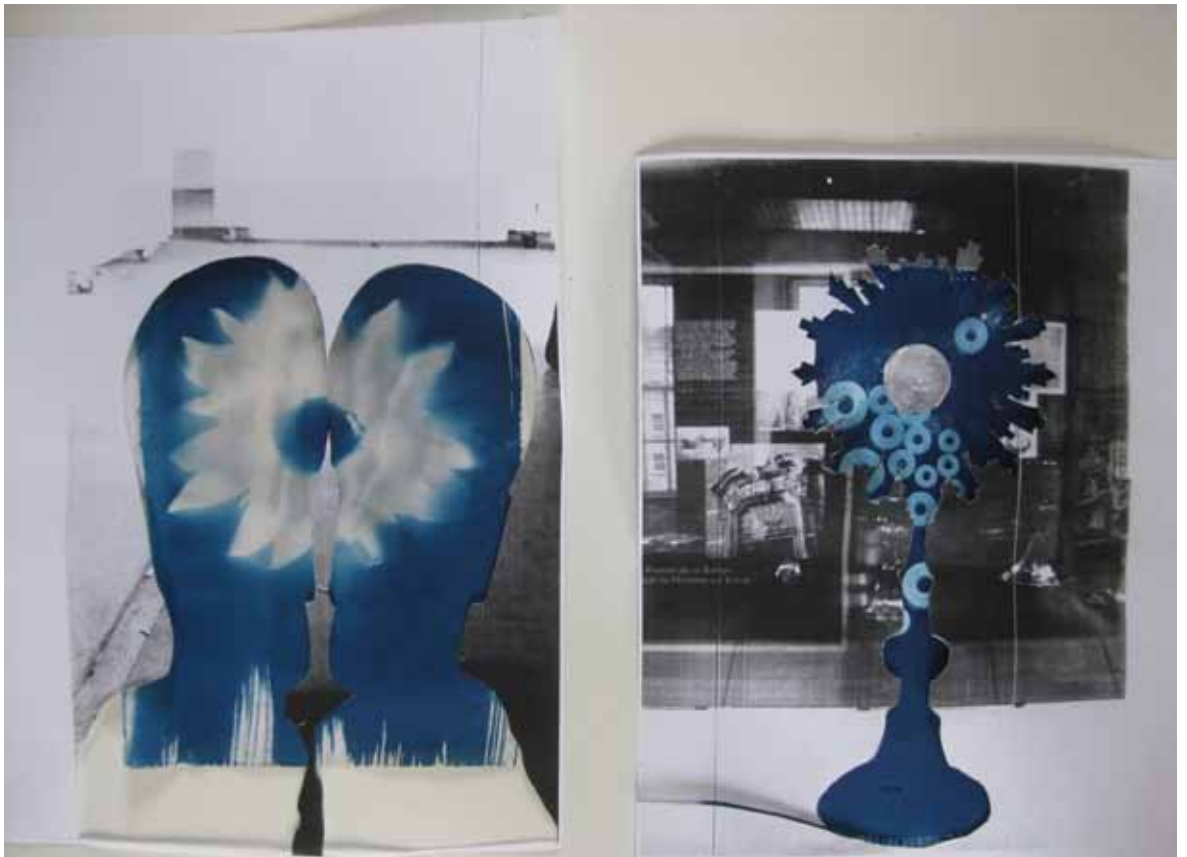


Figure 23. Cyanotype and collage.



Figure 24. Cyanotype and collage.

The mixing of personal objects that relate to the presence and absence of Chris (his slippers holding the imprint of his foot and his cremated remains, something that is materially of him but bears no relation to a live body), discovered objects (the monstrance, sunflower and washers), representations and shadows allow a different encounter with intensity. I wonder if like Wyatt (2013:167) I fear having nothing left to say or in this instance make. “That I fear feeling flat. Dead. That the longing for intensity, for connectedness is not always an easy experience.” Somehow placing and playing with objects directly connected and tangentially connected allows me to step into and out of a place of intensity. I am like Spry (2013:170)⁵⁶ “making the absent present”.

These cyanotypes and collages got developed whilst doing a day’s residency with HATCH, drawing research group, at the Royal West of England Academy and these ideas went with me to my residency at Bildwerk Frauenau in Germany.

Beginning isn’t that always the challenge. I’ve taken out the work from Ireland maybe I will start there, I don’t have to stay with that. This is the opposite experience from Ireland – everything is at my disposal and that is daunting. Kirkpatrick (2013) 18 May.

I had the opportunity to use any of the facilities and develop my ideas into glass, gave a talk on my work to the students attending classes and then have conversations primarily about grief and loss, probing the ideas of the presence of absence that I was exploring visually. I created 17 glass paintings and prints onto glass that worked with the slipper, footprint and monstrance imagery, using screen prints and then the paper stencils to create both the presence and absence of the images. I had thought about using mirrors and sandblasting but didn’t develop this, something I remembered once back in the UK for the work *Every Day for a Year*.

I feel I have been testing my hypothesis that creative investigation can help the grief process and engender conversations that allow people to tell their story. It’s been great to develop the work I started on the residency in Ireland and move it forward. I want to now experiment with framing the glass in layers with space between so there is

⁵⁶ She is talking of writing and how words reconstruct the body of lost loves in response to Wyatt in a paper that tracks through email exchanges “the experience and ethics of writing- and living -from/in intensity”.

movement and flicker as one passes them. Kirkpatrick (2013) Blog post 25 May.



Figure 25. *Footfall I*, glass, glass paint, enamel.

In making images that are the shadow, the space, and the absence these are grappling with the lost physical body, but also take into account how images can taunt because they are present when the body is not. They are also trying to materialise and understand Freud's (2005:249)

notion of “the shadow of the object falling upon the ego”, giving an agency to the shadow as if it were “the forsaken object”.



Figure 26. *Footfall II*, glass, enamel.

In wanting to create layers of the glass pieces with space between them, I am looking at how these ideas relate to an object that links to a dead person. Something or someone that is seemingly fixed, not constantly changing and how the glass pieces are constituted by a combination of fixed object and something that shimmers, hovers, changes; has the visual potential of the insubstantial and uses shadow/light/reflection, transparency/translucency/opacity to suggest the presence of absence. I am reminded of a quotation from Rose:

the infinite nature of absence, its total and utter opacity, that summons us to be building, viewing, loving and remembering subjects (2009:142).



Figure 27. *Footfall III*, glass, glass paint, enamel.



Figure 28. *Footfall IV*, glass, enamel.

Through layering the glass it has been important to decide which images sit at the front, middle and back (for three layer glass pieces, front and back for the two layer) which need to be in focus, which become more powerful by not being absolutely in focus. Edmund De Waal talking about thinking through the power of objects said: “Sometimes objects can be more powerful because they are not absolutely in focus.”⁵⁷



Figure 29. *Footfall V*, glass, enamel, sandblast.

The shimmer gives a visual experience to the stuttering motion of flicker – back and forward and then release that I often feel in my body, of turning and stasis and hovering, wanting to hold back the turning and then succumbing to it, that I associate with grief.

I am being playful and exploring “transgressing and filling the spaces rather than the images

57 He talks about this in the programme *What do artists do all day*: Edmund de Waal.

being held or fixed” (Modeen 2014)⁵⁸ creating slippage, uncertain ground because that relates to my experience of grief and my new Chris-less or maybe more accurately Chris differently configured life.

Iain Biggs⁵⁹ said: “the camera treats drawings as raw material – not entities but moving between - it draws with the material”. This gives a different cadence to his suggestion, on a studio visit, that the glass pieces are on the way toward something. I speculate about filming walking past the glass pieces so the shimmer and stutter is embodied and in movement. During the exhibition I observed people shifting and moving back and forth in front of the glass pieces and talked with them about the relationship between the embodied sensation of stuttering and hovering and how the images visually shimmered and stuttered. My description resonated with others’ bodily experiences of loss.

Walking in His Shoes, **Digital prints and laser engraving.**

Taking the original cyanotypes and scanning and manipulating them in Photoshop gave an opportunity to play with inverting the colours. I realise they have a burnt visual quality similar to an enamel, which takes me back to ideas that were sparked two years earlier:

Looking at Rachel’s samples in enamel, I really liked the big copper cylinders that had a mix of broad brush applied white enamel and transfers of flowers. The small cylinder that has a matt image (given less time in the kiln) was also appealing in its negative image quality and gives me ideas for using negative/inverted images burnt/sepia/white, more ideas for the presence of absence, but also a hinted at violence of burn/destruction. Kirkpatrick (2013) 1 November.

I combine these images of footprints with laser engraved images of the slippers, by experimenting with the settings and speed of the laser cutter I achieve a burnt image that lightly chars the surface causing it to sparkle and shimmer in refracted light. This is important to elucidate both the there and not there visual quality of the slipper and of the once owner of the slipper.

58 Mary Modeen discussed this idea with me at Land 2 Drawing and Place Symposium, Plymouth School of Art 25 Jan 2014.

59 Biggs talking of the film he made with Antony Lyons at Land 2 Drawing and Place Symposium, Plymouth School of Art 25 Jan 2014.

I keep him near but conversely there is also a distance created by the transformation of this everyday object that bears his imprint into other forms and images. The different iterations of this slipper image are akin to a meditation practice, the reciting of a mantra. Watching whether the image of his slipper or my footprint comes to the fore visually echoes conversations with my therapist about where I am situated in relation to his absence.



Figure 30. *Walking in his Shoes I*, Giclee print & laser engraving.



Figure 31. *Walking in his Shoes III*, Giclee print & laser engraving.



Figure 32. *Walking in his Shoes V*, Giclee print.

The Height of Him, **Hangings/works on fabric.**

These are the height of Chris combining footprints and slipper images in subtle overlaid layers, the mixed colour is important it is resonant of dried blood (people at the exhibition thought they were created from blood) this lending a visceral quality to the fragile images. The suggestion of blood is a reminder of when I first returned to the house after Chris had died and his body had been taken away. There was a feeling of life interrupted, half eaten food on the kitchen table and a blood stained sheet on the bed and also of how grief interrupted my menstrual cycle.

Looking at the heat transfer tests I did on my MA workshop, I start to think about doing more work with photocopied hands and/or Chris' shoes, I was surprised how many I had done and how I had forgotten how much I liked the results. I talked with Becky about proportions/colour balance and she now has a sample set of mixes and colours to act as a starting point, which will be really helpful in not working so blind, having perhaps a little more and quicker control over the results. I also have the technical notes. We also talked about using polymer coated wood, Perspex and metal, I could laser cut this and then print onto it. Sarah suggested I could also laser cut wooden stencils that I utilize in heat transfer after seeing my vest prints that would give a greater vestige of object. Kirkpatrick (2013) 1 November.

I worked on more heat transfer press prints, holding the paper up and letting the dried blood coloured disperse dye run down it. When washing my brush in the big Belfast sink in ceramics (I was prepping the paper in ceramics because it was so manically busy in textile printing there was no where to work) I noticed the dye spreading out and mixing with the layer of water on the bottom of the sink, a bit like marbled paper. I decided to try and take prints from this, remembering how dark the dye was mixing it with water seemed no bad thing. The results seemed like traces on old plaster walls. I made fresh photocopies of the darkest footprint images tore them out and coated them in red in addition to the pale blue/grey ones. I then let myself play with layering these images in the press on long lengths, like shrouds, of synthetic translucent fabric. I let the layers build up and pick up traces from the base paper, using the laser

cut MDF slippers to give absent/present slippers and also the coated photocopies a number of times to give subtle footprints. I just kept working letting a rhythm build and responding in the moment to each one but also holding an awareness of the one preceding it. Kirkpatrick (2013) 12 December.

Rhythm is an important element to the making processes, both in embodied repetitive movement and in the building of layers of imagery I wonder about the impact on linear time that these repetitions have. There is a sense of stepping into a making space, possibly a need to immerse oneself in the intensity of being present, watching how a combination of choices made in the preparation of papers to print with flows with not knowing what the outcome will be and how this then troubles at the loss of control I feel around sudden and unexpected death.



Figure 33. *The Height of Him*, textile sublimation print.



Figure 34. *The Height of Him*, textile sublimation print.

I discussed this aspect of un-knowing and intuitive knowing with Blair Coffey⁶⁰ around the

⁶⁰ After his talk at UWE as part of the launch of an exhibition of Australian artists' books and printmaking from the Griffin Centre for Creative Arts Research. (www.blaircoffey.com).

visual work he is making on his PhD. He clearly saw this as part of his method and that it allowed him to approach the subject of his research, the human genome, with different knowledge. The practice is contributing to a pool of ideas and how I know things. It provides a constellation of reference points

Every Day for a Year, **paperclay mourning envelopes project.**

Every day for a year consists of multiple mourning envelopes made from porcelain paperclay imprinted with handwritten or typed addresses reproduced as flexo-plates from the original envelopes sent between Chris and myself. They reference the Victorian custom of sending letters of condolence made explicit by the specific size, shape and black edging, a visible sign in the world that someone close had died.

I am reconstituting the paper clay I want to fire strips, though they need to be flat for laser etching and I want torn edges. I am thinking about the black edged envelopes Si showed me Tuesday night, would like to maybe put oxide edges on my paper clay-apply whilst greenware. Also check out Paul Scott firing photocopies onto the surface, could be another way of getting the image? So does that mean they should/could be envelope size? The ones Si showed me were small and beautifully formed some were embossed. I could laser cut a small template of the slippers and use them to make an impression in the clay that would suggest the embossing. Kirkpatrick (2014) 20 February.

The envelopes don't contain the letters Chris and I sent each other but just replicate the number, 186. They signify the location of betwixt and between, objects moving through posting, sent and received. The repetitive, meditative process of making allows remembering and trying to re-enact what went before. The betwixt and between also links to the ritual of going back to The River Severn each month to photograph the Tying the Threads project, this is discussed in relation to Tying The Threads in Chapter 5.



Figure 35 Detail of porcelain paper clay envelopes with oxides in process

As I talk with Shirley-Ann, I momentarily become clearer she asks “Why not just put the envelopes up?” I have wondered that too when I realised the task I had set myself, but that is part of it the wanting to set myself a task; ‘a labour of love’ and I want to transform them, remake them in a different material one that has different associations and resonances. Speaks, at least to me, poetically of fragility, impossibility, repeating a behavior to stave off the stark reality of Chris’ absence.

“Would it be too raw, to show the original envelopes?” I think so yes, like Louisa showing her sister’s sketchbooks.⁶¹ I want to create something beautiful, maybe even transitional so the rawness is easier to bear but also it allows the viewer their own interpretation and response.

This is interesting in terms of where this aspect sits in relation to my hypothesis of creative engagement assisting living with grief, because I am creating a mediated experience. I am creating; I am in control of what I choose to put in or leave out.

Kirkpatrick (2014) 1 June.

61 I refer to Louisa Fairclough, discussed in Chapter 3.

My control in the creative processes also incorporates an element of serendipity, of allowing the materials to change or develop the initial idea but the structure of processes of making is a fundamental counter to the loss of control I have felt as a result of sudden and unexpected death.

I have an idea to use a mirrored surface behind the mourning envelopes, which allows an interaction between viewer, reflection, reflected light and both sides of the object. It draws on ideas from medieval visual contemplations of death where the mirror provides an instrument that intensifies self-reflection and a way of contemplating death and mortality (Hallam et al 1999:31) I would mirror the glass to give an uneven hand wrought quality and possibly incorporate a shadow outline of Chris. Kirkpatrick (2014) 10 June.

I did not utilise this idea in The Back Lane West Exhibition, as I wanted to create an installation that involved a visual dialogue between the film and the envelopes. The static, memorial quality of the envelopes was emphasised by the moving image playing across them.

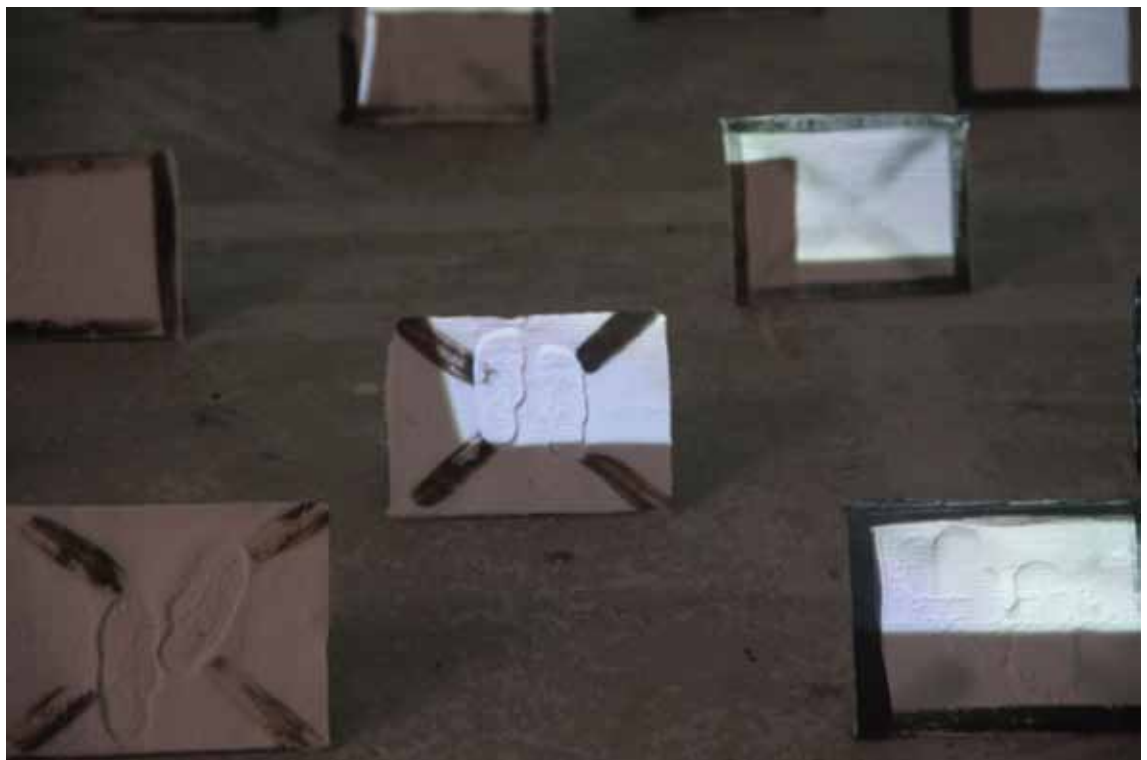


Figure 36. *Every Day for a Year*, detail showing slipper imprint, installation at Back Lane West..



Figure 37. *Every Day for a Year*, detail showing ribbon and reeds, installation at Back Lane West..

She Wanders/Wonders film.

Figure 38 View DVD Chapter 2 Film *She Wanders/Wonders* with credits

The film was seeded as part of a layered account of an inquiry into ‘red’ that emerged out of a collective biography workshop. In 2012, coinciding with the first anniversary of my partner’s death and just after I had attended a ritual and ceremonies course with Sue Gill and Gilly Adams,⁶²

an international and interdisciplinary group of scholars gathered together to write and make other things and marks on paper that asked questions of, and into, the spaces between words, people, things and their environments. This project became a ‘wondering’ and a ‘wandering’ around how we might write and work otherwise collaboratively (Gale et al. 2013).

and inspired the film *She Wanders/Wonders*.

62 I have already talked about this in Chapter 3.

The colour red

A particular material context. What else is there?

A moment in red. She sits sifting, letting the most immediate conversation settle; slips sideways, focuses on the dark red darning on pink gloves, the cross hatching and patching, the reforming of a hole, covering over but still being present and the found object at her feet - metal with a hole not perfectly spherical, a little off kilter. The need to hold, press sharp edges into flesh, leave marks. She tries to let go, let herself drift back to the words, to the ribbons of paths, overlaid now with red enamel lines on visual re-imaginings. But also being pulled sideways to a memory of red blotching and staining of skin, under the skin as the blood settled and mottled, patterned. Still, not rushing and fluid. Still. She couldn't believe, comprehend lack of movement and her mind kept putting it back in a flicker of eyelid, a breath because then it wasn't end. It wasn't this, it wasn't cold, clammy mottled flesh of deadweight, of death. It was rosy-hued, it was rose-tinted, blush and bloom of coy seduction, pulse of blood through veins of movement, of life. But the memory of weight brings her back, the memory of blood on her gloved fingertips from behind the skull.

She wonders/ wanders about walking the paths of the Glory Wood in the glass dress spilling red ribbon and ash, an unravelling.

Kneehigh's⁶³ representation of severed feet, stumps of legs with red ribbons falling beautiful and profane, poetic, visceral; to cover, re-cover, uncover, weave and knot, interleave-leave.

Red-lining of an unworn jacket with red stitching detail on the sleeve and red buttons, softest, inky dark blue needlecord. It had to be that jacket, one as yet unpaid for, unworn, kept for the right occasion - coffin attire and red socks; soft climbing socks with horizon embroidered across the toe and red darning- markers of love and care. Kirkpatrick D (2013).

The film's location and the embodied experience of wearing the glass dress are discussed in Chapter 5, Performance in Place. In this chapter I look specifically at the props created for the film.



Figure 39. Filming of *She Wanders/Wonders*, used with permission of [Emilie Rowell]. Photo by David Bunce.

Both Emilie, who plays a younger version of myself and I carry a vessel made of swan's feathers with images of hands holding a void screen-printed onto them. It's an impossible vessel, too insubstantial to really hold anything, another metaphor for the presence of absence. Yet it holds ash and cremated remains another indeterminate substance that is more than it's material form. The swan's feathers link to the glass dress, this is made from cast glass swan's feathers and references fairytales, particularly *The Wild Swans*⁶⁴ and Chris's conceptualisation of me as a swan maiden.⁶⁵

The use of ash held and carried and sprinkled from this impossible vessel makes reference to ideas that dirt "is the final stage of total disintegration...a cycle that has been completed...a by product of the creation of order" (Douglas 1966:161). There is a link between the images of running water and the ash carried suggesting the "revivifying role of water in religions (and

⁶⁴ A Fairy tale recorded by both Anderson and Grimms, the princess has to accomplish an emotionally and physically arduous task to release her brothers from a spell and is unable to speak of this.

⁶⁵ Swan maidens are mythical creatures who can shapeshift from human to swan form. The key to this transformation is a swan skin or something with swan's feathers attached.



Figure 40. Filming of *She Wanders/Wonders*, used with permission of [Emilie Rowell]. Photo by David Bunce.

Walking in the glass dress held connotations of fairytales – a fairytale task of impossibility (a continuation of one of the themes of my MA work) and both a visual and an embodied metaphor for the weight of grief. How I felt impaired, restricted yet also conscious that the feeling of being out of my usual rhythms of time and movement meant a different awareness and a paying attention to details that was having a profound affect on my day to day life.

Woolf talks of days of astonishing intensity following her mother's death and her heightened perceptions of light and colour and a phenomenology of perception with words of poetry "becoming transparent... and as if they developed what one is already feeling"(2002: 103).

The dress has a poem written by the poet Sally Crabtree that spirals around it's form.

Individual words are printed onto selected feathers so the poem can not be read in it's entirety but only certain words can be glimpsed at any one time, another visual expression of the non-linear experience of my grief.

I sat alone the morning after the evening viewing of the third installation (the film with the 186 porcelain envelopes). The poem below is my moment-to-moment experience of watching

the film projected large, and playing across the surface of the envelopes.

Light, shadow, white, blue.

Time passes.

Muscles tense and release.

The dress sways, rocks,
carries her forward, pulls her back.

Ribbons laced around fingers and wrists fall, trail
and are gathered back up into her arms.

An object waits to be discovered nestled amongst the bark.

At the corner of her eye lurks what?

Spin, spin, ash releases.

Reeds rustle, breath.

Wind ruffles feathers, ribbons blow.

Pulled to the sea.

The editing mix of long shots and close-up details and the colour-grading that visually pushes the red ribbon forward give both intensity and a dreamy quality to the film and as I read the poem I realise how many of the shots are echoes of physical, bodily repetitive movements from the early days of grieving.

Memorial window.

In June 2013 I received an email:

I am trying to find a local glass artist who is willing to take a commission for a very special window in our school. I am the Headteacher of St Uny Primary School in Carbis Bay and, recently, one of the girls from my school lost her battle with a brain tumor and passed away. We want to install a window which speaks to us of her and reflects her joy for life. McNamara (2013)

We spoke on the phone and really connected. I visited the school and liked the ethos. We looked at possible places for siting a memorial window and decided an internal window, that

received light from a window beyond it and was at the end of the main corridor was the most arresting place. It posed a few design dilemmas in terms of working with both transmitted natural light and internal reflected light.

We discussed the need for the window to contain ‘an essence of Lia’ and decided the best way forward was to have a reflective making session with her brother and some friends at the school, getting them to draw some of the things they know that Lia loved and then incorporating their ideas in the design of the window.

In this session we worked with mono-printing and creating collagraphs, the process of cutting and sticking, playing with reversal of images and different textures kept their hands busy and enabled them to talk playfully about what they remembered of their friend and think about how to represent that visually. It also meant that because we were working with print processes we created multiples, so they had images to take home as well as leaving some for me to incorporate into the design.

Lia had loved fairies and angels and so I wanted the design to have a light airy quality suggesting wings and fairies. I used dragonflies as the basis for the fairies and decided on a triple glazed panel so I could sandblast wing forms on the back sheet of glass, sandblast fairies on the front and sandwich the coloured etched, painted and silver- stained glass in the middle without the need for lead comes, that would have added a visual weight I was trying to avoid; I wanted it to be uplifting. I incorporated the prints the children had done into the etching and painting.

A particular shade of pink was mentioned that Lia loved and so I asked the glass blowers at English Antique Glass to blow a beautiful sheet of especially rich pink glass that I then etched. This colour was cited as a meme in order to bring her to people’s recollections and felt particularly important to get right. I was really aware that this object would be seen by those that knew her but also by those that didn’t and I wanted to create a joyful memorial.



Figure 41. Memorial Window, detail.

I am so glad I was invited to the dedication of this window. It was a really moving ceremony and it was good to hear how others experience the window, how they feel I have captured the essence of her. Kirkpatrick (2014) Blog 24 April.



Figure 42. Memorial Window.

I include the memorial window project as it is a bridge between this chapter and the next, an object made for someone who is absent and yet very present in the lives of her friends and family, the design inspired by participatory workshops and conversations. The window uses visual and material metaphors and provides an intermediary, transitional space in which to encounter a loved and remembered child.

Conclusion

This Chapter has examined, through the practice based element of the PhD, tangible examples

of objects, images and the processes used to create. These explore the key themes of control and structure, transformation, intermediary/transitional space, troubling at linear time, the use of visual and material metaphors and intensity; adding depth and texture to the developing argument of the function of stories of loss and absence through personal grief narratives.

Throughout this chapter I have shown through practice how the creation of artworks and objects contributes to a pool of ideas and how knowledge is formed, it provides a constellation of reference points. The practice encourages “operational knowledge”⁶⁶ (Whalley & Miller 2005: 140) and have a transformative power, by allowing an examination of the pain of living with the presence of a dead, absent person. The repetitive processes of making and the re-evaluation of images and objects in order to recreate them in a variety of materials and forms keeps my grief process moving, enables an ongoing conversation to happen with myself but also with others. This allows their stories of loss to be told, as evidenced in the exhibitions at Back Lane West. My own response to grief and loss presents “models of creation” (Leader 2008:87) and this diversity is important because it opens a space that can potentially allow others to explore their own unique responses to loss. The use of small seemingly insignificant domestic objects in many of the artworks reminds me of Bennett’s seemingly random juxtaposition in *Vibrant Matter* of a dead rat, a plastic cup, a spool of thread (2010:3) that has resonance with Hallam and Hockey’s descriptions of objects on the periphery of domestic life that remain “present yet lost, disengagement accentuating melancholy, stimulating unease, invoking the prospect of our own death” (2001: 120).

The dilemma is to decide what to keep, what to let go in terms of the objects that belonged to these now absent people. It has fundamentally shifted my relationship to objects, I remain emotionally attached to them as I ever was yet also see that this is just stuff. It doesn’t seem so important anymore, which can be challenging for someone who has not only collected and valued material possessions but has also been in the market for making them. However, the emotional value of making images and objects that have allowed a sitting with grief and a different relationship to loss to develop has been invaluable.

66 They align this with *techne*, “thinking through doing”.

CHAPTER 5 - PERFORMANCE IN PLACE

Without that depressive moment without that sadness in the heart, that weight you can't be slow enough to receive or hear the beauty so there is a melancholy a longing for something that is singing or calling or sighing through us that isn't even our own personal depression and you can feel that in a landscape. So moods are not only my moods....you may need a landscape to place your mood and to have a response from the world, to share that mood with (James Hillman).⁶⁷

What we are left with is our interdependence a kind of suspended constantly-being-made interdependence, human and beyond human. Maybe this is, or could be, one of the potentials of landscape as a provocation? Massey (2006:17)

He was still alive had fucked off/ disappeared to Guernsey or Jersey but then he came back. He was so real, embodied – it was he.

She was angry, relieved, and joyful.

But then the realisation in the dream that it was a dream she had seen him dead after all, cared for his body, there was no way he could be back beside her in bed - such a yearning, an emptiness and then the phone rang a man's voice too quiet she got up to try and adjust the phone's volume so she could hear him and then woke.

She felt so shocked by the visceral realness of him but also that she had held again both positions inside herself, this was not the first dream, feeling his aliveness and yet knowing it could not be real. She put the overhead light on, before she could return to sleep, didn't want to be in the dark. She sleeps with a night light ever since he died, suddenly a childhood fear of the dark had returned. The fairy lights had gone out when she had got up earlier, maybe she had taken her unease back into sleep, into dreams. Kirkpatrick, D. (2014)

⁶⁷ This is taken from an interview with Hillman in a film by Mark Kidel produced for television *Kind of Blue – An Essay on Melancholia and Depression*.

Introduction.

This chapter explores how relationship and friendship deepens and is enriched by engaging with absence and presence, in the context of loss and/or sudden and unexpected bereavement, as part of a chosen activity and bodily experience. “In other’s grief I hear and see my own, for mortality makes brothers and sisters of us all.” (Harrison 2003:70) The stronger the connections the deeper the experience of absence, illustrated by a powerful quotation from Frers:

The corporeal body...bleeds and wounds that which is missing has torn both physical body and whole corporeality....My affectionate movement tries to stroke gently but finds no resistance my loving movement is not reciprocated, it falls from me, every time, without being returned.” (2013:441).

Documented in this chapter, in first person narratives, are five projects that all involved the production of visual artwork and co-created ritual experience in a chosen place, initiated by myself. They all explore ideas of finding a place to place grief, this relates not only to the relational aspect of placing the deceased relative to our continued life (Walters 1999) but also to geographies of absence (Meyer 2012). The narratives provide “a relay of retrospect and prospect” and create “situated stories” (Daniels & Lorimer 2012:3). Drawing on Denzin’s (1997) notion of “standpoint epistemology”(a framework of producing knowledge from the point of view of the person doing the research), the projects, if viewed as ethnographies, position me as a researcher within the study, providing a unique form of knowledge.

The projects are rooted in an understanding of performance “as a synonym for human agency, as trope of the transitive, as people doing things moments of extra-daily practice”(Pearson 2006:3) and extend the transitory into images, objects, film - creating a presence from an absence. This weaves a gossamer safety net across the chasm of loss and raises questions of absence and presence,⁶⁸ personal loss and the collaborative shared experience; the power of ritual⁶⁹, conversation, object making⁷⁰ and gift-giving to grant

⁶⁸ The theoretical positioning of presence and absence has already been explored in Chapter 1; this chapter builds on this with an embodied and experiential approach.

⁶⁹ Chapter 3 provided the theoretical underpinning of ritual but this chapter introduces specific responses to sites and situations.

⁷⁰ Chapter 4 explores in detail object and image this chapter deals with these in relation to participation and performance.

attention to the presence of absence. These questions/themes work through all the projects except gift giving which applies to *Embodied Absence* and *Remembering Fields*.

The creation of gifted objects (Richardson 2001) given to my co-collaborators shifts the idea of objects placed at memorial sites (Maddrell 2009) into a gifted object as a memory of a ritual journey that also calls to mind the presence of an absent person or an absent place. The documentation of these projects present a form of “manifest absence” (Law 2004:84), a memory of an event, and builds on the methodological framing of “method assemblage” (Law 2004:161) within the thesis.

Both Pearson (2006), Thrift (2008) and Tanner (2006) allude to the death of their fathers as influencing their work and Pearson cites Thrift’s proposal of non-representational theory⁷¹ and desire to: “value and work with everyday practical activities as they occur” and “seek a form of writing that can disclose his (father’s) legacy...and thus emphasise “creative practice, invention and imagination”(2006:16); I sense the necessity in their words to grapple with and make present in an authentic, creative way the absence of these fathers, as I do with both my mother and my partner and as my co-participants do within the participatory projects.

The mapping of grief and loss within a place can act to counter the effect of traditional orthogonal perspective in cartography that tends toward homogenization and placeless-ness. Evoking the particular/the personal could be seen as a subversive act, a method for creating a different cadence to that of a traditional separation of dispassionate reason and emotional life that emerges with the ideal of Cartesian dualism and abstract space (Lefebvre 1991). As Sullivan(2011:93) proposes:

Visual forms are part of cultural practices, individual processes and information systems that are located within spaces and places that we inhabit through lived experience.

The nature of participatory projects is open-ended with the potential for changing and transforming each person involved. Taking the time and learning to listen to oneself and

⁷¹ NRT developed by Thrift & Dewsbury (2000) & Thrift (2008) explores embodied experience, and how relationships are performed, enacted and practiced.

others is a key aspect to this potential being realised. As Till (2011) emphasises, care includes everything we do to maintain, continue, repair our world so we can live in it, inherent in this is allowing oneself to be vulnerable and challenges the presumption that the other is exactly like the self.

Conversation and “metalogue”, following Bateson (1972), provides an indeterminate space where there is the possibility to not resolve a question but open up discussion; how discourse and practice work upon us and open up the possibility of change. (Davies & Gannon 2006:5) The exchange of words provide access points, moments of meeting between people, a sharing of experience. They challenge the cultural assumptions that constitute loss as strictly psychological.

Tying the Threads, a collaborative project of personal memorialisation.

Tying the Threads started as a conversation in an ongoing set of collaborative meetings and opportunities to be playful between myself and the artists, Mollie Meager and Penny Somerville; both of whom had helped in the funereal rituals I created following the death of my partner in 2011.⁷²

Shortly after the spring Equinox of 2013 we met; we walked glimpses of the River Severn illuminating our passage as we caught up with each other’s life events since our last meeting. We sat in Mol’s newly constructed straw bale studio in the Forest of Dean deciding how best to christen this new workspace. A theme that had evolved from our previous meetings was to work in and with the surrounding environments within which each of us is based, as we meet and work in each other’s studios

In March 2011 we had worked on both sides of the River Severn; on the English side recreating the transect line⁷³ Iain Biggs had originally created for *Living in a Material World: A*

72 Documented in *Between Ineffable Intervals*, described in the introduction by Biggs as “a particular interweaving of creative work, scholarship, practical engagements and empathetic imagination” (2012:5).

73 A transect line is a tape or string laid along the ground in a straight line between two poles as a guide for sampling.

*Cross-Disciplinary Location-based Enquiry into the Performativity of Emptiness*⁷⁴ then repositioning this on the Welsh side at Black Rock Nature Reserve. This was a method of orientating and focusing our various ways of working and acknowledging our different connections to this particular landscape. The transect line gave us a connected geographical and visual starting point (both between ourselves and with the historical line that Iain had created), that did not close down options for exploration. We could work from it at any point along its length, this was a useful framing device to manage the overwhelm that can often accompany how to start working and creating within a landscape and environment.



Figures 43 & 44. Transect line on English foreshore of the River Sever, used with permission of [Mollie Meager



Figures 45 & 46. Transect line on Welsh foreshore at Black Rock Nature Reserve, used with permission of [Penny Somerville & Mollie Meager].

⁷⁴ Part of a series of “experiential, location-based workshops to engage with a range of disciplines, arts and community organisations in order to provide an arena in which approaches to landscape and environment could be compared, combined and placed in critically reflective relationships” Landscape and Environment (2006) (<http://www.landscape.ac.uk/landscape/research/networkworkshops/livinginamaterialworld.aspx>).

From the two days spent creating drawings and photographs one image stayed with me - the seaweed caught on the fence at Black Rock had reminded me of washing lines and domesticity. This image had returned to me as I contemplated creating a piece of work that would start to explore my grief and loss. I asked if they would help me start this down on the Severn.



Figure 47. Seaweed caught on the Fence at Black Rock.

I had brought with me two of Chris favorite shirts, as Doty (quoted in Tanner 2006:190) says “a shirt can’t be remote”. Mol and I sat and ripped them up. As we ripped them, the studio filled with the so reminiscent smell of Chris - Nag Champa and grass, the fibers themselves seemed to hold the scent. I was reminded of a conversation I’d had at *The Lives of Objects Conference*⁷⁵ about the Jewish tradition of tearing one’s own clothing during the death ritual of Shiva. The dual symbolism that ritual contains of recognizing the loss, showing one’s heart is torn, whilst also acknowledging the body is also only a garment that the soul wears is apposite. We all talked of our ongoing experiences of loss and grief. Pen documented the process with

75 Wolfson College, University of Oxford, September 2013.

photographs and drawings she didn't want to actively participate in the visceral action of tearing, but gave full attention to her role as witness to the action and shared thoughts.

There is a power in noticing that Kathleen Jamie catches when she writes:

I had noticed, more than noticed, the cobwebs, and the shoaling light, and the way the doctor listened, and the flecked tweed of her skirt, and the speckled bird and the sickle-cell man's slim feet. Isn't that a kind of prayer? The care and maintenance of the web of our noticing, the paying heed? (2005:109)



Figure 48. Shirt tatters just after tying them, April 2013.

It was bright and sunny but bitterly cold the following day as we rhythmically tied the tatters to the fence amongst the seaweed already clinging there and a peaked cap (which seemed oddly pertinent, as Chris had always worn one. I had even placed his favorite one on his coffin) – We were creating another ritual; tying the threads of memory, friendship, connection, love. Penny recorded our actions before we went for tea and cake and I determined to return each month possibly on the day of the full moon, as the day had been when we added them.

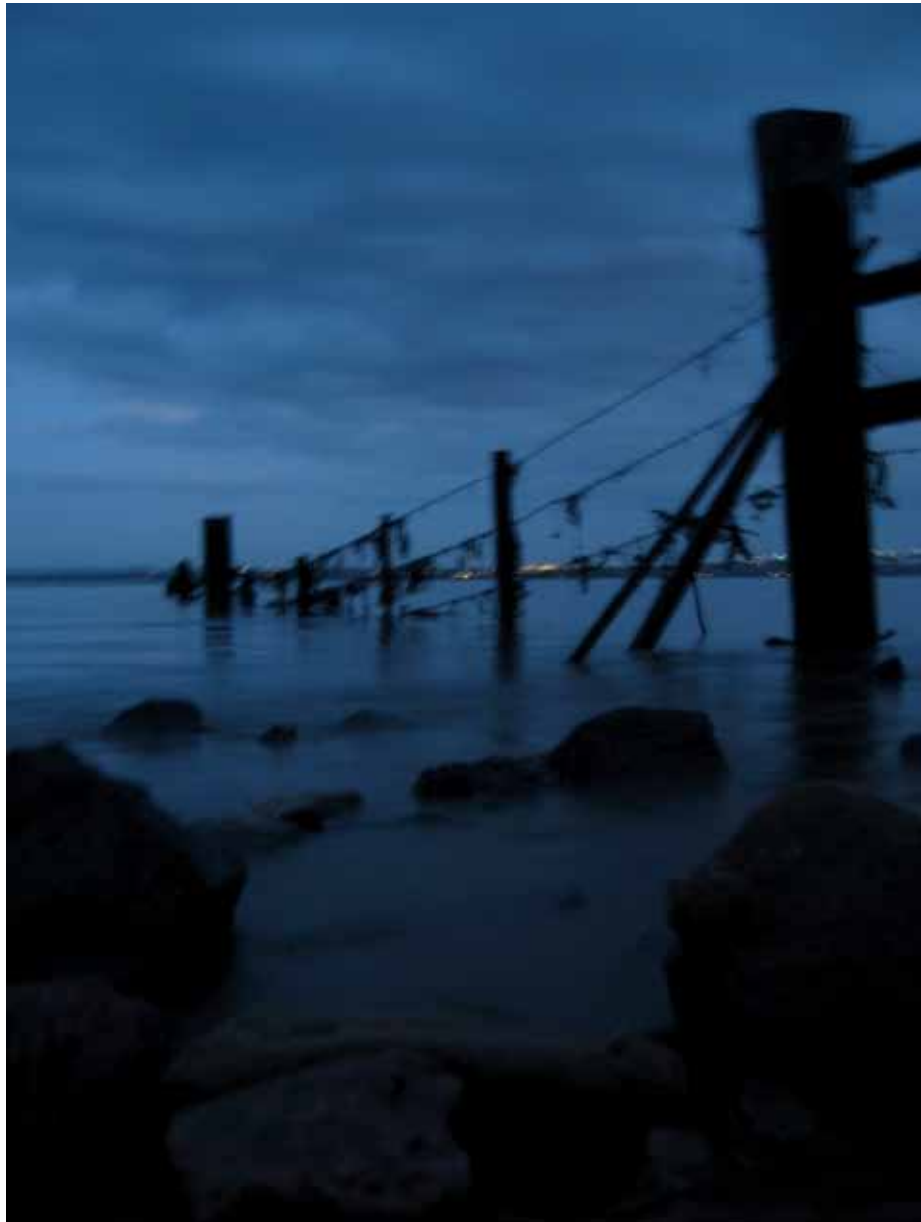


Figure 49. Full moon, tide turning, August 2013.

I returned each month, the visits began by being linked to the moon cycle and then became inextricably linked to my visits to Wales linking both my absent dead partner with my then current lover. It allowed time to sit on the pebbled foreshore, noticing and documenting the changes to the tatters being washed by the tide twice a day, weathered by wind and sun, storms, tidal surges. Noticing and documenting the shifting emotional changes occurring within me. I liked not knowing quite where the tide would be, my only hint the height of the Severn as I crossed over one of the bridges, whether they would be visible or hidden by the water. Often the weather and the tide determined how long I would stay and sometimes this was defined by the arrangement I had with the living.



Figure 50. Tatters and algae, February 2014.



Figure 51. Tatters and algae, February 2014.

There is a relationship between the environmental changes on the shirt tatters of tying the threads and the passing of time, a visual linearity of decomposition and decay that intertwines

and offers up a counter-narrative to the non-linear experience of my grief.

Woolf describes the greater part of each day is not lived consciously: “this cotton-wool, this non-being” (2002:84). Non-being is an important part of a temporary respite from grief, losing oneself in daily activities yet the act of returning to *Tying the Threads*, and through the arts practice and the repetitive acts of making,⁷⁶ I connect with an interior space that allows contemplation of my own mortality. O’Neill in talking of ephemeral time in ephemeral art says:

The slowed time of ephemerality offers the time of grief and gives permission to mourn in a time when we are encouraged to move on. They do not ask us to forget or to ‘get over’ pain but to accept it and find a way of living with it” (2007:157).



Figure 52. Tatters and seaweed, April 2014.

O’Rourke uses the metaphor of a tree growing around an obstruction to exemplify her words: “I will carry this wound forever - It’s not a question of getting over it or healing. No, it’s a question of learning to live with the transformation” (2011:218). Woolf (2002) cites three examples of exceptional moments two that ended in states of despair and one in satisfaction

76 This has been explored in more depth in Chapter Four, including the artwork *Every Day for a Year*.

and she identifies a link between the despair and feeling powerless; I get overwhelmed by feelings of despair and powerlessness to do with Chris' death and how the suddenness challenged my sense of certainty. Having choice over the location for *Tying the Threads* and the times when I would visit gave me back control, even though it is in a public spot. I like the opportunities the public placement has enabled - interesting conversations with dog walkers about grief and loss and ease of access. The top part of the fence disappearing in the winter storms, leaving only the part that the tatters were attached to was another challenge to certainty and a timely reminder of our fragility. It is this corporeality of the tatters of the shirts that once contained his body, a body no longer accessible to me, that speaks to Tanner's theory of corporeal grief: "Visualizable but untouchable and untouching, the lost body of the loved one taunts the survivor with its absent presence." (2006: 89) Ways of negotiating this inability to touch the lost body will be explored again in Chapter 6.



Figure 53. *Tying the threads*, screenprint with mono-screenprint.

Choosing to go there on the second anniversary of his death. I wanted to witness differently this particular moment in time so I drew a simple uncluttered drawing on mark resist and turned it into a screen print with mono screen-print so that each one is subtly different.

The process of drawing brings my attention fully into the moment and time slips and dips, seeming to stretch I am both present and absent, lost in the act of drawing and looking; the potential of making and marking a place, finding places to place grief and also playing with ambiguity. Kirkpatrick (2013) 23 October.

Doughty sees: “no limit to our creativity in creating rituals relevant to our modern lives”(2015:215). I have developed a scaffold of habits and rituals, ways of being that enable me to be in the world after Chris died. I examine that scaffolding what adds to it, what loosens it, what leaks out. As Kathleen Jamie says: “Keep looking. Keep looking, even when there’s nothing much to see” (2012:82).

Memorial Tattoo.

“I carry the absent ones with me on this labyrinthine journey.” (Kirkpatrick 2013:18)

The idea was seeded at a talk I attended at Death: Southbank’s Festival for the Living 2012 by John Troyer, when he talked about the practice of placing a small amount of the cremated remains (cremains) of a loved one in the ink. “A memorial tattoo is an image but it is also (and most importantly) a narrative.” (Troyer 2009) This narrative appealed, in the early stages of grief and loss (my partner had died in the October of the previous year). However, it took a further two years to design the tattoo and find a tattooist whose drawing ability I trusted enough to permanently mark my skin.



Figures 54 & 55. Transfer positioning and application. Photo by Karen Abadie.

I place this project in the context of performance in place, positioning my body, the tattoo parlor and the relationship between myself, Radu Rusu the tattooist and the filmmaker/artist Karen Abadie (who documented the process) as a performative landscape.

Artists such as Shelly Jackson with her project “Ineradicable Skin”⁷⁷ and Santiago Sierra with ‘160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People’⁷⁸ have explored permanence, performance and the ethics of changing another’s body with the use of tattoos but I am interested in the relationship between the living and the dead, aspects of memorialisation on the body and the choice to carry a small part of my partner’s cremated remains on/in my back.



Figure 56. Transfer and cremains. Photo by Karen Abadie.

Memorial tattoos both embody memory and serve as a kind of translator of memory into a language readable by others. The practice of adding cremains is not a new practice, it used to be a marginal activity that tended to happen between tattooists but it is becoming more widely used. Certainly the responses to an online article by Berns (2011) indicate that people who

⁷⁷ Jackson, S. (2003) <http://ineradicablestain.com/skin-call.html>.

⁷⁸ Sierra’s use of tattoos is very different from my own. Manchester (2006) summarises Sierra’s work “as the persistence of the division between the first and third worlds. Each of his works highlights the exploitation of human labour taking place in systems of economic exchange” He raises ethical dilemmas and is concerned with revealing the ubiquity of institutional power.

have experienced sudden, unexpected or violent death of someone close are looking to have this done or have sought out tattooists comfortable with doing this.

For over two years 'design tattoo' had remained on my to do list, transferring into each new diary. I knew I wanted an image that held multiple resonances, but had not allowed the space and time for my sporadic contemplations to be realised into visual form. I sat one evening in my study, formally Chris's study, and drew a small delicate swan's feather in pencil, linking the personal - Chris always referred to me as swan maiden, to the mythological - St Michael weighing the soul against a feather and referencing an older myth of Anubis weighing the heart against Ma'at's feather.

A serendipitous conversation with a work colleague, who unbeknownst to me had a number of beautifully drawn tattoos, suggested a tattoo parlor in Truro, Cornwall. I went to talk to them and Radu Rusu said he would like to do this significant tattoo. We talked about the line quality and how I wanted it to look like a pencil drawing. I convinced him I did not mind the tattoo fading over time, in fact that felt appropriate considering it was for my dead partner, and that he could water down the ink to get the right effect. He also was comfortable with the addition of a small amount of cremains.



Figure 57. Starting to ink. Photo by Karen Abadie.



Figure 58. Creating ink tones. Photo by Karen Abadie.



Figure 59. Focussing on the candle, used with permission of [Radu Rasu]. Photo by Karen Abadie.



Figure 60. Tattoo in progress, used with permission of [Radu Rasu]. Photo by Karen Abadie.



Figure 61. Almost complete. Photo by Karen Abadie.

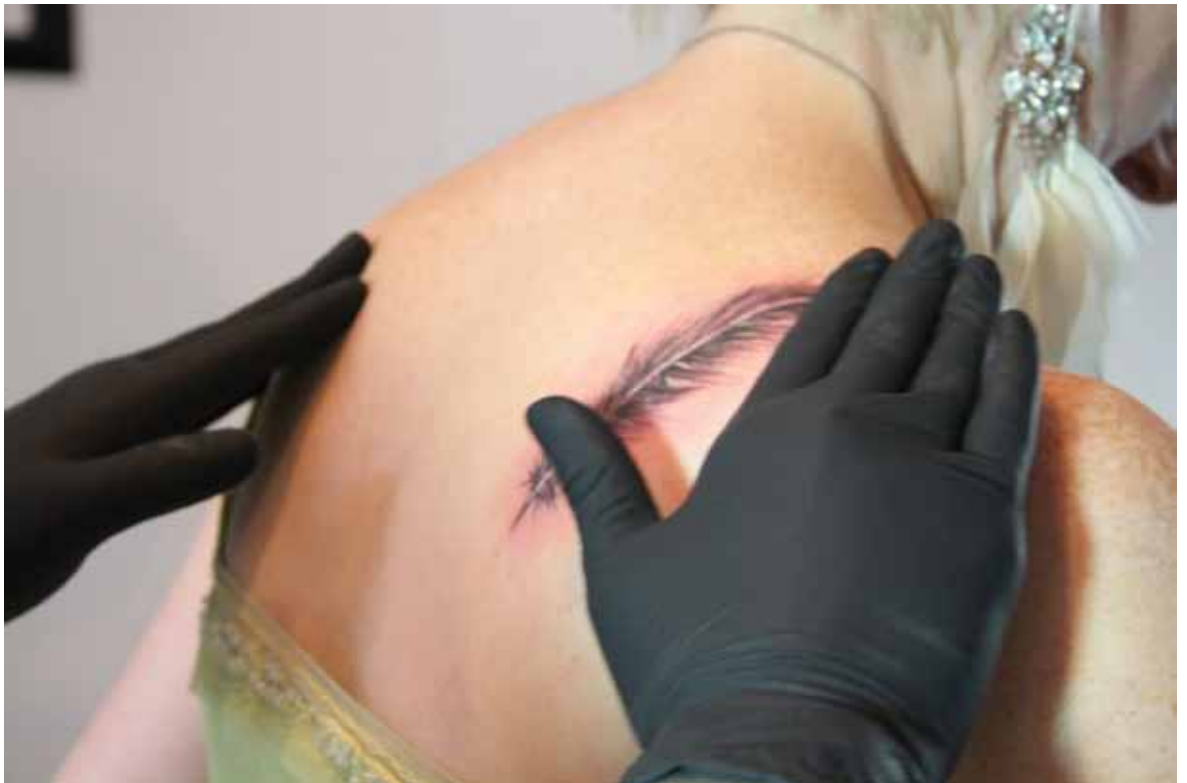


Figure 62. Final touches. Photo by Karen Abadie.



Figure 63. First glimpse. Photo by Karen Abadie.



Figure 64. Extinguishing the flame. Photo by Karen Abadie.

The event took place the day after the third anniversary of Chris's death. I met Karen in Truro and we went to the tattoo parlour together. She set up her cameras and tripod. I lit the candle that I had on his Chris's coffin and that I have burnt each anniversary. On this occasion it had both a ritual and a pragmatic purposes; it gave me something to look at and focus on through one of the longest hours I have experienced. There was an atmosphere of quiet intensity; Radu focussed on translating my drawing skillfully and sensitively onto my skin, Karen focussed on documenting the process and my eyes focussed on the flicker of the candle within its glass container. Later Karen remarked on the quality of attention she observed and endeavoured to capture in her documented photographs.

The tattoo is an embodied response to the continuing absence and loss I feel. By placing his cremains both on and in my flesh, permanently marking my body with an image that is resonant of our relationship (though not obvious, thus giving the opportunity to choose whether I relate its meaning or not) it re-configures the relationship I have with objects

associated with him. I also no longer feel the need to carry a Ziploc bag of his cremains in my handbag.⁷⁹ Tanner identifies the problematics of material objects related to the body to prolong the existence of an embodied presence: “only long enough to exaggerate the immediacy of her (grandmother’s) absence”(2006:179). Maybe the transformation of the cremains from an already indeterminate state (being both the substance of Chris and yet not Chris) into a substance added to ink and formed into a image has helped pull apart and give a breathing space to my attachments to objects?

Tanner’s (2006) investigation of the American cultural conundrum of the struggle to acknowledge and embody the materiality and specificity of loss uses iterations from literature. I re-imagine some of her ideas within the practice elements, as I continue to examine this relationship between, image, object and the presence of an absent body with trying to find an embodied metaphor for grief and a place to place grief in the film ‘She Wanders/Wonders’.

She Wanders/Wonders, **film**.

(Please watch Chapter 2 of the DVD again.)

Having Jane Speedy⁸⁰ thread my phrase “She wonders/wanders about walking the paths of the glory wood in the glass dress spilling red ribbon and ash, an unravelling” through a collaborative writing text⁸¹ it became a refrain that stayed with me in a more insistent and powerful way because of it’s repetition, it became akin to an earworm⁸² insisting that I realise it into a visual form. I thought first of creating still photographs but this did not attend to the sense of embodied movement the phrase gave me. I wanted a moving image to express this.

I pragmatically assessed I needed expertise beyond my own skill level and applied for funding to work with student filmmakers from the institution I work in, Cornwall College in Cornwall. (See Appendix 3 for the information I sent the four students picked by Rory Mason, Course Manager of the Media Production Course).

79 A act that has lead to some interesting conversations at customs and security at airports/border crossings.

80 Emeritus Professor at Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol and founder member of the collaborative writing groups.

81 This later got incorporated into the paper published in Humanities Online and in Collaborative Writing as Inquiry.

82 An earworm, a translation from the German Ohrwurm, meaning a tune that one can’t get out of one’s head, or called a ‘sticky tune’ by Sacks (2007).

It was a fruitful process talking to the students explaining the feel and look of the piece I had in my head. They predominately have opportunities to work on documentaries, so to work with something more fine art based was a challenge and delight. They introduced me to the rigour required to keep a film within budget and after I had visually documented the locations I wanted to film in “visually different yet fairly easily accessible locations that also pay heed to my dreamscapes of those woods.” (Kirkpatrick 2013b). We collectively wrote a shot listing, their expertise providing an excellent interpretation and translation of my visual ideas.

I examine in Chapter 4 the objects used as props/ritual objects in the film. In this chapter I want to focus on the two chosen locations; The Glory Wood, in Dorking, Surrey and Prussia Cove, in West Cornwall. Historically the Glory Wood had been part of a large country estate that was given to Mole Valley District Council. It covers an area of 32.66 acres. It is an area of woodland on the sandstone hills to the south of Dorking and is leased to and managed by Surrey Wildlife Trust. The southern part of the site, known as the Devil’s Den is mainly Oak woodland, with an area of Sweet Chestnut coppice.



Figure 65. Glory Woods, showing one of many unchanged paths.

The greatest area of fascination is how the paths remain unchanged. They are the same ones

my parents walked as they courted (and I wasn't even a twinkle in my fathers eye); the same ones I walked to get to grandma's house as a child, and the same ones that figured through my dream landscapes of the last 33 years (since leaving the parental home) and where I chose to place my grief for my mother.⁸³

Prussia Cove, formerly called King's Cove, part of the Port En Alls Estate, on the coast of Mount's Bay and to the east of Cudden Point. Chris' favorite place and where his eldest son and I sprinkled some of his ashes.

...To walk yesterday in the sometime rain and mud to the rock Chris and I used to stop at and where Sam and I sprinkled some of his ashes. I slipped and ended up on my arse so near the crashing waves and I felt so close to him there – he's part of that place now some of him is scattered there and that feels right.

I imagined trying to get the glass dress to that spot- it will be an epic task but that could be part of it; record walking there in it? I stared at the white waves over the black rocks and wondered how I capture the essence of what this place now means to me. I've written it into the PhD proposal, purposefully, because it's so fucking challenging to try and find a metaphorical response to loss and love, powerful endings, continuings, new beginnings. Kirkpatrick (2013) 13 January.

These two locations link the grief for my mother with my grief for Chris and place both in two differently distinctive locations.

As O'Rourke identifies after the death of her mother: "I just want somewhere to put my grief" (2011:157). An interesting observation in this age when cremation is more prevalent than burial, though in my story my mother was buried, Chris cremated. I don't find solace in visiting her grave; I want to 'remember' her in a time before I knew her in a place that connects us both to younger selves. Hence, my desire to have someone as a younger version of myself in the film to make reference to this time shift.

83 This place inspired the making of a number of artworks including large scale enameled steel panels incorporating drawings, print, photographs; paperclay impressions of the paths and screen-prints incorporating a small image of myself at six when I used to walk through the woods to get to my grandma's house, for the final show of my MA in Multi-Disciplinary Printmaking in 2010.



Figure 66. Prussia Cove. Photo by Sarah Hunkin.

The continued presence of a figure walking with careful awareness then gathering red ribbons and the swan's feather bowl (containing ash) evokes a sense of ritual action. This evocation of ritual was also important in the locations; each contains different elements - earth, trees, sky, water and the decision to include cut-away shots that give a sense of these elements was taken early on. As was the choice to film in late autumn /winter imbuing the film with a sense of the turning of the season, the tree forms are more easily seen in silhouette and the January sunshine in Cornwall gives clarity to the landscape (and was particularly welcome walking in a glass dress in the rain would have been an even more hazardous proposition).

I found it confronting and exhausting to be in the role of director, without really

knowing what that meant in practice (funny I didn't even think about googling what directors do until I got back from the first location shoot). I then realised what I had been doing intuitively and what felt uncomfortable all goes with the job description! Telling people what to do, being in control, shouting 'action' was challenging. I rarely managed to say it without making it a question – something the boys teased me about on Wednesday night in the pub. But we did it - got all the shots, Mary took care of Emilie's son and my dad and brother were complete stars. Kirkpatrick (2013) 20 November.



Figure 67. Filming at Prussia Cove, used with permission of [Sean Benney, Jez Marshall & Ryan Sharpe]. Photo by Sarah Hunkin.

Kernberg talks of a sense of relationship actively continuing by:

virtue of reparative endeavors which the mourners felt were expressions of love and regret for lost time and opportunities that would be appreciated by the lost partner.”
(2009:606)

My wish for the soundtrack was to have Sam (Chris's eldest son and a record producer) to use Chris's music that was recorded in an ad hoc fashion so they could metaphorically play music together. This felt like a reparative endeavour - something Chris had always wanted but never stated to Sam and thus could never now happen. Another act of care on my part and paying attention to a wish only I knew he held. Sam acknowledged this was emotionally difficult but he did listen to the tapes deciding:

that I tried to get a bit of Chris' guitar in but it was in a different key and timing so was proving quite difficult, sorry. He's obviously very present without playing guitar :) (Hardaker 2015).

However we eventually settled on a piece of Sam's own music that he adapted: "to give a bit more space" (Hardaker 2015) and included sounds of the dress moving, as this has a particular disturbing quality, of glass against glass and glass against metal.

These first three projects although involving other participants were directly linked to my own grief narratives. The three that follow are about others' grief, loss, the placing of grief in places significant to the participants and the creation of gifted objects. These could be viewed as 'threshold objects' as they incorporate Hyde's idea that they:

mark the time of or act as the actual agents of individual transformation....They are not mere compensation for what is lost but the promise of what lies ahead." (2006:42/48).

We are also allowing time and attention to be given in revisiting a place that is significant to the loss of a person or in Owain's case to the loss of the place itself and in the recounting of stories. "Because telling a story ensures you aren't forgotten. It's what tribes taught us through oral history." (McMillan & Pahl 2013:16). Because I want to give a flavour of the stories, this has influenced my choice to write up the field notes from the projects as descriptive narratives that incorporate my memories of these trips what Ottenberg (1990:144 cited by McMillan & Pahl 2013) calls "incorporeal property" and links to the presentation of this aspect of the practice as "manifest absence" (Law 2004:84) and builds on the methodological framing of "method assemblage" (Law 2004:161) within the thesis.

“Feeling is both an emotional and a physical phenomenon” asserts (Tanner 2006:88) so Rob Irving and I chose to attend to both through a shared ritual/performance that gave attention to the haptic, visual, aural, olfactory, and gustatory.

As Ingold (2000: 189) proposes:

to perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.

It began with conversations, possibilities and plans to revisit the place his family had sprinkled some of her cremains. It continued with talking, attentive listening, stories of present - mystery, magic and the trickster, stories linked to past, linked to future accompanied by the subtle soundtrack of 1940s dance music. Rob’s memories of his mum, Dorsey, and recollected stories told to him by her and other relatives of her life before and after marriage and children. Material evidence - the diary of 1943 brought her voice into the car with us. It had a very precise, polite cadence that told of everyday bus journeys, life drawing at college and the excitement of dances and meetings, conversations and flirtations. Her delicate ragged doll with stockinet arms and legs, the softness of its velvet nape and a disturbing hard mask-like face sat in my lap all the way, with the diary and the photos of her and a younger version of Rob face scrunched, coke can in hand. I searched the female face for similarities to him and tried to imagine her in 1940s party frocks dancing to Glen Miller with the service men stationed up river, riding Robin her horse on Hergest Ridge, wind in her hair, riding as the crow flies to Aberystwyth. I was invoking her, calling her absence to be present with us.

The shock of arriving to a snow-covered scene was heightened by the car wheels slipping and sliding as we tried to get near the ridge; the physicality of walking in snow with bags, cameras, and 25kg of clay becomes about endurance, matching breath to footfall, letting the exertion move outwards as I became aware of the vast vista. Walking as part of a ritual act, paying attention to the shared intention, the physicality - how we walked and breathed and then the difference between an imagined act and the actuality of experience.



Figure 68. Walking to the ridge, used with permission of [Dr. Rob Irving].



Figure 69. Standing on the clay on the whetstone. Photo by Rob Irving.

It could be described as best-laid plans disrupted or one could say its funny how nature is as

much an agent upon events that happen as we are. I was reminded how vulnerable humans are to the elements. How foolish I felt for not considering the affect of the elements upon intentions, as Pearson assesses: “This is as much a weather world as a landscape, and it conspires to bring about affects.” (2010:29)



Figure 70. Standing on the whetstone. Photo by Rob Irving.

So determined was I to complete our task, I give all my attention to clearing the snow from the whetstone, unfurling the clay, thinking I needed to make sure it made really good contact with the stone, as the surface would be moist and therefore it might not collect all the indentations that were present. I got onto the stone, stood on the clay to really embed into the surface, it was only when I came to remove it I realised my thinking was a bit skewed – the surface hadn’t moistened it was completely frozen to the stone. I castigated my lack of professionalism but my self-criticism quickly turned to laughter as we both tried to prize the clay from the whetstone, even resorting to using one of Robin’s horseshoes as a lever.



Figure 71. Clay with cremains on the whetstone. Photo by Rob Irving.

Our original intention and the ritual surrounding it needed to be adapted and changed. We were “holding doors open, changing the standpoint, the lens, the frame” (Pearson 20006:28). We left leaving the clay firmly attached and after Rob had sprinkled some of Dorsey’s ashes onto the clay and into the snow. In fact Rob remarked to the vicar later on in the afternoon when we went into Kington church “if anyone mentions any curious additions to a local landmark, rest assured vicar, that it’s not vandalism but art.”



Figure 72. Cremains in the snow. Photo by Rob Irving.



Figure 73. The next journey, used with permission of [Christine Baeumler]. Photo by Rob Irving.

We returned in the spring to try again –another picnic, more clay and a visiting lecturer from The University of Minnesota, Christine Baeumler, who was interested in our project. It was important to continue the process, the narrative became richer as a result of the first encounter having been disrupted and we discovered once reaching the whetstone we'd had an effect upon the stone, the clay we had left had stained it, traces of pink remained in the crevices and lichen had grown over it. This leaving of a trace within the environment affected Rob, kept turning in him upon our return and eventually found its way into a further project.⁸⁴



Figure 74. Whetstone with clay traces. Photo by Dr. Rob Irving.

⁸⁴ The museum box project with the Space Place Practice research group. <http://placeinternational.org/space/projects.htm>.



Figure 75. Removing the clay. Photo by Rob Irving.



Figure 76. Clay impression of whetstone. Photo by. Rob Irving.

The second cast went as I had originally imagined and we returned with it intact ready to be cast in glass. My experience has been one of reciprocity, gifts of time, image and object – a physical manifestation of absence, a cast of a place containing some of the cremated remains of Dorsey.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ The precursor to this project was the creation of a dish for Juile Frampton containing some of her husbands cremains. (See Appendix 4).



Figure 77. A cast of a place, with cremains.

We talk of returning to see if the whetstone still carries a trace of our interventions, to revisit the land, recall again Dorsey as a young woman riding her horse. We will follow again the same paths as Rob’s predecessors, taking that into ourselves, embodying their absence in what Ingold (2000/01) calls “guided rediscovery”, as he says “but each retracing is an original movement not a replica”. That is a key component of the intention, not keeping the memories of the place and the person the same but allowing them to change and be altered by shared actions. The dead become less fixed more fluid and changing, like the living, by the stories we tell.

Remembering fields with Dr Owain Jones.

This collaboration grew out of a collaborative paper at The Royal Geographic Society and a collaborative presentation at The University of West of England.⁸⁶

I had been really moved by a presentation Owain had give at UWE in 2011 where he talked about his displacement from his childhood farm home and the disappearance of this

⁸⁶ Jones, O., & Kirkpatrick, D. (2010) Poets, Artists the Severn Estuary and us Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference.

Jones, O., & Kirkpatrick, D. (2011) Towards landscape as an ecology of practices of (non)representation. PLaCE Visiting Lecture Series, UWE.

landscape as it became a housing estate⁸⁷ and the continuing resonance of this absent presence on his life. We emailed each other through the early part of 2014, forming a plan to return to St Mellons. Owain had been back once about six years ago and had looked on Google street view a few times but explored no further. I suggested in an email:

We talked about going to particular spots...the one you look for from the train, fields you played in, maybe we start on the peripheries of the land and then move closer to what was the centre of the farm? Kirkpatrick (2014).

Owain refined this:

I got a sort of idea of what I would like to try to do once we get close to the 'farm' stop at a place that is still recognisable and then walk to the house. Jones (2014).

We fixed a date we could both do; Owain acknowledged his nervousness and I was apprehensive too as documented in my diary.

I am worrying about my ability to create the 'right' ritual; holding an awareness of his apprehension and my nervousness. I suddenly thought of the chestnut tree as this was something that remains unadulterated, all else had been interfered with taken away with no love or respect for what it had been. Maybe the ritual could centre on the tree. I look at tree rituals of tying rags and leaving stones.... they don't feel quite right. I wonder if my desire to take a clay impression is just the comfort of a familiar process?

But I remember he wrote about feeling he was becoming transparent.... I want to make that visual.

I get a feeling of panic, that my whole existence is thinned as the spaces of the past have been eradicated. They are mapped into my memory, re-form in my dreams, and form hybrid landscapes with other places I have known or know now. (Jones 2005:217)

I also have something turning in me about time being a deep pool rather than linear... from O' Rourke. My sense is Owain needs to forgive himself for not being able to change what happened and to see that it was formative in his passion for the Severn

87 The farm was situated in what then became new St Mellons. St Mellons (Welsh:Llaneirwg) is a district and suburb of northeastern Cardiff, Wales. It consists of Old St Mellons and a newer, much larger area of modern housing and business parks.

and his desire to protect the beauty and fragility of this land. Kirkpatrick (2014) 17

April.

Owain created a Google map and on 22 April we drove over the old Severn Bridge to St Mellons, with cameras, notebooks, clay and lunch. As we drove we talked about what had changed in the nine years since he wrote *An Ecology of Emotion, Memory, Self and Landscape*, in Emotional Geographies; the death of his father, memories of the farm. My presence gave a different way of framing the unconscious, paying attention to something that permeates his life and work but with another riff, an additional view.

We drove into the new part of St Mellons Owain was momentarily disorientated as we park, refer to maps, and then walked to what was once the farmhouse. It is still there, now divided into two houses, streets and houses enclose it. We became aware someone was home in the left hand side and knock on the door. The couple who live there let us in so Owain could go stand on the stairs look out of the window to a view almost completely changed but there are a few remaining trees; they remember the farm and Owain promised to send some pictures to the woman.

We walked to the shopping centre past the chestnut trees that remain and talked to the woman in the café, a plan starts to coalesce – possibilities for an exhibition, an invocation of what once was there. Owain realised how sad he is that the names of the fields will be lost now his father is dead and I suggested we map the old field structure onto the housing estate and make a series of enameled signs of the field names and hang them onto the road signs. This could be documented and be part of the exhibition or have a map that people could follow.



Figure 78. Fields by Lamby Lake.

We walked to the edge of the estate to where the crossing was to the pasture lands of The Lamby. We lunched by Lamby Lake frustrated that the Lamby, land where Owain's family used as grazing land but is now partly a landfill site for Cardiff's rubbish is inaccessible because of the railway line but determine to return again and find a way over to it.



Figure 79. Lamby Lake.

The O'Rourke quotation that I mention in the diary entry is significant because the gift I made

for Owain is a visual interpretation of it. The whole quotation is by Frank:

We usually think of time as a river, a river like the Nile, with a strong swift current bearing us further and further away from what we have been and towards the time when we will not be at all – birth, death and the brief transit of life in between. But perhaps we should think of time as a deep, still pool rather than a fast-flowing river. If time were a pool we could sit at it's edge and gaze at our reflections and then beyond them to what lay deeper still. Instead of looking back at time, we could look down into it, peel back the layers of the palimpsest and now again different features of the past- different sights and sounds and voices and dreams- would rise to the surface: rise and subside, and the deep pool would hold them all, so that nothing was lost and nothing ever went away. (1997:8).

I wanted to create a gifted object for Owain that was not only cast from something that remained in the place - the three chestnut trees, but that also contained images of the past and a map of St.Mellons now layered and blurring together; it alludes to a pensieve⁸⁸ my favourite magical object from Harry Potter. It proved tricky to make and I had a number of abortive attempts before I managed to create what I had imagined the object to look like.



Figure 80. Lamby pensieve.

There is resonance between a space unutterably altered and the loss of a person through

⁸⁸ Pensieve is a portmanteau word, combining the words 'pensive' and 'sieve.' The latter is an object in which something may be sorted, drained or separated, and 'pensive' is derived from French, and originally from the Latin 'pensare,' meaning 'to ponder,' and in common English usage means 'thoughtful' or 'reflective,' thus a 'pensieve' allows for the sorting of thoughts, or memories. Pensive can also refer to a tense mood someone seems to be in, and indeed many of the memories Harry views in it are of tense or awkward moments. (Harry Potter Pensieve 2016).

death, both prompt an awareness of a larger scale that our individual human life is a very small part, which can trouble at our notion of control. How do we deal with feelings of powerlessness? I transform materials and try to create images that provoke the presence of absence as a way of connecting, managing the pointlessness. I reflect on how much of Owain's passionate defense of the River Severn is tied to trying to save something that has already been lost once already – the magical wild land of childhood place and the trauma of witnessing "its slow death" Jones (2005:241).

Conclusion.

This chapter provides a differently nuanced examination of loss that enfolds collaboration and the ritual enactment of performance in places, through the projects explored above. Thus further examples of conversational and emotional exchange are presented that expand the argument proposed by De Martino (1975 quoted in Harrison 1994:71) that a definition of human civilisation is "it's formal power to transform into value that which in nature hasten toward death". It is the continual evolving and different iterations of ritual that allow recognition of kinship and a shared language.

Issues of powerlessness and the feeling that one has no choice in the loss are key components in the need to construct emotional scaffolding, to find ways back into life. In creating objects and rituals the initial tie to the loss is changed, the self is altered, because it requires paying attention to the nature of the relationship - both to the loss and to the person(s) sharing this process. It also introduces the power of metaphor and story to bring both distance, a stepping away to examine the particularities required to bring the essence of the relationship into a new form, and conversely closeness as one engages with the loss through this new object/ritual. This is exemplified in the projects described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6 - WRITING

My experience is just mine. Yet individual stories are important, not because they can wholly represent anything else, but because they insist on specificity, on experience, on detail. They can give voice to what is silenced in polemical debate. And they can give space to the complexity within each sexuality. So, no corpus for me, then. Only some bodies. (Angel 2012:55)

Recall my own moments of breakdown into near insanity and self destructive risk taking that have been one way out of it all. (Cornell 2014:306)

Her body is at the moment the thinnest it has been since she moved to Cornwall and she was pleased stepping onto the scales to find within the space of four days she had lost seven pounds. Wom, grief is an amazing diet tool! She doesn't remember paying attention to this when her mum died, maybe it only works when it's your love, your nearest and dearest and most precious that has died.

Why in the midst of all this unravelling is it suddenly important to weigh herself? Be proud, that she is once again returned to the weight of her thirty-four year old self?

Control?

Trying to erase twelve years of settled, contested, contentment? Why does it even matter now and if she shares this will she be seen as lightweight?

She is sceptical of describing loss, of describing physical absence, of making 'sense' of something that feels impossible to grasp - the loss of trust in each day continuing to the next, that she will wake tomorrow if she sleeps tonight. But also the juxtaposition of the dead weight of his body. The there-ness but the absence of him-ness.

Kirkpatrick, D. (2011).⁸⁹

Introduction.

This chapter explores both auto-ethnographic text and text crafted in writing sessions with the collaborative writing group and adds another layer of interpolation⁹⁰ to the themes of the PhD. The purpose is to provide voice to, the often contradictory emotional places and spaces

89 Written at Tami Spry Workshop, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, November 2011.

90 I am using interpolation in the musical context "as an abrupt change of elements with (almost immediate) resumption of the main theme or idea" (Wittlich 1975).

I have explored through my own experience of grieving and loss. As I have previously stated:

Where does writing into and from our ghosts take us in our inquiries? The playful presentation of being alive, dead and ghostly seems to create slippage between worlds – life afterlife, trace.”(Kirkpatrick in Speedy and Wyatt 2014:42)

Stories provide infinite possibilities, and a multiplicity of possible meanings that can provide “fruitful liminal space....to stand on the side of hope and in a place of agency.” (Speedy 2008:16)

She grapples with not really knowing where she is and the deep missing of Erik the Red. How could this fuzzy felt dog have got so under her skin, so into her heart? She can feel tears pricking her eyes as she thinks of him and her lostness; it's hard to get a handle on where she has been, where she has come from, echoed in the unfamiliarity of an unknown place and Czech names .

Embrace the adventure.

Sue said yesterday that maybe Erik is her transitional object? But as Esme asked “transitional to what - a puppy, a man?

She knows her life is wholly changed. She is now a dog woman, she sees and delights in others' dogs.

Erik enabled her to be still, in the house, realise and acknowledge how difficult that had been, let her resistance to that stillness dissolve because she was no longer alone. He was such sweet company. She wonders if Sue knew he would charm her, bewitch her, enable her to drop another layer into grief, to feel the sadness rather than the anger and to weep, though he did try to shag her when she wept which turned the tears to laughter, how could it not? Maybe the noise she made was too reminiscent of his squeaky toys?

She feels stronger, more independent, and she has started listening to Radio 4 again, in the car, it seemed less charged with Erik beside her. Thoughts turn to anticipation of puppy training Ulf, something to balance attending to interviews, practice and writing up. A different, dog shaped, relationship to nurture and delight in.

Kirkpatrick, D. (2014).

There is a bridge between narrative inquiry/auto-ethnography and creative arts practice, that prompts a confidence to speak in a variety of voices, revealing what William James (1890:291) calls a “constellation of selves/characters/self positions”, and what Haraway (1991:193) and

Strathern (1991) call “partial connections”. The methods give a way into writing about and sharing personal experience and ways of knowing gained from these, which feels important particularly in relation to grief, loss and consolation, to sit alongside and sometimes provide a tension with the rational and logical. As Clandinin & Connelly (2000:25) point out:

experience happens narratively...narrative inquiry is stories lived and, that involves thinking narratively at the boundaries between narrative and other forms of inquiry, that allows the observer to be altered by the process.

Auto-biographical writing and auto-ethnography.

Diary extracts and autobiographical writing are framed by collective biography and auto-ethnography as part of the doctoral project. This is part of a poetics of writing, necessary to a project that goes beyond the analytical norms of academic writing. This approach is, however, predicated on my awareness that such writing needs be well crafted, emotionally engaging and critically reflexive of one's relationship both to one's self and the world. It needs to tell a good story and be a convincing “I-witness” (Geertz 1988). “To become a convincing ‘I-witness,’ one must, so it seems, first become a convincing ‘I.’” (Geertz 1988: 78-79)

Such writing must not only be lucid and reflexive, it must progress the argument; exploring issues through making, writing and recursive, reflexive and reflective practice, both individually and collaboratively, around loss and grief; a way of teasing out the particularities of my personal experience and placing them alongside others' experiences within the framework of cultural expectations and theoretical positions.

What we can construct, if we keep notes and survive, are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced together patternings, after the fact....can be woven together with a variety of facts and a battery of interpretations to produce a sense of how things, have been going, and are likely to go” (Geertz 1995 :2-3).

Speedy talks of reflexive knowledge and liminal spaces: “to extend, provoke and create knowledge in new ways” (2008:33). Reflexive and reflective practice combining both living

a life with self-criticism and growth and being aware that this requires an attention to relational distance (Schon 1983, Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Speedy 2008) are an essential part of the writing and making processes (already discussed in Chapters 4 and 5) and have a direct correlation to the field texts that ethnographers would collect. Field texts are always interpretative, always composed by an individual at a certain moment but combine outward and inward observations and reflections to capture as much as possible an openness of experience and hold onto a wakefulness that is communicated. (Clandinin & Connelly 2000: 84-87). Ellis and Bochner (2001:739) compare the shifting different gazes of auto-ethnography to a changing camera lense, wide angle “focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience” then zooming inward “exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations.”

I always write the auto-biographical/auto-ethnographic in the third person. It is another iteration of the changing focus, allowing a stepping back and to the side, aligning myself with the absent others that populate the text. It also softens the terror of judgement that I feel with the revelation of very private and intimate details of my own grief process because it fictionalises. I would argue that there are “no clear differences between fact and fiction” (Czarniawska 1997:203) that we are formed from “an I who learns by seeing and telling stories along the way, and who writes stories of relationships.” (Clandinin & Connelly 2000:9)

Flower/flour

Cold hands on a feverish brow, long fingers draped across piano keys, sting of the slap on the back of her legs, just below the skirt line so everyone could see the redness of her shame.

Kneading the dough - turning, shaping, moving, stretching, lifting, smudging, gathering, smoothing.

Gentle, quiet, calm, creative -

Angry, slapping, pinching.

Holding, letting go. Letting her slip through her fingers, letting her fingers find her's, become her's, running her hands across table tops, through drawers, winding the mechanism, closing her eyes, listening to the tune.

Opening the perfume bottle, drinking in the smell, but the olfactory picture is incomplete until she opens the dressing table drawer. There is make-up and powder, hairspray and her-ness. Is this it then?

The closest thing to her absent physical body?

But there is so much more, so many spaces in-between, so many presences and absences, known and unknown, sensed, desired, dismissed, reviled.

Let it Fly, Let her fly into the woods, in the trees, between the branches, to the spaces of light and shadow, form and space.

Fingers draped across piano keys, imagined from underneath, beneath the piano feeling the vibration through her body.

What she sees are her feet on the pedals. What she imagines are her hands caressing the keys; whiteness of skin against bone white keys. How the placement and stretching causes changes in vibration and noise, tone, note - warm , cool, shivery.

She curls up, let the vibration lull her, rock her, soothe her, send her dancing into dreams that patter, echo, amplify the tingle in her spine - the tickle of music.

She still likes her music loud so she gets the vibration in her feet and body.

Kirkpatrick, D. (2011).⁹¹

The challenges of auto-ethnography.

The challenges of auto-ethnography are that it can lack rigour and be judged as too aesthetic, emotional and therapeutic (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner 2011). However, that is why it is of interest within this thesis. Auto-ethnography offers up a way through the use of epiphanies (“remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person’s life”) (Bochner & Ellis 1992), a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of personal and interpersonal experience, layered accounts and verisimilitude (Bochner & Ellis 1992) to work with the embodied, viscosity of loss.

The tricky position it occupies as a “felt-text” (Spry 2001:714) within the hegemonic academic discourse of presupposed objectivity, singular truth and grand narratives, here parallels the transgressive act of talking about loss and grief in a culture predicated on novelty and youthfulness.

91 Written at Elyse Pineau Workshop, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, October 2011
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Auto-ethnography and performance.

The tripartite combination of critical reflection (the body), writing (the paper) and performance (the stage) after (Spry 2011) mirrors the methodological framing of method assemblage - (presence, manifest absence and absence as Otherness).⁹²

Combining auto-ethnographic writing with performance as I have through the presentation of performed papers at conferences and The Very Small Literary Festival (see Appendix 1 for details) has broadened the reach of my research across different academic fields of inquiry. It has often felt like a transgressive act:

a revealing of what has been kept hidden, a speaking of what has been silenced—an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconceptions borne in the air of dominant politics. (Park-Fuller 2000:26).

It is all the more surprising within the academic context of a conference that often intense and deeply personal conversations about grief and loss have been initiated from the performances. In allowing my memories and feelings to be spoken a space is created where permission is granted for others to share theirs. I show a vulnerable inquirer because it makes secret stories public. (Clandinin & Connelly 2000: 62) Therefore Chapter 6 must focus on my uses of auto-ethnographic writing and show examples of more of this writing.

Another absent body, lost boy, enchanted swan.

She felt like she was in a movie of her own life. It was a filmic moment (or perhaps even a scene from a Pinter-esque play). The doors to the station were still locked but as she walked round to the kitchen window there was a woman leaning out of it.

“Sophie?” she enquired.

She responded, in an equally questioning tone “You want to see Kasper, yes?”

“Yes”

She unlocked the door shook her hand enquired if she wanted coffee and then he was outside the window his two loves standing in his kitchen.

92 Method assemblage (from Law 2004) has already been discussed at length in Chapter 2.

She had walked into a seemingly content domestic scene and thus felt a need to check that the feelings of love were reciprocated not just some fantasy in her head, once Sophie had graciously withdrawn (possibly secure and resolute in her power over this man).

Another absent body, lost boy, enchanted swan.

She wanted to know why he had not told her about Sophie in the beginning,

“Because I wanted to just be a human being standing in front of you wanting love”

And actually that is how she felt too, suddenly aware of her own unspoken story. The deep knowing and connection was felt by both of them but whereas she wanted to run toward it, develop it, he wanted to run away from it.

“I told you not to come”

“Yes and I made an assumption (after some time finding a translation for and an understanding of assumption) that, was spoken from fear but that you wanted to change things, shift, move.”

She told him she had written in her diary why she felt so wretched was because she felt she was dealing with another absent body and she was already dealing with one of those.

Another absent body, lost boy, enchanted swan. Kirkpatrick, D (2013).⁹³

Mourning and intensity, another iteration.

Frommer (2005:481) identifies that living with our losses can allow risk taking. He also suggests that people who dwell on their mortality can be viewed as suspect, they break a taboo, cross a boundary. There is, for me, a transgressive element to the embodied viscosity of physical loss, that links to messy bodies, seemingly being both in control and out of control, eroticism and sexuality, being haunted and taunted by intensity and authenticity.

She has an attuned awareness to intense responses to grief or the sudden awareness that death has whispered in one's ear; for her they are everywhere; in televised drama, to cite two recent examples the characters of Catherine in 'Happy Valley',⁹⁴ constantly glimpsing her dead, hung daughter, of Daniel

93 Part of my performance at The Very Small Literary Festival organised by alldaybreakfast, July 2013
94 A BBC series about a police sergeant Catherine Cawood (2014).

in 'From There to Here'⁹⁵ deciding to start a marital affair and lead two lives after surviving being in the Manchester bombing.

In day-to-day conversations, it would read like a sit-com if she recounted every death story she is told. Even in online conversational exchanges when ostensibly she is arranging to meet and fuck someone, the intensity leaks out cannot be contained.

Containment, control - so much of our lives, her life is about trying to control her body how it looks, smells, functions but it's illusory this containment there is a tussle, a power struggle; she can feel stretched and straining, like the very seams of her being will rip.

She could talk lyrically of the dripping, fecund ripeness of re-awakened sexuality and eroticism that it is like an embodied Dylan Thomas poem all alliterative vowels and rolling, lilting exuberance.

She could talk of possession, feeling like some external spirit, possibly that of her dead mother or dead partner is invading, unsettling her sense of self, getting her to step ever nearer the edge of extremity. Kirkpatrick,D.(2014).⁹⁶

I searched for accounts of increased libido in connection with grief, worried that my own experience was way outside the normative. Berlant says that sex requires “irrational exuberance”(2007:436) and “the collaborative risk of a shared disorganisation”(2007:440), disturbing the normative. Yet I found few examples in auto-biographical literature that talked of this aspect of grief. I found even fewer academic references that explore specifically the link between the intensity of grief and a searching for an equivalent intensity through sexual encounter, though it is acknowledged by Leader (2008:142) that “the death of a parent or someone truly loved can produce the, little discussed, phenomenon of intense, wild and unrestrained sexual desires.” He also suggests that sexual thoughts are experienced with unusual intensity and frequency. This need for intensity speaks to me of a yearning to find equivalence to the intensity of grief.

95 A BBC series of a story of a city and two families lives after the Manchester bombing (2014)

96 This was the beginning of my paper ‘Tying the threads, navigating uncertain ground; grief, loss and tidal landscapes’ at 12th Symposium Waddenacademie ‘Sense of Place’, Terschelling, Holland, June, 2014 and was also included in the paper Friendship and Mourning part of the Friendship as Methodology Panel at the Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry at University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, USA, May 2015.

There is an almost instantaneous self-editing that she is trying to circumnavigate; moving from her seat, sitting on the floor, writing with pen and paper in front of an empty chair.

Who is in the empty chair?

The dead mother – ghostly apparition covered in an old, white sheet with not fully washed milk bottle tops sewn to rustle and catch the light but unfortunately creating a lingering odor of stale milk. Pre-‘Thatcher, Thatcher milk snatcher’ days when the separated third of pints, left beside a warm radiator to curdle, were forced upon them to help them ‘grow up big and strong’.

Who is in the empty chair?

The perfectly organised PhD student - who has used her time wisely and effectively who’s initial idea was to use creative process to expiate grief, as if it could assuage the raw, bloody hopelessness of grief and loss. At every turn when she mentioned the topic of her PhD, she found people falling over themselves to tell their own stories of grief, loss, near death, altered life courses. Her seemingly unbidden choices that grew ivy-like from these experiences that could not be contained in bereavement counseling, medication, imbibing of alcohol, shopping, trying and failing (until it became absolutely essential) to read death studies and psychology literature of grief and loss. Instead turning to romantic fiction, autobiography; real accounts of lives lived and lives ended.

Who is in the empty chair?

The dead man. - How many dresses, pairs of shoes, pairs of matching underwear, sex toys, fucks does it take to fill the space of his absence? A lot it seems. The small house becomes more full of stuff and more devoid of space, compensation perhaps for the huge, gaping abyss that she teeters on the edge of; sometimes lowers herself down into with ropes and safety helmet and then on occasion recklessly flings herself in, not caring of the implication, the repercussions, the bruised limbs, the potential danger. Instead reveling in the adrenalin rush of danger, pushing her beyond what is sensible, safe, and finding others willing to do the same. A seeming equivalence to the decision to wash and prepare the dead man’s body, his corpse, engage with the visceral process of weight, spoilt goods, cold, clammy morgue skin, absence presence. None of it even comes close to that experience, but what does come near to it is the fear and anxiety about writing about the sexual liaisons.

She can talk about it with humour, a deftness that seems to shock and amuse in equal measure, a delicate balance that she is unsure she can maintain in the written word. And yet, there is this need not to hide it, to not tidy the cushions, to say this messy process is as much a part of the process of her grief as any other.

A justification, perhaps?

A giving voice to choices and connections, perhaps?

A passionate belief that in telling the story the space is created where alternate stories could be told by other people, where one's own and others' judgments could be acknowledged and challenged, perhaps?

Kirkpatrick, D (2015).⁹⁷

My very conscious choice to engage in one-off sexual encounters through a sex dating website gave me power to create an amplified, performance of self to influence others' perceptions; I was in control of the parameters of the meeting, in my frank discussions of what I wanted and how I wanted it. It also held at arm's length my developing relationship with one particular man I met through it, important in negotiating the tricky paradox that the death of a loved presents; to feel loss one must feel love.

I am aware that although having safety measures in place (a safe person I told where I was going, who I was meeting and letting them know I was safe after the event) there was a frisson of danger and the unknown that added to the excitement. I was often left after such encounters with a deep sadness that indirectly allowed me to feel the deep sadness of the physical absence of a dead mother and a dead partner. O'Rourke (2011:133) talks of "craving the connection of sex" after her mother's death but also the terror she feels at the prospect of intimacy but the compulsion to seek it out. Testing the hypothesis that nothing really mattered against the cathartic contact of sex, that pulls you fully into an awareness of one's own body both separate and in relationship to another body in the present moment. A re-enacting of loneliness, "an intensified, intoxicated sense of aloneness". She talks of feeling like she had "no-skin", of a need to confide and reveal herself and that these qualities seems to draw others toward her. (O'Rourke 2011:208-209).

97 This was written at the Symposium 'Organisation: Disruption and difference through experimental, embodied and non-written texts', at The University of Bristol, April, 2015.

I was surprised how many of the men I met through the sex dating website had grief stories, or near death experiences to share that had influenced their decision to seek a different way of making contact with women; an urgency that linked to an increased awareness of mortality and aging.

Legs clad in a variety of coverings, “like Bubakee” Jane had said to her this morning, about the chosen combination of tights and socks. She looks down on them, the outer adornment of flesh. Flesh that is ageing, gravity sagging; as yet not apparent when adorned in clothing but shocks her when she see it in the mirror.

She tussles with the need to exercise, firm the skin because there is an anxiety linked to desirability, fuck-ability if the flesh continues to show these signs of ageing, decay – creeping toward death. But she is dismayed she is buying into the cultural condition that youthfulness, firmness is the optimum requirement and she suspects this is a reaction to staving off thoughts of death. Kirkpatrick, D (2015).⁹⁸

She starts with the list;

- *Hidden – subversive? Concealed – is it inside, is it outside?*
- *Not smoothing differences.*
- *The happy ending and the ending.*
- *Having people in your pocket.*
- *Knowing the intimacy of a hand in someone else’s pocket.*
- *Inside – swollen, whole.*

“I’ve blown it.”

“What is the it?”

“My reputation.”

“You don’t have one.”

But look at the fear, how it grips. The fear of not making the mark – It’s her’s, she carries it inside that mark and the chalk to make it. Make a mark, a line to measure up to.

Is it subversive to turn the inside outside? Show the inner, hidden lining.

What would be on the inside?

Maybe the most fearful would not be the vivid hue of shock and revelation? Maybe it would be the tawdry, pen-stained, fluff-encrusted, sagging, white tinged grey from too much washing?

She returns to the list -

- *Not smoothing differences,*
- *Allowing the rub of disjuncture and the disjointed.*

She realised last night, how happy she felt to be in the studio pottering and how long it took for her to let herself get there. Could she let the process happen quicker or is that not understanding, the unfolding? Wanting the destination. Remember the delight and it's not a happy ending, not even an ending, but the beginning of something.

There is something folded in her pocket, a fold that doubles back about intimacy and hopefulness. The intimacy of a hand in someone else's pocket and letting them put their hand into yours. Kirkpatrick, D (2015)⁹⁹

Conclusion.

The following story extract is a fitting conclusion to this chapter as it exemplifies my proposal that using the PhD process to share stories of grief, loss, creativity and intensity allows others to find different meaning-making in their own experiences and I feel illustrates the point made by Clandinin and Connelly:

therefore, difficult as it may be to tell a story, the more difficult but important task is the retelling of stories that allow for growth and change...There is a reflexive relationship between living story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story. (2000:71)

She is sat in Union Station in Chicago with two fellow travellers who have also attended the marathon conference of 18 different sessions that one could attend at any given time frame, with 10 minutes between sessions and half an hour for lunch. They are all tired but overflowing with ideas and inspiration, it is such a friendly conference. There is an easy exchange between them all although

they have only just met.

She starts to talk about her research maybe she is clearer because of the maturation process of having constantly talked about it and answered perceptive questions posed, but also she has heard and felt the power of lyrical words and crafted stories. The centrality of the importance of moments of intensity is arrow sharp in her description of her own grieving.

One of the woman responds “You have explained the irrational process of knowing I was choosing an unsuitable relationship but the compulsion I felt to do it, after my mother died. Craving the intensity of the experience of her dying and then trying to recreate that intensity in the aftermath describes my emotional state so accurately you have just revealed something that has troubled and remained unresolved in me.”

If the PhD does nothing else but provide one other person with a moment of clarity it still will have done its work. Kirkpatrick D. (2015).

CONCLUSION

The thesis explores the key themes of control and structure, transformation, intermediary/transitional space, linear time, the use of visual and material metaphors and intensity. The thesis provides a multi-faceted response to Gonzalez-Crussi's (2009:160) question of whether "art dwells on the unintelligibility of death" revealing how making and writing allow a dwelling-with the presence of absence and exemplifies Leader's (2008:4-6) idea that art can be a vital tool to make sense of loss, allowing us to explore differences in interpretation and response. Additionally spending time with the dead body as well as incorporating elements of ritual for preparing for the disposal of the corpse is shown as one way of allowing a tangible experience of the differences between life and death.

By extending the social science methodological framework within a practice-based artistic context with the auto-ethnographic research practice I am creating a new methodological framework for artistic practice. New knowledge is also formed in the methodological and iterative dance between practice, reading and writing. This is instrumental in the structure of the thesis. Using repetition as method/praxis I have shown through the variation and development of practice how the presence of absence has become an ostinato. Meaning is re-interpreted and transformed through evocation and noticing, allowing an examination of the pain of grief and loss. The back and forth interplay and iterative processes of reading, writing, and making; the movement from one material state to another and from one place to another allow the transformation of materials, emotions, places and objects. Through these interactions absence is experienced sensually. Object making, ritual journeys, performance, exhibitions all allow a paying attention to the flow of expectations and the effects and affects absence creates. The practice contributes to a pool of ideas and how knowledge is formed, it provides a rich constellation of reference points.

The triangulation of using auto-ethnographic text, objects/images; performance in places and artists' practice and interviews is echoed in the tripartite methodology of method assemblage - (presence, manifest absence and absence as otherness), this grounds and extends the theoretical argument of Law (2004) and Meyer & Woodthorpe (2008) by demonstrating how absence can have a materiality, be spatially located and have agency.

I have shown:

A dialogue of practice through making, writing, exhibitions, performance in places, finding a place to place grief, gifted objects, interviews and conversations that demonstrates a “dialogue of mourning” (Leader 2000:85). and as Davies & Gannon (2006:90) propose: “practice is a site of innovation”. That art can be used as an intermediary to allow public discussion and understanding of grief.

I have offered a means of access to artists and audience to a restorative place of the presence of absence through the creative process. Art and making allows responses to remain open-ended and unsettled, making new meaning and possibilities that could act as a counter to the finality and irreversibility of death and the lack of control one feels as a witness. As Hanrahan (2006:154) observes: “the truths (art) holds shields other meaning-making activities from anxiety.” I give empirical depth to Leavy’s (2009:ix) argument that arts based research offers resonance, something often lacking in traditional academic writing, this potential to give form, place and structure to anxiety and to provide resonant responses has been invaluable in supporting my own and others grief and loss.

The thesis illustrates through object making, ritual journeys and performance in specified places the affect of how everyday experiences are disrupted by absence, by paying attention to the flow of expectations, the effects and affects absence creates, and the relationship between an absent person, place and time. This shows how visual arts knowledge threatens and destabilises established expectations providing a bridge and place of safety for “the emptiness that threatens established expectations and practices” (Frers 2013:432).

I have given a voice to enable the participatory expression of grief to a new audience. I have revealed how artists/practitioners use grief to create and the effect and affect upon them, their work and the public. The relationship between landscape, transformation and metaphor is reiterated within the interviewee’s artwork, they all talk about the power of metaphor and beauty to enable both themselves and their audience to stay with something potentially uncomfortable. They talk of using their practice and the work produced to work with and through issues of loss and the potential this has for a sharing of experience. The inclusion of

artists working with the identified themes contextualise and elucidate the argument. The artists discussed and interviewed in Chapter 3 are indicative of a constituency of artists to whom the new knowledge created through the doctorate is relevant. Additionally this knowledge is relevant to professionals and academics within the fields of psychology, death studies, narrative enquiry and practice-based research as well as anyone learning to walk alongside grief and loss.

I demonstrate that the power of metaphor and story alters the self, gives back a sense of choice and control and finds equivalence to the intensity of grief. Through creating objects and rituals, writing and sexual encounter, through the examples of other artists' practice and the sharing of extended conversations I reveal multiple layers of meaning and how they work in relation to what continues to exist and what is missing in the physical world. This is a negotiated strategy across disciplines that also explores conversation through participation and collaboration, particularly in Chapter Five. These combinations model new possibilities for enabling others by offering ideas and choices of how we might live with the presence of absence and demonstrates how personal grief narratives, explored through contemporary arts practice and the participatory, performative act result in access into, the potentially, restorative space of mourning.

I have found a lack of academic writing that explores the link between the intensity of grief and a searching for an equivalent intensity through sexual encounter. The thesis is a start to address this lack and there is scope to extend the research further both academically and through writing a novel, the working title is *52 ways to deal with sudden and unexpected death*.

The practice-based work from both Chapters Four and Five will be re-presented at conferences and through exhibitions, it will be continued and revisited including *The Remembered Fields Project* with Owain Jones. A new iteration of *Tying the Threads* will be part of the *Library of Pilgrimage Project* with the Space Place Practice research group.

Relationships developed through the doctoral process will enable me to apply and further develop the methodological framework as an artist/researcher as part of the AHRC funded,

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APPENDIX 1

Performed papers

She wonders/wanders about walking the paths of the Glory Wood.

Royal Geographic Society with IBS Annual Conference Sept 2016.

She wonders/wanders about walking the paths of the Glory Wood.

Postgraduate Research Symposium, Plymouth University, February 2016.

Inquiring into Red/red inquiring.

Emotional Geographies Conference, Edinburgh University, June 2015.

Inquiring into Red/red inquiring, and film screening of *She wonders/wanders*.

Friendship and mourning. Friendship and Methodology, Methodology as Friendship Panel.

Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, University of Illinois, Chicago, May 2015.

The Sited Social and the Socially Sited.

Vibrant Matters, A Land2/PLaCE International Conference, University of Dundee, January 2015.

Stories, lost voices, absence through loss and landscapes; a practice based investigation.

Post Graduate Research Day, University Of The West of England, Bristol, June 2014.

Haunted Landscapes - Tying the threads, navigating uncertain ground; grief, loss and tidal landscapes.

AIR talk, Falmouth University, July 2014.

Tying the threads, navigating uncertain ground; grief, loss and tidal landscapes.

Sense of Place, 12th Symposium WaddenAcademie, Holland June 2014.

Embodied absence and evoking the ancestors - a collaborative encounter.

Malady and Mortality Conference, University of Falmouth, September 2013.

Inquiring into Red/red inquiring.

Lives of Objects Conference, Wolfson College, University of Oxford, September 2013.

Another absent body.

Very Small Literary Festival, Alldaybreakfast Exhibition and Events, The Galleries, Bristol, July 2013.

Embodied absence and evoking the ancestors - a personal and collaborative encounter.

Consolation-scapes session, Emotional Geographies Conference, Groningen, Holland, July 2013.

She wonders/wanders.' (and a conversation with Ciara Healy).

PLaCE Speaker Series University of the West of England, 2013.

Dorsey's dance, embodied absence and evoking the ancestors - a collaborative encounter.

Death Day Conference, University of Winchester, October 2012.

Publications

Kirkpatrick, D. (2014) Introduction, Chapter One, Chapter Five, Chapter Twenty-One, Chapter Twenty-Three, Chapter Twenty-Four In: Speedy, J. & Wyatt J. (2014) *Collaborative Writing as Inquiry*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kirkpatrick, D. (in press) Embodied absence and evoking the ancestors - a collaborative encounter. In: *Consolation-scapes*, Ashgate.

Ken Gale, Mike Gallant, Susanne Gannon, Davina Kirkpatrick, Marina Malthouse, McClain Percy, Maud Perrier, Sue Porter, Ann Rippin, Artemi Sakellariadis, Jane Speedy, Jonathan Wyatt and Tess Wyatt. (2013) Inquiring into Red/Red Inquiring. *Humanities Online*, 2, 253–277; doi:10.3390/h2020253.

Kirkpatrick, D. (2012) A gap between;an open-ness. In: *Between: ineffable intervals Bristol*: Wild Conversations Press.

Awards.

Research funding for 'She wanders/wonders' short film project from Cornwall College, 2013

Second place in UWE 3 Minute Thesis Competition, 2014.

Santander Travel Scholarship to attend Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, University of Illinois, Chicago, 2015.

Residencies.

Bildwerk Frauenau, Germany, May 2013.

Back Lane West, Cornwall, Feb 2016.

APPENDIX 2.

Interview questions.

Louisa Fairclough.

My response to the installation at Spike Open:

Echoes. I notice the circle of light only on the highest note. Because of the ambient light I strain to see if it is more than light is there moving image too, I sense water flicker but may just be imagining it. I'm aware of my anxiety that at any point the looping film could tangle, unravel. There is a tension of the loop continuing but at what cost, what risk? There is a similar tension to watching a tightrope walker will it all end badly! The machines seem to breathe, painful yet comforting – danger –held, contained and yet the sound creates a spilling out. I'm aware as I leave the space how it permeates through the building.

1. Can you tell me about your motivation for making the work?
2. Can you clarify the time scales between the loss and the creation of the work?
3. In what ways did making the work affect your relationship to the loss whilst you were considering and then making it?
4. Can you talk a little about the development of the work *Ground Truth* from *Body of Water* through *Song of Grief* to *Flecks of a Brighter Colour*?
5. It feels the work has expanded from a personal exploration out into a more explicitly and publicly collaborative one?
6. What impact has the work had on other people/collaborators whilst making it?
7. What impact or responses has the work elicited when it is formally presented?
8. In what ways has making the work affected your relationship to the loss?
9. How do you negotiate the absent body of your sister?
10. Did the temporal performance/installation space feel like a place to place your loss?
11. If so has that feeling changed over time?
12. Are there particular actions you would like to take but haven't?
13. What is your position around cultural assumptions of getting over and moving on from loss?

Sue Gill and John Fox

1. Ceremony and creativity –“Art can change our death and dying” Since revising the dead good funeral guide in 2004 I wonder if you have experienced a change in how people approach funerals?
2. I am particularly interested in your experiences/stories of the choice to spend time with the dead body, prepare it, have it around rather than have the undertaker take charge and in my own experience the profound affect this had upon me. What are your experiences of this part of the funereal process?
3. “A ceremony or celebration is a rope bridge of knotted symbols strung across the abyss” I would like us to talk about your experiences of the power of metaphor in creativity and ceremony.
4. I wonder if art can change our grieving?
5. If and how art changes our experience of the presence of absence?
6. The part place can play in our experience of the absent body?
7. What is your position around cultural assumptions of getting over and moving on from loss?

Gurda Holzaus

1. Can you tell me a bit of background to the project.
2. How your personal experience of loss manifested into something creative.
3. How much time had elapsed before thinking about and then making the work?
4. Can you expand on the idea you talked about in Bristol, your idea that the play would give voice to something that maybe wasn't expressed?
5. What did you do with your own grief?
6. Can you talk more about the connections between the play and your own grief?
7. So the play transcended the religiosity of the differentness of each of the women and became a point of connection?
8. Did it have a counter impact to your feelings around your sister?
4. What impact did the work have on other people/collaborators whilst making it?
5. What impact or responses did the work elicit when it was formally presented?
10. Did/does the temporal performance space feel like a place to place your loss?

11. If so has that feeling changed over time?
12. Are there particular actions you would like to take but haven't?
13. What is your position around cultural assumptions of getting over and moving on from loss?

Carol Laidler

Quote from Carol's Masters dissertation "This last year I've been of necessity involved in the process of mapping loss, in trying to understand what it means for someone to exist and then to be extinguished. But even in this I'm aware of a pattern emerging, the stuff of fiction."

Can you talk about your ideas around fiction/self and then some further reflection on this quote?

"my work has shifted from a focus of analysing representation and simulacra to a burgeoning interest in perception and its relationship to narrative; the phenomenological alongside the interpretive in an endeavour to comprehend the different ways we encounter and experience existence".

You talk of "profound uncertainty" I am interested how this relates to the body of work made in the final year of your MA and Tom's death?

1. Can you tell me about your motivation for making the work?
2. Can you clarify the time scales between the loss and the creation of the work?
3. In what ways did making the work affect your relationship to the loss whilst you were considering and then making it?
4. Can you talk a little about the development of the work and if and how it influences current work?
5. Can you talk about the dance between personal exploration of these themes out into a more explicitly and publicly collaborative one through your curation of projects with Alldaybreakfast?
6. What impact has the work had on other people/collaborators whilst making it?
7. What impact or responses has the work elicited when it is formally presented?
8. In what ways has making the work affected your relationship to the loss?
9. How do you negotiate the absent body of your partner?
10. Did/does the temporal performance/installation space feel like a place to place your loss?

11. If so has that feeling changed over time?
12. Are there particular actions you would like to take but haven't?
13. What is your position around cultural assumptions of getting over and moving on from loss?

Fern Smith

1. Can you tell me about your motivation for making the work?
2. Can you clarify the time scales between the loss and the creation of the work?
3. In what ways did making the work affect your relationship to the loss whilst you were considering and then making it?
4. What impact did the work have on other people/collaborators whilst making it?
5. What impact or responses did the work elicit when it was formally presented?
6. In what ways has making the work affected your relationship to the loss?
7. Did the temporal performance space of 'An Imaginary Woman' feel like a place to place your loss?
8. If so has that feeling changed over time?
9. Are there particular actions you would like to take but haven't?
10. What is your position around cultural assumptions of getting over and moving on from loss?

(Generic questionnaire questions)

1. Can you tell me when the loss occurred?
2. Please tell me your story of loss.
3. How has the way you have experienced loss changed over time?
3. How do you negotiate the absent body?
4. Do you have a particular significant landscape that relates to this absent body?
5. How do you negotiate the absent body in relation to a place?
6. What actions have you taken to be able to walk alongside your loss?
7. Are there particular actions you would like to take but haven't? Please describe.
8. In your opinion, how do you think loss can be expressed creatively?

Belinda Whiting

1. Can you tell me about your motivation for making the works - *So near so far the distance between*

us, Transitions, and Obsession?

2. Can you clarify the time scales between the loss and the creation of the work?
3. I wonder about the link between memory and loss and you inhabiting your body, it feels there is a link between your experience of still having a body and maybe those who haven't?
3. In what ways did making the work affect your relationship to the loss whilst you were considering and then making it?
4. I wonder if you find it helpful to play with the metaphor of the "still-live moment" in photography, does that enable you to sit closer to the presence of absences in your own life?
5. Do you have a particular significant landscape/place that relates to this absent body, I'm thinking particularly of the work made about your house *Echoes*, and *Flutterings*?
6. Does the photographic surface feel like a place to place your loss?
7. You have stated it's important 'to interact physically both with the image and within the process itself' could you talk more about this? (I wonder if this element of transformation is both physical and philosophical and it's relationship to grief?)
8. Can you talk a little about the development of the work. I'm interested in the relationship between the photographic work and the book *Sophie's Story*, which seems a more straight forward narrative of a personal experience and very much aimed at children that Sophie never became.
9. It feels the book has expanded from a personal exploration out into a more explicitly and publicly collaborative one?
10. What impact has the work had on other people/collaborators whilst making it?
11. What impact or responses has the work elicited when it is formally presented say the exhibition at The Millenium Gallery or book signings?

APPENDIX 3.

Initial information given to film crew.

Context.

Practice based PhD at UWE on the presence of absence, grief and loss, ideas of placing grief in a chosen landscape and creating rituals and objects and initiating conversations.

Glass dress is made from cast feathers maybe some reference to swans feathers can be made?

It also has a poem on it written by Sally Crabtree;

Under the bodice of the night
Is light
Bursting to get out
The night hardly dare breath
In her dizziness thoughts become stars
And all her words whisper is 'desire'
So full of it is she and too the dawn,
Until they can resist no longer
The bodice is torn open
From their passion
The day is born.

I want to work with the glass dress and the Glory Woods – my dreamscape, childhood play place and where my parents courted, and where I placed my grief around my mum's death.

I also want to use the coastal path between Prussia Cove and Rinsey Head, the favourite spot of my dead partner.

Inspiration

Text written in collaborative biography workshop, with collaborative writing group.

A moment in red. She sits sifting, letting the most immediate conversation settle, slips sideways, focuses on the dark red darning on pink gloves, the cross hatching and patching, the reforming of a hole, covering over but still being present, and the found object at her feet: metal with a hole not perfectly

spherical, a little off kilter; the need to hold, press sharp edges into flesh, leave marks; she tries to let go.

She wonders/ wanders about walking the paths of the glory wood in the glass dress spilling red ribbon and ash, an unravelling. She let herself drift back from the woods to the words, to the ribbons of paths, overlaid now with red enamel lines on visual re-imaginings, but also being pulled sideways to a memory of red blotching under the skin as the blood settled and mottled, patterned still, not rushing and fluid. Still she couldn't believe, comprehend, lack of movement and her mind kept putting it back in a flicker of eyelid, a breath, because then it wasn't end. It wasn't this, it wasn't cold, clammy mottled flesh of deadweight, of death...It was rosy-hued, it was rose-tinted, blush and bloom of coy seduction, pulse of blood through veins of movement, of life. But the memory of weight brings her back, the memory of blood on her gloved fingertips from behind the skull.

She wonders/ wanders about walking the paths of the glory wood in the glass dress spilling red ribbon and ash, an unravelling.

Kneehigh's representation of severed feet, stumps of legs with red ribbons falling beautiful and profane poetic, visceral, to cover, re-cover, uncover, weave and knot, interleave-leave. Red-lining of an unworn jacket with red stitching detail on the sleeve and red buttons, softest, inky dark blue needlecord. It had to be that jacket, the one as yet unpaid for, unworn and kept for the right occasion, coffin attire and red socks, soft climbing socks with horizon embroidered across the toe and red darning markers of love and care.

She wonders/ wanders about walking the paths of the glory wood in the glass dress spilling red ribbon and ash, an unravelling.

Funding

From Cornwall College Research Project Funding (see application for budget).

First thoughts:

Two main components:

1. Possibly My niece in the dress in the Glory Woods walking the paths spilling red ribbon and ash and unravelling.
2. Me in the dress walking the coastal path between Prussia Cove and the bridge/flat rock (on way to Praa Sands).

Colour – muted except for red ribbon.

Shots of wood/coast so that the setting is apparent. Details of hands, feet. Work with light/reflections from dress.

Changes in sharpness of focus/blur

Sound of dress when slowed down is really disturbing, mix with soundtrack by Chris' son?

APPENDIX 4.

The precursor to *Embodied Absence – Forms Re-formed* - ritual and memorial object creation and recreation, Tonbridge, Kent with Julie Frampton.

Many years ago I created a stained glass window for Julie and Peter Frampton's house in Tonbridge, Kent. We stayed in touch. One summer she visited me in Cornwall with her son, unbeknownst to them her husband was dead back at their home in Kent.

In the subsequent months, we talked of her experience of his ongoing presence - doors opening when the piano was played, the constant appearance of feathers inside and outside the house, and decided to create a memorial object for him. He loved trees and Julie was creating a series of paintings for her MA Fine Art of the trees at the bottom of their garden, which were as much to do with her grappling with the presence of his absence as a representation of the trees.

We created a cast from a clay impression of a tree trunk and then cast a glass bowl with some of his cremated remains encased within and had a pilgrimage visit to Derek Jarman's garden in Dungeness after I delivered and installed the piece in her garden. Some years passed and then she called to say she had cracked it accidentally whilst cleaning and putting it away for the winter.

We talked about what to do with an object imbued with significance that is no longer fit for purpose; I suggested re-firing it in the kiln but was aware there would always be an inherent weakness in the structure, it was a dilemma. Incorporating this dilemma within the practice element of the PhD felt like an opportune moment to revisit. We talked further and I suggested that I carefully smash it up collect up any ash that loosened from the glass and re-fire it into a completely different form, not trying to replicate or mend something that already existed but create a new object. She gave permission for it to be transformed.

One afternoon I spread a white sheet on my workshop floor, put on Mozart's Requiem Mass, wrapped the dish pieces in paper and smashed them with a hammer. Carefully gathering up the shards and the dust I placed them into the pod shaped mould that had a rose in relief on

the underside and carefully packed it with a spacer running from bottom edge to the centre so a metal rod could later be placed inside the form allowing it to stand.

The resulting object was more opaque than the original form, from the glass having been fired twice now, and the cremated remains had migrated to the outside surface appearing in a sweep across the pod and rose form. Julie was particularly taken with this bit of serendipity that had occurred in the firing process;

“it’s like he is trying to escape the form, take flight” she remarked, when I placed the object in her hands and she ran her fingers over the surface. The ash is he and not he and is resonant with this ambiguity, as Murray (2012) said: “Is that my father or not? How much is in that dust?”¹⁰⁰

Julie and I re-sited the glass in her garden in Tonbridge, Kent next to Peter’s last gift to her a rose bush, it threw an unexpected and unplanned shadow on the fence, which could be read as a profile. We also created a new clay impression from a favorite tree at the bottom of the garden, which I turned into a new mould and then glass dish, back in my studio, similar but different from the original. The process enabled further conversations about both of our experiences of grief and loss and the effect of time.

I am reminded of an undertaker who told me how they have a cupboard full of uncollected full urns, we ruminated on why people don’t return to collect them, forgotten or maybe a decision they don’t want to take, of where and how to let go of them? But I remain touched by her comment that she sometimes goes into the cupboard and talks to them, these abandoned remains, they are more than an inanimate object.

100 Murray, S. (2012) *Around the world in 20 death rituals* (panel session at Death Southbank’s Festival for the living), Southbank, London 27-29 January.