

# Grounding Grief

**A Sacred Space for Creative Synthesis of Embodied Bereavement**



**Student: Michelle Wilkinson G20755005**

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**Module Tutors: Tim Lamford & Amy Voris**

# CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3-4
2. SUMMARY OF STRUCTURE.....	5
3. RATIONALE.....	6-9
4. PURPOSE STATEMENT.....	9
5. LITERATURE OVERVIEW.....	10-11
6. CONCEPTUAL & THEORETICAL LENSES.....	12-18
7. METHODOLOGY.....	19-20
8. PRACTICAL METHOD.....	21-22
9. ETHICS.....	23
10. VALIDITY.....	24-25
11. HEALTH & SAFETY .....	25
12. DATA & FINDINGS.....	26-53
13. CONCLUSION.....	54-55
14. REFERENCE LIST.....	56-60
15. APPENDIX A/ FORMS & DOCUMENTATION.....	61-65
16. APPENDIX B/ JOURNAL & POETIC WRITING.....	66-74
17. APPENDIX C/ ALTAR IMAGES.....	75-78
18. APPENDIX D/ MOVEMENT & DRAWINGS.....	79-88
19. APPENDIX E/ RITUAL ARTWORK VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.....	89

## INTRODUCTION

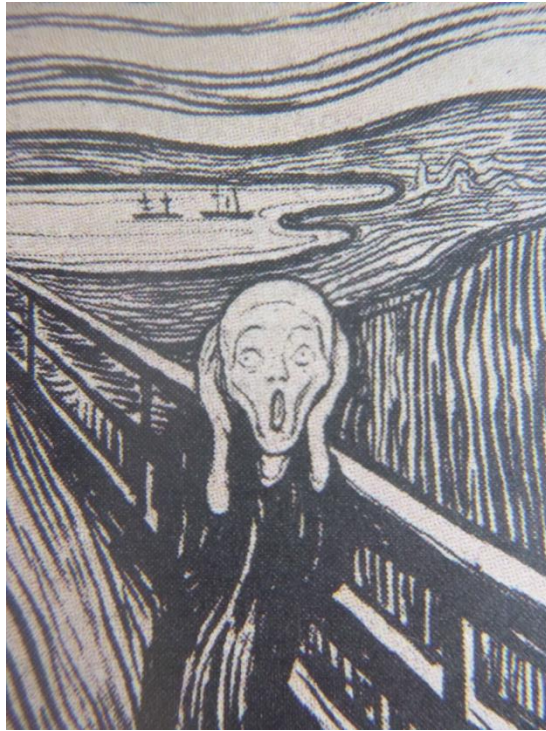


Figure 1: 'The Scream' British Museum 2019

The Scream hits you like a bomb in black and white. It is a work that abolishes the distance between us. Even as he portrays despair and loneliness and death, Munch does so in a way that celebrates our ability to communicate with each other. He leaves you harrowed yet inspired. This is an exhibition that shows why we need art. How else can we hear each other scream? (Jones 2019: 13)

'Grounding Grief' is a somatic practice-led research that has provided a sacred space to hear each other's screams and discover inspiration and transformation through the creative synthesis of ritual artwork. Brought to the foreground is the placement of death and emotional expression which within western culture is often hidden and pushed into the human shadowland (Kubler-Ross 1975; Moules et al. 2004; Olsen 2002; Weller 2015; Woodman 1982). However, death when viewed as part of the creative life cycle, our natural

ability to grieve, embraces our capacity for relationship, appropriate response to life changes, and our capability to evolve (Coreless et al. 2014; Shear 2012).

This research provides evidence through the bodily-lived experience of grief emergent within the researcher and four professional artists as co-researchers with the lived body, viewed as physical, emotional and imaginal (Halprin 1995, 2000). It is not a phenomenological inquiry in what Creswell describes as ‘the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or phenomena’ (2013: 76). Rather it attempts to articulate the individual variables of grief expression. Heuristically, there is a curiosity around the artists’ emergent themes and posits the question what themes arise from the artists in the creation of a ritualised artwork expressing bereavement?

Grief is ‘a curiously somatic experience [during which] the body can register sorrow as sensitively and as involuntarily as a seismograph’ (Talbot 2001: 62 in Macdonald 2019). Emotional response in death and bereavement is an intrinsic part of the territory. Hayes asserts it requires courage to sense and feel life’s losses; to reach into ‘the abyss of pain’ (2007: 51). Therefore, this research inquiry asks the question how does the creation of ritual artwork meet the emotional needs of the bereaved artists?

## **SUMMARY OF STRUCTURE**

The format of this research commences with the rationale where relevant personal bodily and emotional motivations are revealed. Here illumination is given to social, cultural, political connections and global context. Next there is a purpose statement followed by the literature review formed of two sections. The first is a literature overview and the second examines the conceptualisation and theorisation around death-related grief. This includes Jungian and post-Jungian tradition and the existential philosophical thinking of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Afterwards discussion is made on the applied methodology. Subsequently, the practical method, offers practical logistical methods used to gather data from the co-researchers. Next ethics, validity, health and safety are discussed. Then research evidence is provided in three sub-sections while the findings are considered alongside published literature at the end of each sub-section. Finally, significance of findings is relayed in the research conclusion.

## RATIONALE

Romanyshyn claims ‘in re-search with soul in mind the topic chooses the researcher as much, and perhaps even more than he or she chooses it’ (2013: 4). In the essence of these words I share with you some personal and professional death-related experiences of grief. In the six months preceding the research commencement, I lost a beloved aunt while simultaneously presented with three new somatic movement education (SME) clients expressing grief. One of these clients brought with them the raw grief of two and a half years of repeated miscarriages. Peppers and Knapp (1980) reveal that this is a form of intense grieving which may never be completely resolved. This client unlocked the door to my own personal memory of a miscarriage 23 years ago.

*The soft silken hairs at the back of my neck instantaneously raise themselves into an army of fear. I am frozen. My jaw is clamped shut, my shoulders curved forwards compressing my chest while the muscular coat of my bones is taught and tight in readiness to spring. Yet I am afraid to take another step. Inside my heart pounds fast ricocheting into my fence-like ribs. It sounds in my radar ears a warning cry of Look Out! Yet I see no danger in the hallway, only the warm welcoming rays of sun beckoning a pathway through the frosted-glass of the front door. Questions jump into my mind. What am I afraid of? Is the enemy within? My gut is in spasm. I am panicked by an internal threat. Now my legs involuntarily start to quiver subtly at first but growing into persistent shakes. The skin of my inner thighs is moist and there is a running sensation. My eyes become fixed on a rosy-red stream staining its outward journey on the visible skin below my summer skirt. The threat is over, an inner knowing registers loss. Trembling, I lower myself to the floor. It feels firm and stable in contrast to*

*my jittery self. I can no longer see clearly as torrential tears mingle blindly  
with blood and the hopes and dreams of a baby now gone.*

Not long after writing these emotive words of loss, I attended Tracey Emin's exhibition 'A Fortnight of Tears' in London. Her painting 'So it Felt Like This' (see figure 2) vividly and painfully expresses the sentiments of my words while movement that I made in response laid foundation to my ritual artwork.



**Figure 2: 'So It Felt Like This' White Cube**

Grief for my lost baby has periodically waved throughout my SME explorations. Kirkley-Best and Keller (1982 in Archer 1991) claim that parents of stillborn babies who did not see or hold them when they were dead experience heightened yearning and a strong impulse to search for the dead baby. During a movement session in 2015, I was improvising with white netting that weaved and wrapped until it became a swaddled babe I could hold and rock; I

had found my baby. This seeded an outdoor witnessed ritual ceremony ending with the physical offering of my baby to the sea.

Surrender of my baby, could be viewed as an expression of grief resolution (Moules et al. 2004). However, only last year during another SME improvisation, a heavy cream blanket transformed into a fleshy babe-in-arms accompanied by uncontrollable cries and sobs; the rawness of my grief. The contrast in grief experience from a soft gestural baby offering to an intense torrent of sorrow offers me a sense of grief that is in oscillation toward and away from confronting emotional pain (Shear 2012). There is no clear linear progression towards a sense of peaceful closure, rather a cyclic blend of yearning, sadness and painful outpouring existing alongside thoughts, memories and symbolic expression of my lost baby.

In Western culture, Weller illuminates our refusal to acknowledge grief and death describing it as ‘a grief-phobic, death-denying society relegated to what Carl Jung called the *shadow*’ (2015: xvii). Even when grief does surface much of its expression is located within the fields of Health Psychology, Nursing Care and Behavioural Medicine where it is pathologized and different approaches are offered towards personal resolution. However, some literature is suggesting that grief is life-long (Coreless et al 2014; Moules et al 2004) and for this reason will naturally be emergent throughout a person’s lifetime. There is evidence to suggest that grief opens the doors to personal authenticity, creativity and transformation (Kubler-Ross 1975; Weller 2015).

At the research outset the intension was to make a ritual artwork in relation to my aunt’s death, however through the creative process the loss of my unborn child gathered voice. Along with the co-researchers that which was ultimately personal was brought into conscious community. As a result, there has arisen a desire to bring death-related grief out of the shadows where it has been lost, ignored and neglected and into the light; to offer more

respect, voice and consciousness to grief expression. Regardless of where a person is born, people of all cultures are united by death and grief (Gire 2014). Nevertheless, cultures vary in how they conceptualised death and how the bereaved express their loss. Globally there is much we can learn from each other and this research study seeks through SME exploration to gather new knowledge of death-related grief expression.

### **PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The purpose of this practice-led inquiry influenced by art-based and heuristic research, is to discover how somatic movement education supports myself as researcher alongside four artist co-researchers experiencing bereavement, in the creation of ritual artwork. Within this research death-related grief will be generally defined as the physical, emotional and imaginal bodily sensations and movements which are emergent within the bereavement experience.

## LITERATURE OVERVIEW

What follows is a brief overview of articles which weave throughout this research. This literature is critically articulated alongside the collected evidence within the three data findings sections, one at the end of each sub-section entitled; black, red and white. Reviewing the literature after the study is completed minimizes bias and encourages the originality of the researcher's work (McNiff 1998).

Grief finds extensive voice within the fields of psychology, nursing and medicine. From a psychological and cultural perspective James Gire (2014) in *How Death Imitates Life: Cultural Influences on Concepts of Death and Dying* explains how differing worldview concepts on death have a noticeable influence on a culture's lifestyle, especially within grief expression. While in the Journal of Health Psychology and Behavioural Medicine Coreless et al. (2014) offer a *Languages of Grief* model developed from research to provide a bridge between the language of the professionals and that used by the bereaved.

Located in the Journal of Advances in Health and Nursing Care, Archer (1991) writes *The process of grief: A Selective Review* discussing stages of grief. Conversely, Moules et al. (2004) in the Nursing Inquiry Journal article, *Making Room for Grief: walking backwards and living forwards* discuss how the widely accepted model of grief therapy inherently based on a modernist tradition when internalised is instrumental in the constraining, confining and pathologizing the experience of grief. From a clinical neuroscience viewpoint psychiatry professor Katherine Shear (2012) at Columbia University writes *Grief and mourning gone awry: pathway and course of complicated grief* and postulates that people experiencing 'Complicated Grief' need to be distinguished from depression and anxiety disorder and offered specific assistance.

Within the visual arts grief is emergent for artists. Focus here is given to Jones (2019) in *Break on Through* and Fuchs (2019) in *Embracing Tracey* who review artist Emin's exhibition *A Fortnight of Tears* in the White Cube gallery book of the same title. However, literature remains scarce within the fields of western contemporary dance and SME. Anna Macdonald's (2019) PhD publication, *Acts of Holding: Dance, Time and Loss* provides an exploration of the relationship between dance, time and affect which focuses on the temporality of loss. While located in the Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices, movement artist and therapist Helen Poynor (2013) writes the reflective autobiographical essay *Landscapes of Loss: Moving and Mourning* conveying the kinaesthetic, emotional and spiritual experiences of the death of a loved one. Both papers are centred on the grief experience of the researcher while this study includes co-researchers and creative synthesis through ritual artwork. It aims to contribute new SME knowledge to existing grief literature.

## CONCEPTUAL & THEORETICAL LENSES

### Grief and Emotions

‘Grief’ a key word in this research study is viewed as the bodily response to bereavement. The *Collins English Dictionary* (2011) defines bereavement as having recently lost a close relative or friend through death. Grief is acknowledged by psychoanalyst and dance therapist Chodorow (1977) as one of the fundamental emotions along with Joy, Excitement, Fear, Anger, Contempt, Shame, Surprise which are innate patterns of expressive behaviour. Here Chodorow is defining grief as the emotion of deep intense sorrow. Worden (2009 cited in Gire 2014) extends the emotional expression of grief to include anger, guilt, as well as sadness. Although Weller (2015) equates grief largely with sorrow, he too offers a re-visioning of grief, not as a life event or a period of mourning, but as an on-going conversation that accompanies us throughout life; ‘[s]orrow is the sustained note in the song of being alive’ (2015: xix). Moules et al. (2004) on the other hand, provide an understanding of grief which lies in the assumption that grief is larger than the overwhelming sadness of sorrow. Rather it encompasses the celebration of the lost person.

Whatever emotions are attributed to the word grief, emotional expression is of central concern within this research. Emotion or affect can be viewed as a purely physiological reaction to events. The James-Lange theory of affect holds such a standpoint suggesting that emotion, the bodily innervations are causal. They are of physical innervations which precede emotions and then experienced as feelings (Redding 2011). However, this research draws on the work of psychiatrist and psychoanalyst C. G. Jung. Here emotion simultaneously operates as somatic and psychic which he describes as a ‘marked physical innervation on the one hand and a peculiar disturbance of the ideation process on the other’ (Jung 1921: 411).

For Jung emotion functions as a dynamic bridge where there is dialectical interaction between body and psyche. This makes possible what Jung (1961b) terms the *archetypal experience* whereby an image is charged with psychic energy and becomes of significance to an individual. Poynor gives example of this during a movement session in which she was grieving the death of her brother and father saying,

I found myself kneeling on crossed, immobilised legs with a puffed-out chest, embodying the unexpected image of a stone griffin blowing steam out of its mouth. At the time, I had no sense either of where the image had sprung from nor what it signified. However, on reflection, the associations of petrification, family heraldry and suppressed rage held meaning for me, mirroring aspects of my emotional landscape (2013: 174).

Grief's emotional terrain is reflected in Parkes's (1972) stages and phases of grief theory. Building on this Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) forge the *Five Stages of Grief* process. Although this framework is not emergent within the research study, it does offer key indicators around felt emotions and reflects certain therapeutic and general cultural discourses on grief and bereavement. Stage One, *Denial* is a period of shock and overwhelming numbness which enables the bereaved to pace their strong feelings. In Stage Two, *Anger* acts as an anchor to bridge the empty and lost feeling brought about by bereavement. Stage Three, the *Bargaining* phase, is a period of 'If only' and 'What if' statements whereby the bereaved finds fault with themselves and tries to see if things could have occurred differently. In Stage Four, *Depression* is experienced not as a sign of mental illness but an appropriate response to a great loss. Stage Five is *Acceptance* whereby the bereaved accepts the reality that the loss is permanent and becomes open to change, growth and evolution.

## **Ground, Embodiment and SME**

This research project seeks to ‘ground’ the phenomena of death-related grief in the body. If we take ‘ground’ as defined in the *Collins English Dictionary* (2011) as land or the soil of the earth, connection can be made to Halprin (2000) and Abram (2010) who both view the human body as part of our bigger or larger body of earth. ‘Ground’ therefore gives emphasis to the body and the importance of embodiment in this exploration. Tufnell gives us the words ‘everything we have ever experienced, even those things below our consciousness are nonetheless remembered by the body’ (2000: 18) and as such places body central to living.

Within the realm of Existential Phenomenology, the body is perceived through first-hand perception; as a ‘container of subjective experiences’ (Press 2002: 17). Cerbone (2006) informs that Heidegger inveighs against Husserl’s attempt at purification by bracketing subjective feelings, claiming that this sense of purification overlooks precisely what is most important and crucial to phenomenology, namely a human-being’s natural manner of experience, which is not a set of assumptions or presuppositions and is unable to be abstracted. Merleau-Ponty (1962) extends this view claiming that humans are worldly embodied beings and the world is an extension of body. He notes that each person’s body is unique and therefore irreplaceable, making all perceptions valid. In this way phenomenology and SME both position the omnipresence of body as active and central in all life process. Both purport that the mind and imagination are viewed as different functions of body. In the words of Parviainen ‘my body reveals my lived life, my ways of thinking, attitudes, even my dreams and prejudices about others’ (1998: 35). From an epistemological perspective, myself as researcher and co-researchers provide subjective evidence for this research through our bodily-lived experience of grief.

## Body as Sacred Space

The *Collins English Dictionary* (2011) defines ‘sacred’ as religious devotion to a god or gods. In the context of this research feminine spirituality is offered in contrast to patriarchal religion where ‘the goal of this old ‘sacred game’ is to get away from women, fleshy bodies, decaying nature, away from all that is rooted in mortality and dying’ (Eller 1993: 136). Here death is viewed as other worldly, ascended to the elevated realm of the pure spirit and the utter transcendence where nothing gets soiled or rots, or dies.

Whereas, what gets soiled, rots and dies, emerges into new life. The female and fleshy, is precisely what is most valued in feminist spirituality. The ‘sacred game’ within feminist spirituality is immersion in the natural world rather than trying to escape from it. Artist Emin, highlights this in the self-portrait *I cried As I held you* (see figure 3) where she appears holding a wooden box containing her mother’s ashes. The rawness of decay, these ashes, fails to transport Emin into a purely spiritual realm. Rather it is a stark reminder that the living body is flesh and blood. What she misses is the physical breathing, warm-blooded presence of the woman she loved (Jones 2019).



Figure 3: ‘I cried As I held you’ White Cube

Lying at the heart of this research is the fleshy, pulsating and grieving body. Aligning with Jungian analyst Marion Woodman's workshops the primary purpose is to create a space in which the body can speak. Woodman describes this as a 'sacred space' (1982: 86). It allows for an integration between the physical bodily sensations and psychic images whereby 'the body and soul [are] one' (ibid: 77). Similarly, artist and poet William Blake according to Jones (2019) denied there was any difference between body and soul because the body is the visible aspect of our spiritual form. Hillman offers the following words on the body and soul connection,

'The moment we realise body as a subtle body – a fantasy system of complexes, symptoms, tastes, influences and relations, zones of delight, pathologized images, trapped insights - then body and soul lose their borders, neither more or literal or metaphorical than the other' (1975: 174).

### **Death and Authenticity**

Jung asserts that the tearing away of one human being from another through death is 'brutal' (1995: 346). While Weller (2015) claims that there is something feral about death-related grief, something which lies outside ordained and sanctioned behaviours of our culture. Similarly, Heidegger whose philosophical standpoint in Western thought lies within the existential tradition identifies that from moments of despair, evoked by the finality of death, there surfaces an underlying anxiety from the tranquilizing powers and behavioural expectations of cultural norms. In his book *Being and Time* Heidegger offers us this view on dying and authenticity,

'death is not to be outstripped; instead, anticipation frees itself *for* accepting this. When, by anticipation, one becomes free *for* one's own

death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally trust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factual possibilities which is not to be outstripped' (1962: 308).

Heidegger believes that anxiety in the face of death is an appropriate response because of the potential way it can shape and affect the way a human exists. Having a sense of our own mortality, brought home through the experience of having someone close to us die, imposes a limit on life and becomes a wake-up call to enter our own lives more fully. Moving away from a collective level of public conformity, we find our way towards self-determination, individualisation and authenticity. Moreover, Heidegger suggests death brings 'an unshakable joy' (ibid: 358) because in the knowledge our lives will end there is opportunity to bring more weight and significance to our life choices. Likewise, world-renowned leader on death Kubler-Ross (1975) claims that we only truly live, find enjoyment and appreciation of life if we realise that we are always finite.

## **Creative Synthesis**

'The Life/Death/Life nature is a cycle of animation, development, decline and death that is always followed by re-animation. This cycle affects all physical life, all facets of psychological life. Everything - the suns, novae, and the moon, as well as the affairs of humans and those of the tiniest creatures, cells and atoms alike-have this fluttering, then faltering, then fluttering again' (Estes 1992: 127-128).

'Create' in Latin is *creare* meaning to make (life), to produce where there was nothing before. Within the life cycle, Estes holds view that 'create' is a kind of birth where

reanimation occurs after death. 'Synthesis', the *Collins English Dictionary* (2011) states, is the process of combining objects or ideas into a whole complex. When the words 'creative' and 'synthesis' are combined Kapitan (2010) describes it as the externalization or expression of holistic understanding.

## **THE METHODOLOGY**

Stromstead (2001) highlights the fact that there have been radical changes within research methodology within the last decade. For several centuries the positivist scientific worldview profoundly influenced research methods advocating application of the scientific method to ascertain true knowledge. Junger & Linesch (1993) explain that this mode of thinking allows human-beings to be studied through experimental methods in order to discover the underlying truth of the laws of human behaviour. Stromstead views this as ‘the belief that “reality” is located “out there”, existing in and of itself – a “fact” which could be measured and quantified’ (2001: 41).

This form of quantified research approach could be viewed as a ‘top-down’ approach. It is in direct contrast to more recent inquiry paradigms such as the constructivist worldview, a ‘bottom-up’ kind of approach whereby the understanding or meaning of phenomena is formed by research participants and their subjective views regarding the area of investigation. Creswell describes this qualitative research as ‘illuminating, understanding and extrapolation rather than causal determination, prediction and generalisation’ (1994: 6).

Following in a qualitative research heritage, founded by artist and creative practitioners, practice-led research is my chosen methodology. Inquiry is made into subjective bodily experience and therefore the living body becomes research knowledge, rather than an externally imposed theory. According to Williamson ‘somatic educators do not impose pre-existing theory upon the client [...] overarching grand theories of analysis are rarely used, if at all’ (2009: 30). Instead of offering a pre-existing grief theory the participants’ grieving bodies become a conduit through which research is conducted and new knowledge generated; a key advantage of practice-led research.

Creative self-explorations, such as drawing and writing, important in this somatic research aids to anchor the movers experience so that it does not sink back into the unconscious (Stromsted 2009). Notwithstanding, this reflexive artwork can be moved, drawn or written about. Through such phenomena contemplation we activate the artwork's ability to communicate with us. Moreover, the different modalities take us out of our habitual response to things; from the purely personal into a widening field of social transformation, a central element of art-based research (McNiff 1992).

However, the nature of creative practice-led research has the tendency to be unruly, ambiguous and marked by extremes of interpretive anxiety for the reflexive researcher. This became particularly marked within the research data selection. Fortunately, I was open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition whereby illumination of theme selection was made possible (Hiles 2001). The toleration of ambiguity, gaining understanding through heightened reflexivity and an ability to draw together knowledge are necessary skills required to be a successful researcher in the creative arts (Haseman & Mafe in Smith & Dean 2009: 220).

Being an artist is by its very nature heuristic in that it incorporates the creative process and self-examination (Kapitan 2010). This research study contains a characteristic of heuristic inquiry in that it has been a life-long calling. I have come to understand the impact of the loss of my mother immediately after my birth. My first grief experience was met with coldness and separation. No wonder there is a call to provide the community with a warm, safe and creative grief container. I have risked opening a wound for personal and social transformation (Moustakas 1990).

## THE PRACTICAL METHOD

This research study spanned a period of 7 weeks. Week 1- 4 included meeting once per week, consecutively, for a 2-hour-session, held in a safe and comfortable studio. In their own studio spaces, one-to-one sessions were provided for those co-researchers who were absent. Separate to my facilitation role, following each group research session, I engaged in a 2-hour solo exploration. Each session commenced and finished with an altar ritual, respectfully evoking and bringing closure to our exploration of embodied bereavement. Castle (2007) notes that the altar's energy informs both the quality and expression of the work which is to follow and as such offers both a sense of summons and a container for the work's intentions.

Drawn upon were a few selected SME practices. Miranda Tufnell's work (2000, 2017) grounded in deep bodily listening allowed participants to tune into bodily sensations such as the flow of breath. Responding in movement to such organic inner impulses was supported by the discipline of Authentic Movement rooted in archetypal psychology and active imagination (Chodorow 1991). Significantly, as artists, Halprin's Life/Art Process which is based on the principle that 'as life deepens, personal art expression expands, and as art expression expands life experiences deepen' (2000: 20) became a vital container. Within this process three primary art mediums movement/dance, drawing and poetic writing act as an intermodal arts model (Halprin 2003).

During week 5 the researcher and co-researchers worked independently on their ritual artwork. In week 6 there was a group meeting in a local wood where the ritual artworks were ceremonially witnessed. Following these ceremonies, in week 7, there was a period of participant reflection. Data was gathered from journal writings of each co-researcher which included poetic writing, drawings, and photographs. This included video documentation during the facilitation sessions and the final ritual sharing. All gathered data was reflected

upon over a period of 3 weeks providing an opportunity for ‘immersion and intervals of concentration and respite’ (Moustakas 1990: 46). Consequently, this enabled the resonance of the research study’s creative expressions, an extrapolation of any themes that had emerged from the process and provided an openness to the voices of the artworks themselves (McNiff 1992).

## **ETHICS**

Mills et al 'prioritizes the well-being of participants' (210: 337). Sensitivity was of prime concern throughout the research, as the co-researchers shared the common experience of bereavement. Although there was no intention to cause distress, the emotionally charged subject matter of grief might have generated participant discomfort. As researcher I am a seasoned SME practitioner experienced in grief facilitation. I was available to support any questions and concerns and/or refer participants to additional resources appropriate to their needs; one co-researcher provided support through their personal movement therapist. Moreover, throughout the research process I attended one-to-one sessions with an ISMETA therapist.

From the outset the co-researchers were informed of the nature of the research and were invited to sign a Consent Form and received a Bill of Rights prior to commencement. At any time without repercussion, the co-researchers had the freedom to refrain from answering any questions, participating in activities, or photographic/video documentation and to withdraw from this research. Confidentiality and privacy of the co-researchers is essential. Therefore, co-researchers are anonymised using the titles Artist A, B, C and D respectively, whenever their emergent themes, journal writing, photographic/or video documentation of movement and artwork are cited. All the information disclosed throughout this research is strictly for research purposes only.

## VALIDITY

The *Collins English Dictionary* (2011) defines the word ‘validity’ as something which is truthful or correct. On truth, Moustakas (1990) argues for the importance of accurate meaning and essence of participants be conveyed throughout the research. For this reason, co-researchers participated in member-checking research findings prior to its completion (Creswell 2013). This enabled them to ‘review and confirm or alter the research data to correspond to her or his perception of the experience’ (Moustakas 1994: 110). Consequently, this allowed me as researcher to make amendments prior to final submission so that all the co-researchers’ authenticity and truth are accurately presented.

Because each co-researcher’s own truth is honoured the research can ‘move away from the idea that there is one truth’ (Reason & Rowen 1981: 242). According to Moustakas (1990) research will achieve deeper, richer more profound and varied meaning when it includes experience of different viewpoints or *multi-truths*. Forming such a triangulation extends to the drawing from a range of published literature not only pertaining to SME, but in kindred fields such as visual arts and those further afield. Likewise, the theoretical lenses of philosophy, psychology and feminism provide varied source streams.

Creating triangulation between different data sources is a key validation strategy procedure identified by Creswell (2013). Data was gathered from movement, drawing/painting, poetic/journal writing, and photographic/video documentation. Creswell further identifies what is often regarded as a secondary validation strategy procedure namely the importance of writing quality. Writing within this research aims to be detailed, thick with description, explicitness and vividness, an essential aspect of SME.

Knowing the research leader’s position, their subjectivity in relation to the research, any biases, assumptions, past experiences or approaches is important for the reader at the outset

therefore the research rationale offers subjective background (Creswell 2013; Kapitan 2010). As researcher, I have no intentional personal bias in the research outcomes, rather I am open to a full spectrum of personal responses (Yin 2014). Consequently, this research intends to offer a validation of each artists' experience of grief through their self-validation emergent in the creative synthesis of ritual artwork and the external validation of sharing this work with others (Hiles 2001).

### **HEALTH & SAFETY**

Prior to the practical research sessions and ritual sharing a risk assessment was carried out in both the studio and outdoor site. A risk assessment form was completed, and the co-researchers were given a health and safety brief. Through *People Dancing* the foundation for community dance I hold a public liability insurance policy which covers both studio and site-specific dance and movement work.

## DATA & FINDINGS

Within this research there have arisen a myriad of themes, so much so that initially I felt confronted by a fast-approaching tidal wave. In the studio I let these themes swish and swash around as I started walking. For an hour I walked, often forwards in varying weights and speeds. I bobbed sideways and periodically participated in the Eastern tradition of walking backwards (Moules et al. 2004). Walking in reverse uses unfamiliar muscles and opened me up to new and unexpected ways of being in the world. Roy (2015) informs that walking is an established practice of philosophers and writers as a means of generating clarity and thought.

My walking had life which at times fell away, only to be reborn and become the over-arching theme from which the data has been gathered, namely the *Life/Death/Life Cycle*. This Estes (1992) informs is a creative cyclic pattern rather like the seasons, in which whatever lives shall die and whatever dies shall live again. After I finished walking, I could see the ancient colours of red, black and white the colours of my grief banners (see figure 4). These colour motifs embedded in mythos and fairy-tales connote birth, life and death have been emergent for co-researchers and form, for the purpose of this research, the sub-themes:

**Black**

**Red**

**White**



**Figure 4: Researcher's Grief Banners**

Pertinent examples from the whole process have been selected, leaving a small selection of additional data documented in Appendices B-D. In each sub-theme, immediately following the selected evidence, the findings are critically articulated alongside published literature.

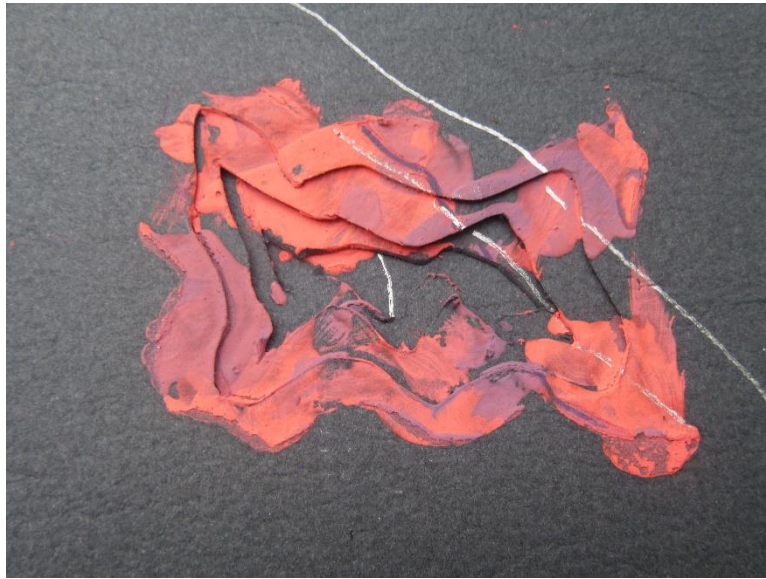
## **BLACK**

### **Artist D/ Session One**



*Little black spot coming and going. My body is contained in this colour. I move across the floor, knees up, head folded, hands hugging. Is this a safe place? It feels comforting. It feels like protection.*

**Artist A/ Session Two**



**Black Hole**

**Empty**

**Hurting and Lost**

**Fragmented**

**Torn Apart and Broken**

**Hollowness**

**Cut Away and Removed**

**Missing You**

**Depressed**

## Artist C's Ritual Burial



*Under a rose.... fish-bits and rose quartz crystal*

*In response to needing to bury a foetus...didn't happen at the time*

*Abortion should be a sacred ceremony and the foetus matters...body parts  
put in a coffin to be buried or burned and blessed...the surgeon and nurses  
pray for the baby, mother and father's spirits...to let go with love to the  
divine.*

### Artist B/ Session Three



*I often found myself curling up 'holding on' to feelings or experiencing a sense of comfort...coming to the floor...a downward pressure...Listening to the body...stilling the mind...Observing the process...Appreciating the WIDTH of any present moment.*

*The fear...the anxiety is triggered by the familiar being unfamiliar. The struggle for breath, affects our bodies through patterns. The simple act of going up the stairs requires recovering. We have to get our breath back.*

*We have to focus inside to drive the fear away.*

## Artist B's Ritual Artwork



*Hold ball...Roll ball*

*Follow the ball on an unknown, unknowable journey*

## Artist D's Response

*This dance has other stories to tell.*

*I feel it in my bones.*

*Black cloth...Black branches*

*The roll and push on the earth will come.*

*Instinct knows it.*

### Researcher/ Solo Session Three



*I became aware of my back, my naked back. It felt moist arousing in me an unfamiliar sensation. There was something behind me, it had crept up from nowhere. Suddenly I was embodying an image of overly large black tears cascading from my head to my feet. They continued to fall as though the whole world was raining sadness. My awareness shifted to my face which had also become wet and I felt a stream of silent teardrops staining downwards to the earth. I was expressing the loss of my unborn baby. However, I realised that my personal experience was not only mine, but transpersonal. I had stepped into the sorrow of the world.*

## Researcher's Ritual Artwork



*Fingers spread wide as my open hands involuntarily clutch my beating breast. One hand for each weighted lung, like water-bags of sorrow. I recall my childhood, those times when I wanted to cry...those times I was told not to cry. Rather I held back the sobs through quivering lips. Never fully being myself, all my sadness became stored inside. The rustling leaves speak it's time...it's time. The twisted blacken branches reflect my inner contortions. A soft breeze opens my pores. As my knees bend, I sink into the spiky grasses which scratch my pale tender flesh from which seeps blood stains of pain. The immense weight of grief accumulated over a life span of sixty years is brought down to the ground. Each drop clinging to the next now soaks into the soil of the earth to be absorbed and await with all that is dead and rotten to be transformation into fertile land.*

## DATA FINDINGS

### **death/ black hole/ return to earth/ foetal burial/ tears of sorrow/ lung illness/ rebirth**

Estes (1992) offers two meanings for the colour black. Firstly, it is the colour of death either of the physical body or the dissolution of old values. Reflected in a culture's history, Coreless et al. (2014) note how black-edged stationery was used in Victorian times indicating the status of a mourner. I remember my maternal grandfather wearing a black armband to signify a family death. Artist B in their final ritual artwork wore black clothing, used black cloth and was surrounded by blackened tree trunks and branches.

A second meaning of black is its association with the earth, the mud beneath us. This can be viewed as a place of burial or the fertile ground in which new life and ideas are sown. Poynor (2013) found in her movement that her head was pushing on the ground as though she was trying to burrow into the floor. Kubler-Ross (1975) notes that the raw gaping hole in the earth awaiting the coffin, symbolises the raw emptiness of the mourners at the final moment of separation. Artist A's portfolio artwork of a black hole full of '*emptiness, hurt and loss*' provides a metaphorical expression of the emptiness felt and is echoed by these mourner's words 'I miss you so much there is a huge hole where you were' (Coreless et al. 2004: 9).

An overwhelming direction of movement for myself and Artists B and D was a '*coming to the floor, feeling a downward pressure*'. Poynor (2013) notes that the weight of her grief pressed her so close to the ground that she could barely move. While Weller claims 'grief enfolds our lives, drops us close to the earth, reminding us of our inevitable return to the dark soil' (2015: 17). Once on the earth Artist B and D found themselves '*curling up*' and '*folding in*' on themselves in a way that felt '*comforting*'. As witness I experienced within me a foetal return to the earth in a way that some early cultures bury their dead, postulating a belief in rebirth (Mui 2016, Simpson 2000).

The significance of foetal burial was central to artist C's ritual artwork. Fish remains representing the aborted foetus and rose quartz crystal a symbol of love, compassion and comfort were buried under a newly planted pale pink rose. This offered a missing ceremony for their aborted baby in 1987 and emotively highlights that '*the foetus matters*' and requires blessing so that '*the baby, mother and father's spirits...let go with love to the divine*'. This ceremony rooted in the feminine soil of the earth contrasts my own 2015 masculine offering of my unborn son to the sky. However, both denote the importance of recognising and honouring the loss experienced in abortion and miscarriage.

For me the earth was holder of my weight of emotions. Located in my lungs this weight felt like '*water-bags of sorrow*' an accumulation of a lifetime of unshed tears. As a child my adoptive mother, needing to appear a good mother, insisted that I did not cry. Kubler-Ross notes that 'the showing of such personal indicators, as tears are taboo in our society' (1975: 11). Unable to express my tears started a long burial of my authentic self as I conformed to external social expectations. Macdonald explains 'death generates an intensified sense of presence of oneself' (2019: 2). Through my grief exploration I had discovered an intensely slow weighted way of moving which gave my buried emotion form in movement, not too dissimilar to Butoh Dance.

Davies cites a poem from Henrik Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*. The verse entitled 'Dewdrops' starts with the words 'we are the tears which were never shed' (2012: 97) and echoes an embodied image I had of large black raindrops. These raindrops fell '*as though the whole world was raining sadness*' and suddenly there followed '*a stream of silent teardrops staining towards the earth*'. Finally, I was able to cry my buried loss. It was a personal experience however '*I had also stepped into the sorrow of the world*'. Hayes (2007) identifies this as transformational energy, a voice which is not only coming from within a person but from somewhere else.

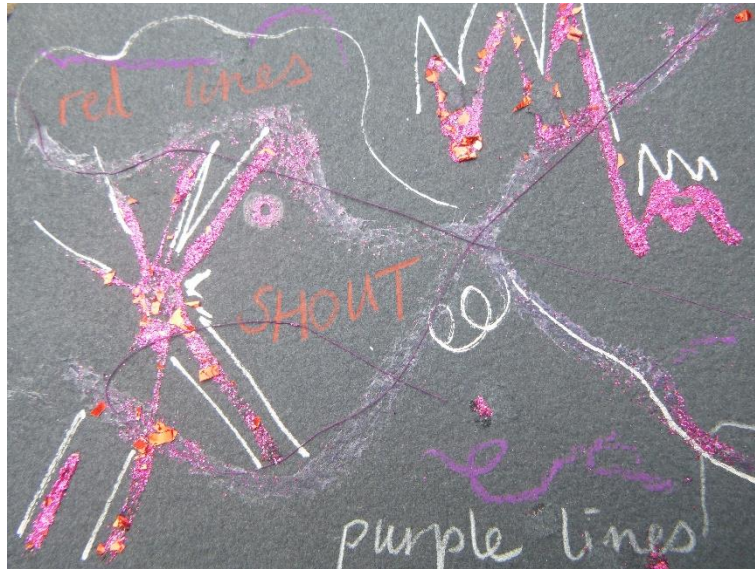
My black tears were shaped like lungs, there were blue lung tears on my grief banners and as facilitator I included breathing awareness in the group sessions. Artist B started the research with severe breathing difficulties to such an extent that going upstairs required recovery; there was fear around when *'the familiar, becomes unfamiliar'*. No longer able to stand easily and comfortably they spent time lying close to the earth, *'slowing down... listening to the body....stilling the mind and appreciating the WIDTH of any present moment'*.

As a circus skills entertainer, Artist B, the joker and the fool has been what Hayes (2007) describes as an ego-based performer. However, through this illness they were unable to move in their old familiar way. Instead they discovered new ways of exploring familiar materials. Tufnell claims 'illness is, in a sense, an attempt at healing within the body, a call for change in how we live our lives, a call to notice what has gone unnoticed' (2000: 18). This artist's illness had become a kind of death, in what Estes (1992) describes as a dissolution of old values. Heidegger (1962) draws relationship between death and authenticity in that there is a move away from public conformity and a call to shape our own existence.

Rather than meeting audience expectation of a performing fool, Artist B's ritual artwork performance did not seek to please or entertain, but was what Hayes describes as a 'compassionate performance' as it promoted 'empathy, understanding and communion' (2007: 35). From fertile earth, they returned to upright, moved with silver spheres on tree branches and a low black table. Awoken were their early dance and drama training and as a result they have applied and been accepted on a newly formed MA in Directing Circus, which brings circus skills into the arena of the arts. They are to *'follow the ball on an unknown, unknowable journey'*.

## RED

### Artist A/ Session One



**Red Lines SHOUT**

**Red Lines DOMINATE**

**Red Lines ACTIVE & SPIKEY**

**Red Lines CREATE TENSION**

### **Researcher Witnessing:**

*Artist A sat motionless. From nowhere limb muscles tightened, elbows and knees drew in. Suddenly, left arm jabbed, quickly followed by right. There was a kicking out of legs, an explosion of limbs marking lines in the air. I had an emergent image of the heart being monitored. On the screen jagged lines chaotically scribing the feelings from within.*

## Researcher's Ritual Artwork & Embodied Writing



*I was standing helpless and forlorn in the shadow end of the sunlit studio. Drooped shoulders following leaden head withdraw themselves from the lively shrill of birdsong in the spring green outside. As ghost-like apparition I embraced the inertia, not wanting to be here. However, a deeper calling brought twitches to my limb fibres. Bit by bit they strengthen into muscular pumping causing my arms to push and pull. 'Out of my way!' I cried. I realised I could no longer stay blind to these strong emotions inside. My mouth twisted open in scream like contortion. This was a more authentic response to my aunt's enforced death rather than the streams of letters to a care home and the council. My breath was fast, rapidly vomiting buried emotions from my usually locked-down ribcage. My skin was tingly awake, my muscles actively engaged. I was dancing my red unearthed shame and rage, an animated creature who had entered the sunny side of the room to be seen and heard.*

**Researcher/ Solo Session Two**



**Time to TEAR APART...to RIP**

**The sound of SEPARATION**

**The Loss of BLOOD...bleeding from the SOUL**

**Folds of FEELINGS...PAIN...ANGUISH...JOY**

**FRAYED at the edges**

**It is all coming APART**

**An army of RED BANNERS**

**To herald my expression of GRIEF**

**Awaiting a time when they can FLY**

**With the winds of the GODDESS**

**Strong enough to hold my aching BONES**

**Artist D/ Session Two**



**Heart beats...skips a beat**

**Broken heart so confused...so angry**

**Better behave...you know time heals?**

*How do you mend a broken heart? You don't, but you tell it to keep beating. Others keep it beating for you. The heart feels the pain of loss, but scientists say it is just a muscle. No! In the blood the thoughts and feelings rage around the body expressing all its grief.*

## Artist D/ Session Two



*I moved with the sensations of having a broken heart. I protected my heart area. Feeling the pain that comes with loss. Cradling that area of my body.*

## Artist C's Ritual Artwork



**Comfort Tuffet containing menstrual blood loss.**

## DATA FINDINGS

### **anger/ separation/ horror story/ blood flow/ broken heart/ comfort**

Estes (1992) offers a dual meaning for the colour red. Related to death and destruction, red is rageful and reflected in sacrifice, torment and murder. In contrast, as a life-giver, red is the vibrance of life, dynamic emotion and an expression of arousal, love and desire. These dual meanings are found in the red of blood flow and is reflected within the menstruation cycle, where that which does not become life dies.

Anger is an emotion which for some people is likely to flare up periodically throughout the grieving process (Archer 1991). Artist A expressed their anger in drawing and the words '*red lines SHOUT*'. Through their bodily movements I witnessed a '*kicking out of legs, an explosion of limbs*'. Within my own movements strong rageful emotions created '*muscular pumping causing my arms to push and pull*'. In the stages of grief theory (Parkes 1972, Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005), anger is thought to be an indicator of the intensity of love the mourner has for the deceased. I was horrified that my healthy aunt, was severed from her beloved home and forced into an unfamiliar and unsuitable environment where she quickly died. Moving my rage in this session gave voice to my emotions in a way that '*letters to a care home and the council*' were unable to meet.

The Jewish grief rituals include *kriyah* which is an act of tearing up the clothes of the dead loved-one (Kubler-Ross 1975, Poynor 2013). It is a visible dramatic symbol of separation, the internal tearing asunder between the mourner and the deceased which Jung (1995) describes as a brutal experience. It gives vent to pent up anger and anguish. The ripping of red material, '*time to TEAR APART...the sound of SEPARATION*' became '*an army of RED BANNERS*' an expression of my grief that was '*strong enough to hold my aching BONES*'. Davies (2012) notes that when human aggression is directed it can serve as creative function in life. My

destructive anger found transformation in the construction of the grief banners in which the negative and disturbing images stimulate healing in that the toxin becomes anti-toxin (Mc Niff 1992).

I had seen my aunt's death as a kind of murder, if she had not been removed from her home, she would not have died of starvation three months later. Jones describes Emin's painting *I was too young to be carrying your ashes* (see figure 5) as 'a stab of agony. It is like a horror story. The woman seems to be covered in blood, like someone who's survived a slasher film. The blood of inner pain seeps through skin as actual gore' (2019: 8).

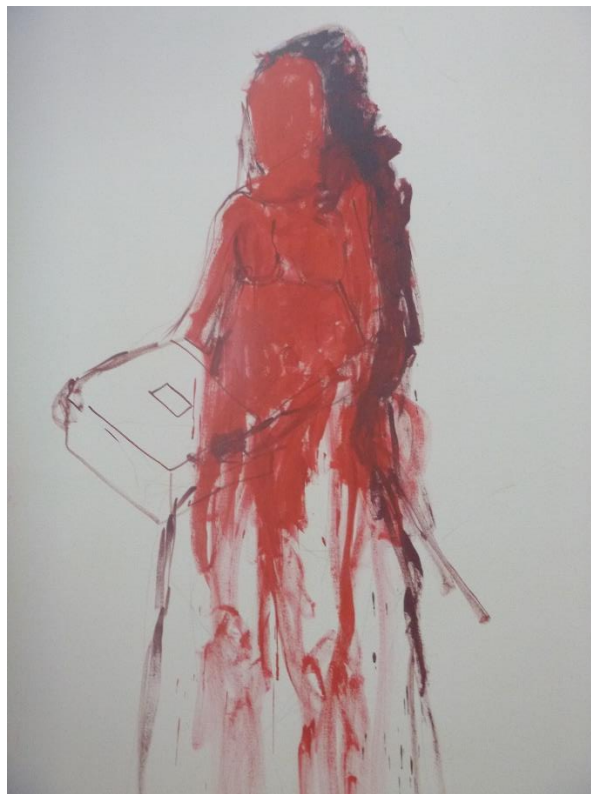


Figure 5: 'I was too young to be carrying your ashes' White Cube

This painting and my photo of '*my mouth twisted in scream-like contortion*' authentically express the horror I experienced in my aunt's death. I feel grateful that I have had the opportunity to dance '*my unearthed shame and rage*' and as a result have become '*an animated creature who has entered the sunny side of the room to be seen and heard*'.

Artist D talks of how in *'the blood the thoughts and feelings rage around the body expressing grief'*. Red the colour of blood, is not only a reflection of inner pain, but expresses the energy of a vibrant dynamic life. An important aspect of SME is the connection to bodily pulse, getting the body moving, and awakening to aliveness so that a person feels fully alive (Halprin 2000, Hayes 2007). Tufnell & Crickmay (2004) describe the heart as the sun within the body. Shear (2012) recognises for some people in bereavement it feels like the light has been turned off, they are in darkness, there is no sun. Some people describe this as a broken heart.

Coreless et al. (2014) and Moules et al. (2004) highlight that being broken-hearted is metaphorical language to describe an intense feeling of grief. It offers something to grasp hold of in the human mystery of death and removes us for a while from the raw pain of suffering. It provides us a home in language and understanding; a different way to experience grief. Artist D drew their broken heart in red and green, wrote about how it *'skips a beat'* and *'moved with the sensation of having a broken heart'*. Reflecting on their grief expression I am drawn to Tufnell & Crickmay who offer an improvisation with something that is broken. They suggest

*Find something...that seems broken*

*Imagine it has a voice*

*Make, move and write from its point of view*

*Let it go on a journey*

*What/who...does it meet?*

*What happens to it? (2004: 282)*

The heart holds blood and so does the womb. The loss of an unborn baby whether through abortion or miscarriage comes with blood flow. Emin depicts this in her painting, *So It Felt Like This* (see figure 1) while the red ripped material between my legs in the making of grief banners and the words '*rosy-red stream*' in my rationale were my markers of baby loss. Artist C created comfort tuffets (see figure 6), layered material pads which echo the female genital folds and contain menstrual blood. They are an important reminder of the need for compassion, comfort and nurture at times of such loss (Hayes 2007). Hold one in your hands, allow it to rest upon your belly, surrender to its softness, allow love and warmth to seep through.



**Figure 6: Comfort Tuffets**

## WHITE

### Artist A/ Session Three



### Research Leader's Reflexive Response

*Within the shimmer of silk woven as a veil, I am seeing new life in the essence of death. Bathed in moonlight, night offers descent into this underworld offering. Here how readily, magically the caterpillar morphs into butterfly. I am witness to the visibility of transformation as fresh wing arms and legs unfold, push outwards weakening their protective skin. From my focus on this tiny miracle. I step back awakening to a widening field and see a world ablaze in flickering light. I am in a place where a billion caterpillars rise from the earth as winged creatures dancing between the sunset and sunrise.*

## Artist A's Ritual Artwork



*Fragile...gentle...feminine connections*

*The tatting my grandmother was working on before she died.*

*These woven threads become the neural pathways of the ritual painting*



**Artist D/ Session One**



**Artist B Writes after Dyad Movement**

*Response*

*Circles...Cycles*

*Revolution...round and Round*

*Held softly...Spun gently*

*The ball of my foot*

*The curve of your arm*

*The space between us*

*The spiral breathes*

*Its tempo*

## Artist C's Snail Shrine



*See snails resting*

*hibernating deep in wall crevices*

*Other empty shells*

*Already in other cracks*

*Little spiral beauties*

*Similar to my tiny life form who died*

*Notice moss, ferns and new growth*

## Artist D's Ritual Artwork



*You've moved too fast again have not savoured the moment, not embraced the stillness as skin envelopes and protects. Linger longer, linger longer, sleep awhile. Flapping wings wildly is not feeling the emotion. Looking through holes to those who have gone before. I repeatedly say these words...*

### **Dragon-fly Catcher**

**Where today**

**have you gone?**

Fukuda Chiyo-ni (1703-1775) wrote this haiku when her son died.

## DATA FINDINGS

### **veiled/ insect metamorphosis/ connecting threads/ cycles & spirals/ transformation**

Estes (1992) claims that white is a colour that is a life giver and taker. In the former white is pure and pristine and represents new life; a blank page waiting to be written upon. White gives life to the dead as it takes on the colour of the soul when it is free from the body. It is the colour of ghosts or spirit unencumbered by the physical form. In some of Emin's paintings pale coloured paint creates spectre or spook-like images. These are of her dead mother who has left her physical body behind. In witnessing the painting below (see figure 7), 'the pale colour pink, silent and atmospheric' (Fuchs 2019: 88) takes me to another world. I have a sense of a veil that divides me from this world and suggests that something new is emerging.

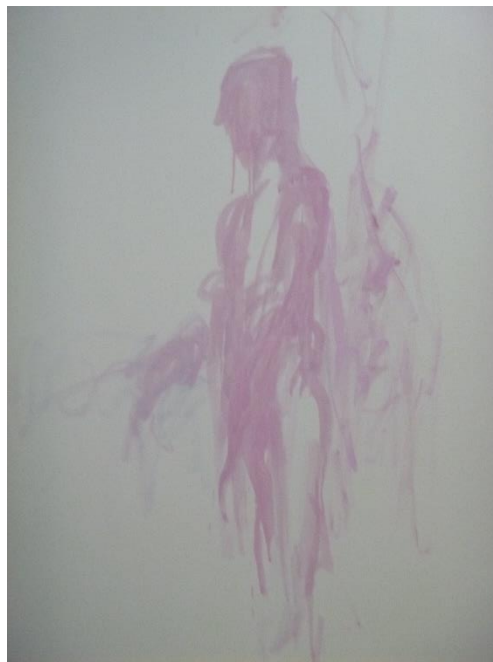


Figure 7: 'I watched you disappear. Pink Ghost' White Cube

Artist A's soft flowing movement of comfort were shrouded in *'the shimmer of a silk woven as a veil'*. I was witness to *'the visibility of transformation as fresh wing arms and legs*

*unfolded*'. Eventually *'a billion caterpillars rise from the earth as winged creatures dancing between the sunset and sunrise'*. From the black hole of the loss, this artist experienced a metamorphosis. Moules et al. describe a mourner who believed that when her grandmother died, she would be lost forever. However, she came to realise that she *'became more like her every day, so I didn't lose her at all'* (2004: 101). In a similar way, Artist A realised how much her grandmother, a talented craftswoman, lived inside her and emerged in her own artwork. The white tatting her grandmother was working on before she died *'became fragile...gentle...feminine connections'*. These *'woven threads became the neutral pathways of the ritual painting'* as symbolic connection. They offered what Coreless et al (2014) values as important in bereavement, a theme of continuing bonds with the deceased.

*'Connecting threads'*, *'cycles'* and *'spirals'* emergent in this sub-section found expression for Artist C. The delicate hibernating, empty and at times broken shells of white snails became *'little spiral beauties similar to my tiny life form who died'*. In their walled snail shrine some living, some decaying they embodied the *Life/Death/Life Cycle*. Artist D's ritual artwork on a pine tree island metaphorically explored death. They started cocoon-like in their made felt shroud, which then morphed into a creature which was *'flapping wings wildly'*. From time to time they repeatedly spoke the haiku *'dragon-fly catcher, where today have you gone?'* Although they were aware that their flapping of wings did not allow strong emotion to surface, through their embodied imagination, they moved with the possibility of afterlife.

Kubler-Ross notes that humans have an endless capacity for creative change, saying *'we are created for transcendence as birds are for flight and fish are for swimming'* (1975: 159). In a similar vein, Moules et al. (2004) suggests that humans can view bereavement not as final resolution in that the mourner is now over the death, but are able to change, transform and blend their experience of loss so that clarity and new vision is born. Transformation is the subject matter of a well-known poem, by an anonymous author, often recited at burials and is

the one I read aloud at my aunt's graveside. It renders an inspiring and comforting view of death using beautiful images, metaphors and symbolism. Although I feel that the ability to cry and weep is a natural part of grieving, this poem imagines into transformational afterlife.

*Do not stand at my grave and weep*

*I am not there I do not sleep*

*I am a thousand winds that blow*

*I am the diamond glint on snow.*

*I am the sunlight on ripened grain.*

*I am the gentle autumn rain.*

*When you awaken in the morning hush*

*I am the swift uplifting rush*

*Of quiet birds in circled flight*

*I am the soft stars that shine at night*

*Do not stand at my grave and cry*

*I am not there I did not die*

(Cited in Saunders 1996: 1-32)

## CONCLUSION

Significant within this research is the emergence of multiple deaths for any one artist while experiencing a current bereavement. For instance, artist B found connection between the recent loss of a fellow artist and their best friend who drowned aged of 21, 50 years previous. Emin (2019), Macdonald (2019) and Poynor (2013) all moved with a recent death loss alongside either one or two past bereavements. In the case of Emin this spanned a period of 29 years while the recent loss of my aunt is weaved with a miscarriage 23 years ago. This would suggest that grief has the potential to be life-long, not something to transcend, but an experience which can be moved with, revisited and transformed over time. In the words of Tufnell 'the story of our lives is always changing, incomplete, retold in the light of new events; a circle and re-circling as we attempt to give form and meaning to events' (2000: 22).

Consequently, the emergent themes arising from body provided fertile earth for grief exploration in contrast to a cultural external marker of bereavement found in the stages or phases of grief theory. The themes revealed a rich subjective exploration of grief suggesting there is no one right or universal way to experience grief. Artist D asserts '*grief never ends...it is worked out in a myriad of different ways.*' The overarching and sub-themes weaved together the diverse nature of these themes from a horror story to connecting threads, providing curiosity, insights and wonder. Participants felt deeply connected with their own grief journey. Moreover, there was a community connectedness whereby what was personal had become transpersonal. There has been a request for the ritual artwork sharing day to become an annual event where our stories are retold in the light of new events, possibly even new deaths.

Through their witnessing the co-researchers provided attentive compassionate presence (Hayes 2007; Poynor 2013) which lay ground for emergent emotions; wild outpourings or in

an image which compelled the body to take its form. The oscillation toward and away from confronting emotional pain supported the emotional needs of co-researchers, whereby when necessary their screams could be heard. Artist D reflects on how the research was ‘*cathartic, painful and liberating...always taking me to new perspectives and creative directions.*’ Not only was place made for authentic emotional expression, some of which had been buried over decades, fear, sadness, anger and joy became fuel of creation. Artist B’s fear fuelled new breath to embark on an MA. The anger and sorrow of Artist C enabled, after 32 years, a longed-for burial. The client from the ashes of two and a half years of miscarriages has joyfully given birth to twin girls.

Death has opened me up to my emotions, much of which has been repressed over a lifetime. Consequently, it has brought me into my own authenticity for I can only be truly myself if I am able to express my feelings. In the sacred space of body, my Butoh inspired movement embodies my emotional expression in a way in which I feel utterly heard. With an openness to whatever may unfold, as SME facilitator, this research lays foundation for community sessions with a conscious focus on ‘Grounding Grief’. In conclusion there appears to be no map to grieving, rather we are travelling companions in each other’s journey and through acceptance in relation to our losses we can ‘experience mourning as a creative act of transformation in which each is freed into his or her own destiny’ (Romanyshyn 2013: 75).

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## APPENDIX A

Name...MICHELLE.....WILKINSON.....

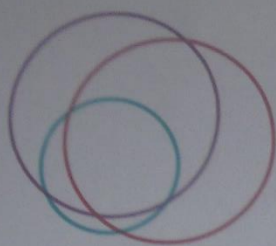


### FACULTY ETHICS COMMITTEE CHECKLIST

Please answer the following questions:

- 1 Does the study involve participants who are unable to give their informed consent (e.g. children, people with severe learning disabilities, unconscious patients etc.) or who may not be able to give valid consent (e.g. people experiencing mental health difficulties)? ☒/NO
  - 2 Does the project raise issues involving the potential abuse or misuse of power and authority which might compromise the validity of participants consent (e.g. relationships of line management or training). ☒/NO
  - 3 Is there any potential risk arising from the project of physical, social, emotional or psychological harm or distress to the researchers, participants or audience? ☒/NO
  - 4 Does the project involve a potential risk of causing shock, offence or outrage to researchers, participants, the audience or public? ☒/NO
  - 5 Does the project involve researchers and/or participants in the potential disclosure of any information relating to illegal activities; the observation of illegal activities; or the possession, viewing or storage of any material (whether in hard copy or electronic format) which may be illegal? ☒/NO
  - 6 Will the deception of participants be necessary during the study? ☒/NO
  - 7 Will the study involve invasion of privacy or access to confidential information about people without their permission (if 'YES' see note below)? ☒/NO
  - 8 Will the study involve any external organisation for which separate and specific ethics clearance is required (such as the NHS; any criminal justice agencies including the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Prison Service, Probation Service or successor organisations)? ☒/NO
  - 9 After completing the Data Protection compliance checklist are there any data protection compliance problems? ☒/NO
- If you have answered 'YES' to any of the above questions then your proposal needs to identify, discuss and explain how you are going to address these issues. It may also be necessary to explain and justify, for example, the choice of research participants, if issues of consent or power relationships are raised. Members of the Ethics Committee can offer guidance if necessary.
  - If you answered 'YES' to question 8, then an application must also be submitted to the appropriate external ethics committee, or, in the case of criminal justice research, to the Home Office for clearance.
  - If you are undertaking the research as part of an undergraduate or taught postgraduate qualification, and you have answered 'NO' to all the above questions and your supervisor is not concerned with the ethical nature of the project, then you need not submit your project for ethics approval. However, it is still incumbent on you to observe the University's rules on ethics in the conduct of your research.
  - All research student registration proposals, irrespective of the outcome of the Faculty Ethics Checklist, need to be submitted to the Faculty Ethics Committee to be dealt with either by Chair's Action or committee.
  - If you have answered 'YES' to any of the above questions, or you have any doubts, or need further information in relation to any of the above questions, consult your Supervisor, Research Degree Tutor (RDT), Dissertation/Project Supervisor or a member of the Faculty Ethics Committee.

All materials submitted to the Research Ethics Committee will be treated confidentially.  
Updated February 2009



**People  
Dancing**

the foundation for  
community dance

## **Professional Individual Member**

### **Membership certificate**

Name: Michelle Wilkinson

Membership number: 28415

Valid from: 1/4/2019 to: 31/3/2020

Insurance benefits policy no.: GBT00190319B\*

\*provided by Bluefin Sport, to be viewed with accompanying Evidence of Cover

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involved in creating opportunities for people  
to experience and participate in dance.

**[www.communitydance.org.uk](http://www.communitydance.org.uk)**

People Dancing is the trading name of Foundation for Community Dance  
LCB Depot, 31 Rutland Street, Leicester LE1 1RE  
Tel: +44 (0)116 253 3453  
Email: [info@communitydance.org.uk](mailto:info@communitydance.org.uk)

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## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This is an invitation to participate in a research project investigating how the unique lived experiences of bereavement translate through artistic expression into a piece of ritual art work. This study is being conducted by Michelle Wilkinson, a student on the MA Dance and Somatic Wellbeing: Connections to the Living Body, at the University of Central Lancashire.

Participation spanning a time period of 7 weeks will involve in weeks 1- 4 meeting once a week for 2 hours. This will take place in a safe and comfortable studio setting. If for any reason, such as illness, you are absent a one-to-one session will be offered in your own art studio at a mutually agreed time. Each session will offer somatic movement education (SME) explorations including tuning into bodily sensations such as breath, responding in movement to inner impulses which organically arise in the body and an engagement in the three primary art mediums of movement/dance, drawing and poetic writing.

These SME sessions sow the seeds for the creation of a reflective piece of ritual art work in week 5. During week 6 there will two group meetings where the ritual art work is to be witnessed, one for those artists desiring an outdoor environment and another for those artists requiring an indoor studio setting. As artist, you will offer a ritual ceremony in which your art work is to be received. Week 7 will provide an opportunity for a period of process reflection which is to be collated in journal format.

You will be asked to keep a journal between each SME session and during subsequent weeks 5-7. This may include writing, drawing, paintings and/or photos. Journals with spiral bindings will be provided so that you can tear out and submit only what you choose to share. Preferably photos can be submitted either via email or in print.

The purpose behind journal submission is to give the lead researcher an opportunity to tune into the resonance of creative expression, how these have emerged from the living body, and extrapolate any themes that may have arisen during the study process. Before final research submission, you are invited to read its findings to ensure they are accurate to the experience of the participants. Photographic and video documentation will take place during the SME sessions and the final ritual artwork ceremonies. Likewise, you will be given the opportunity to view any relevant images and recordings and give or decline permission for their inclusion in the final research documentation.

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks from participating in this research project. If you are uncomfortable at any time within the project, I am available to address your concerns and questions, and/or refer you to additional resources as appropriate. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to refrain from responding to any questions, and to withdraw from this research project at any time, without repercussion.

Any and all information disclosed throughout this research project will be kept completely confidential, including art work, for research purposes only. Additionally, pseudonyms will be used for journals, art work photographic and video images.

By signing this consent form you will be accepting responsibility for your own health and safety.

This is a mutually applicable agreement between lead researcher and artist participants.

If you have any concerns or questions, please contact:

MICHELLE WILKINSON

Email: [michelle@movingnaturally.co.uk](mailto:michelle@movingnaturally.co.uk)

Phone No: 01395 271037

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in a research project conducted by Michelle Wilkinson, MA student at the University of Central Lancashire. I have received a copy of this consent form and a copy of the Bill of Rights for participants in this study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **'GROUNDING GRIEF' RESEARCH PROJECT**

### **BILL OF RIGHTS**

As a participant in this research project you are entitled to

- a verbal and written description of the research aims for this project
- know about the researcher's training and experience
- know what you are doing as participant/co-researcher
- be given confidentiality throughout this project
- ask any questions that you have about this project
- withdraw at any time during this project without repercussion or judgement
- refrain from responding to questions
- refrain from participating in photographic or video documentation
- review the findings resulting from the research project prior to its submission

Research Leader: Michelle Wilkinson

Student on MA Dance and Somatic Wellbeing: Connections to the Living Body

University of Central Lancashire

10<sup>th</sup> April 2019

## APPENDIX B

### Poetic and Journal Writing

#### Artist A

##### Portfolio Words

*Scribing Loss*

*An exploration of love and loss dedicated to my grandmother.*

*Connections through generations*

*Reaching out bringing back*

*Ebb and Flow*

*Evasive memories*

*Tangling of time*

*Purple lines comforting*

*Enveloping*

*You helped me grow*

*Layers adding*

*Circles as cells*

*Glitter and Varnish*

*New Growth*

## **Researcher**

### **Session One**

#### **Response to Artist B's Drawing**

*There is no one way...not one life. It is not neat and ordered. Yet there is pattern in the chaos. Pulled this way and that. Can I meet the shake? Beneath what I present as me. My anger is so near the surface. My frustration over not being able to control the flow of life I'm in...yet it all feels like a gift.*

### **Session Three**

#### **Moving with Artist B in Response to Artist D's Artwork**

*The spaces between so beautiful...the arc...the curves...the connections*

*Without needing to touch...it was there in the energy.*

*The skin speaking to each other*

*Caught in a circular web*

*Then that moment of stillness. A pause in life*

*A marker of time*

*Ready to start again*

### **Solo Session Three**

*Cry me a river...I cried a river over you*

*The loss of hope, possibility, future*

*To cry until tears becomes a river*

*Waters evaporate in the sky*

*Become rain, hail and snow*

*Part of the life cycle*

### **Environmental Solo Session**

*Large lung tears...my tear lungs*

*Drip down blood stained walls*

*Disgust...Distain...Shock...Horror...An Inner smile...Immense Joy*

*The faces of life revealed*

*Returned to the estuary wall seven years hence*

*Wind-swept in westward direction*

*Creating twists and folds*

*Receiving myself*

*In my marker of grief*

## **Artist B**

### **Session Two**

*The space to breathe when breathing is no more*

*The body with no more energy and the soul dissipates into the infinite*

*Freed from the prison of body and mind*

*Released into the forever*

*The limits on the mind – our history, our conditioning and our capacity*

*All that we hold to be important rendered meaningless*

*The rip is released, the tension relaxes...memory fades*

### **Session Three**

*Loss lingers*

*The life lived lingers*

*The life to come loiters*

*The texture of existence can be felt in so many ways*

*The past informs the present*

*Our present determines our future*

*Curves...breath...through to the bones them dry bones*

## **Session Four**

*MARTA*

*You made me laugh till I cried*

*Marta, I can't believe you have died*

*Your charm a sweetness was such a delight*

*Following the laughter around the room*

*You were like a torch in the gathering gloom.*

*With your eyes wide open, occasionally a frown*

*There was never a question that you were a clown*

*The delight that came when we heard sound from your mouth*

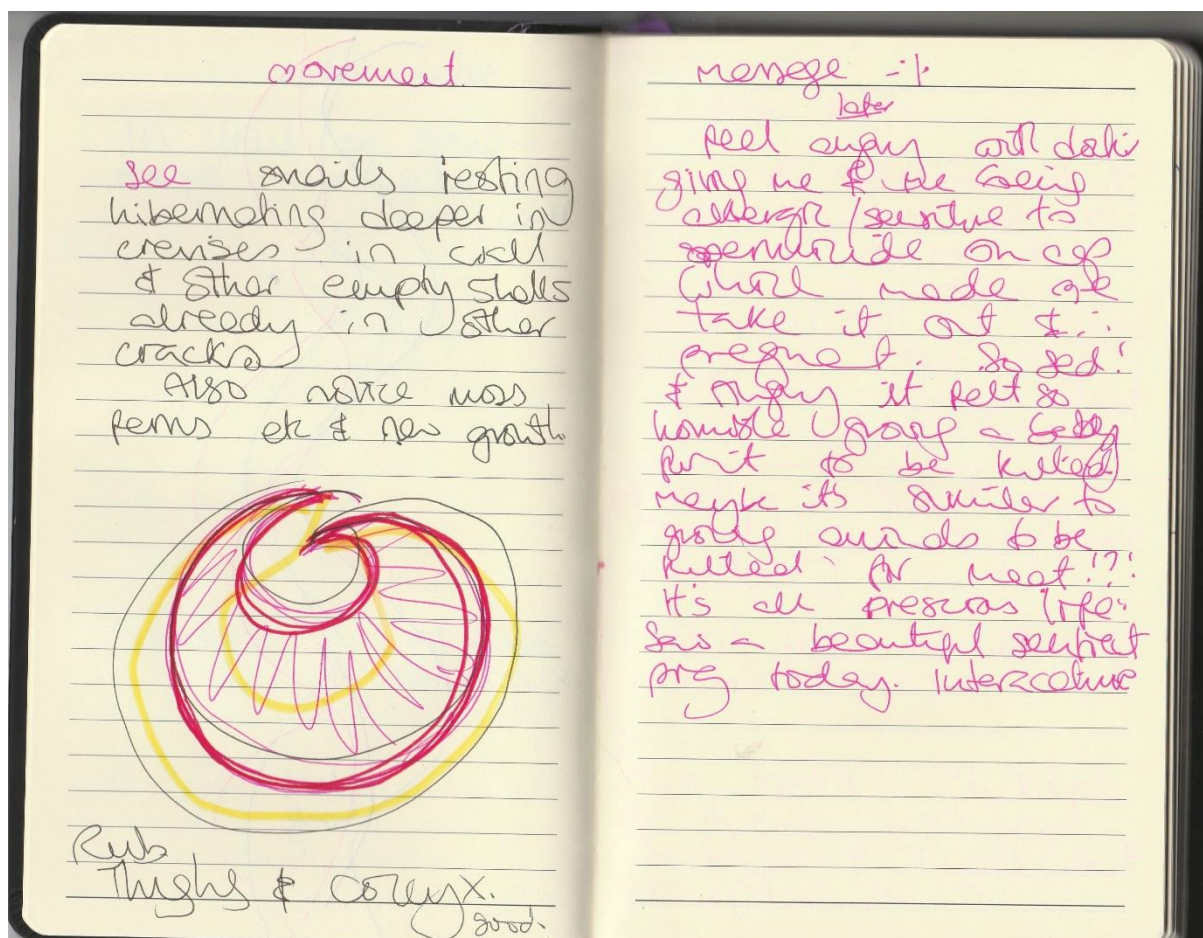
*Creating smiles and laughter*

*North, West, East and South*

## **Altar Reflection**

*In each session some time was spent contemplating the altar space. Each time I placed either a Buddhist artefact and/or the silver ball that I was working with as a symbol of reflecting and as a solid 'earthly' object through which I could channel the feelings I was experiencing within the sessions.*

Artist C



*All that rage was below grief*

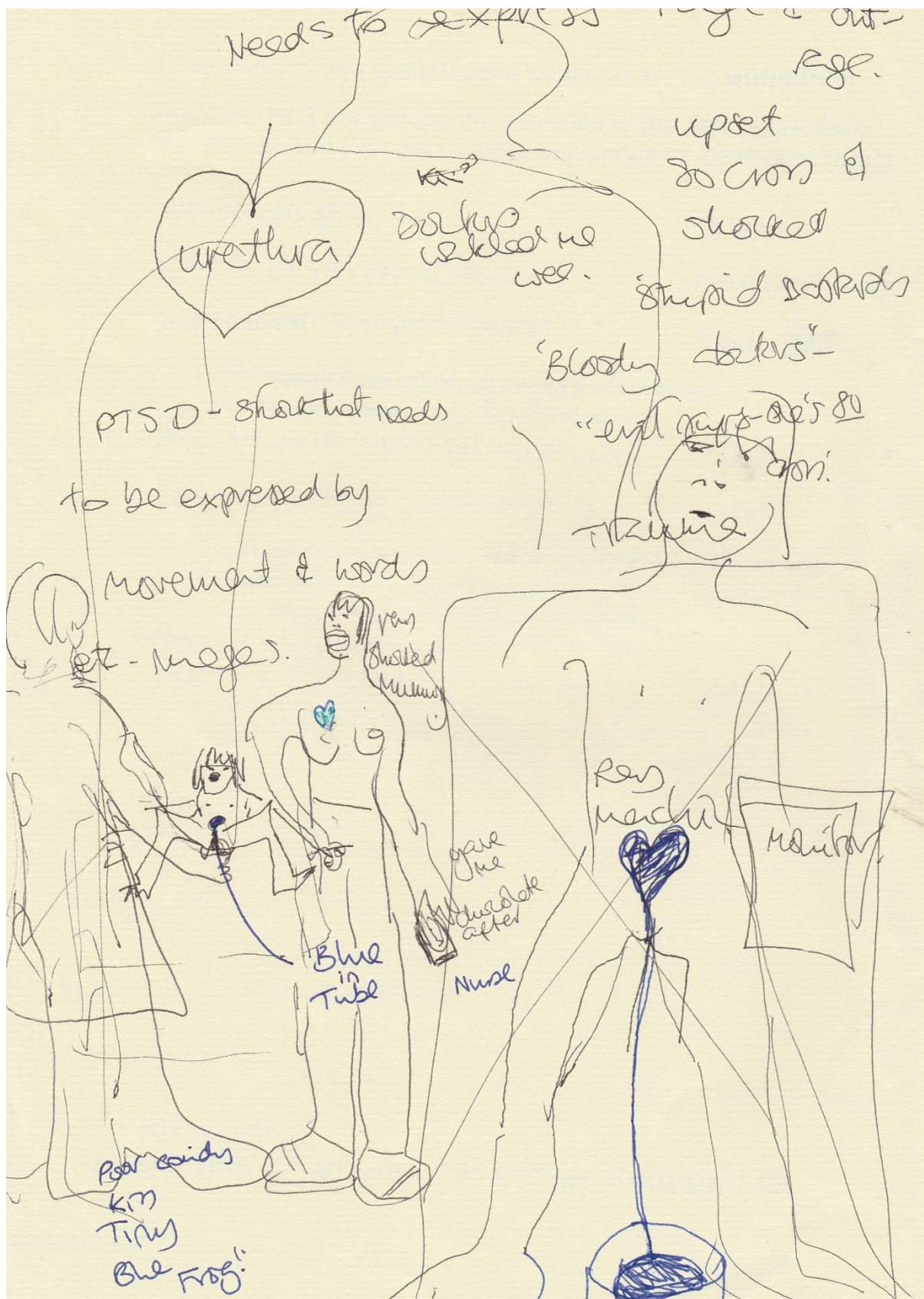
*I felt so much*

*I was very angry with you*

*And with the doctor who suggested the cap without prompting from me*

*By trying to prevent pregnancies*

*He caused one!*



## Artist D

### Dyad Movement Response

*Witnessing the movement inspired by my artwork was amazing, like a coordinated dance. The movers moved in unison bodies arched like a bird, arms hanging like enveloping wings. One mover coiled coming lower to the floor while the other stayed upright spinning with arms outstretched over and around their partner. All the time my body craved touch. Will they make connection. There was disappointment as I felt they came so close moving together in this beautiful dance.*

### Ritual Artwork

*Hello artwork...hello skin. You were once hair on skin and now you have new life as skin in your own right. I love your warmth as we make contact. I love your softness and your strength. You are no longer an image with the meaning that I put on you but have a presence of your own. You can be many things, a cloak to envelop me in and keep me warm. A place of safety where I can look out and survey all that goes on. You bring light shining through your fibres an orange golden glow caresses my skin. You have the potential to be many things wherever imagination takes us.*

*I was a creature in a wool body moving around the room. Not a sheep but some mythical creature. The next moment I shed my skin and it became a protection around my body. It felt warm and soft and was like a garment, like a coat close to my skin; where did either of us begin and end? My winding path was taking my imagination in other directions as I placed my artwork over my head. It felt like an invisibility cloak. I could look out and survey the world from this safe place and I felt like I had protection. At the same time, I could look out and peer through the holes that had not been finished and feel that I had power over the world. I was the one in charge of an entity that was gliding through time. It also seemed to have special powers as the sunlight was making it glow with a wonderful golden light. My ritual artwork had transformed into an entity dance.*

### **Response to Researcher's Ritual Artwork**

*This is the dance of a special life*

*Anger can't lie on the floor*

*It can scream and cry with pain and loss*

*But it costs the earth to heal the soul of the skin*

## APPENDIX C

### Research Images/ Altars



**Figure 1: Session One Altar**



**Figure 2: Session Two Altar**



### Figure 3: Session Three Altar



**Figure 4: Session Four Altar**



**Figure 5: Artist A One-One Session**



**Figure 6: Artist B One-One Session**



**Figure 7: Artist C Solo Outdoor Shrine**



**Figure 8: Artist C's Solo Indoor Shrine**

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Movement/ Drawings/ Ritual Artwork**

#### **1. Researcher**

##### **Session One**



**Figure 1: Red Black & White**

##### **Solo Session One**



**Figure 2: Lung Sorrow**

## **Solo Session Two**



**Figure 3: Blood Loss**

## **Ritual Artwork**



**Figure 4: I cannot See for Tears**

## 2. Artist A

### Session One



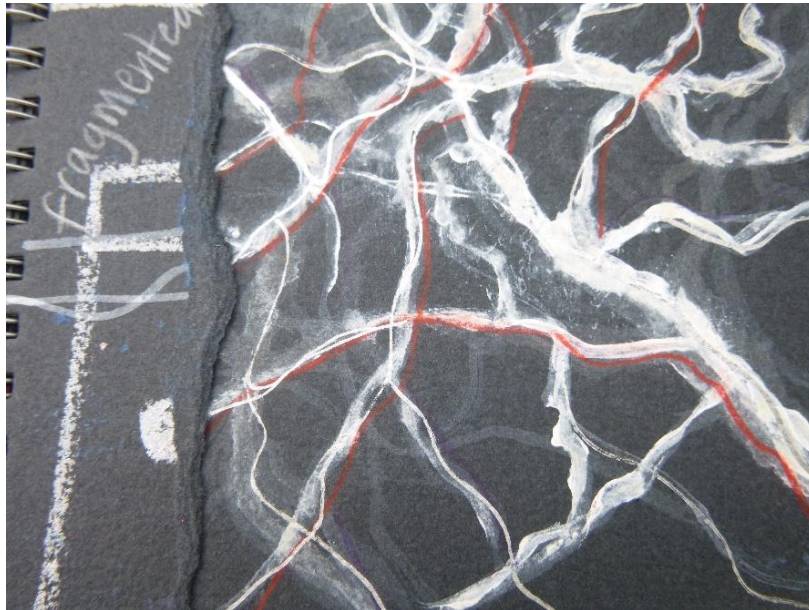
**Figure 5: Reflexive Drawing**

### Session Two



**Figure 6: Cut Away (Portfolio)**

### Session Three



**Figure 7: Fragmented (Portfolio)**

### Ritual Artwork Ceremony



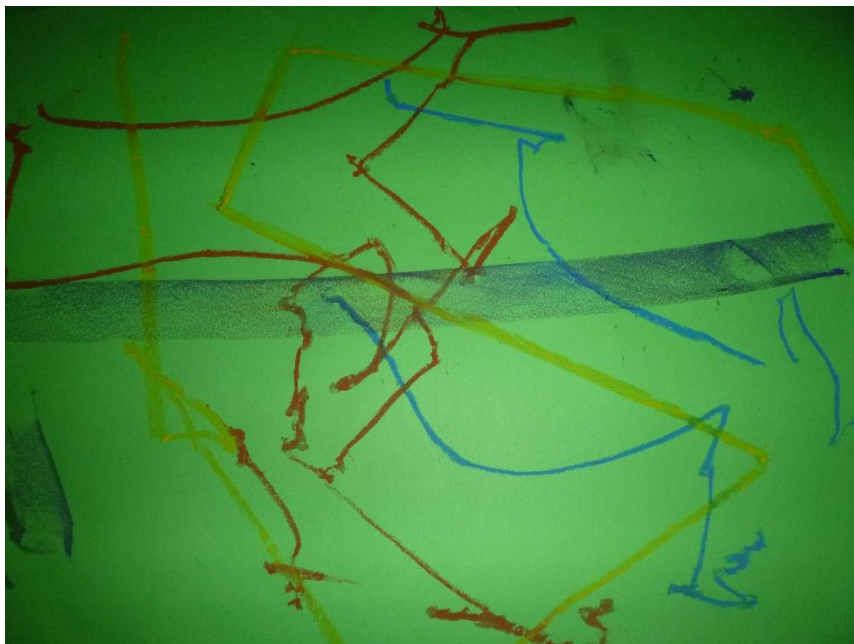
**Figure 8: Telling the Story**

### 3. Artist B

#### Session One



**Figure 9: Authentic Movement**



**Figure 10: Reflexive Drawing**

## Session Four



**Figure 11: Movement Improvisation**

## Ritual Artwork



**Figure 12: Ritual Artwork**

#### 4. Artist C

##### Session Three

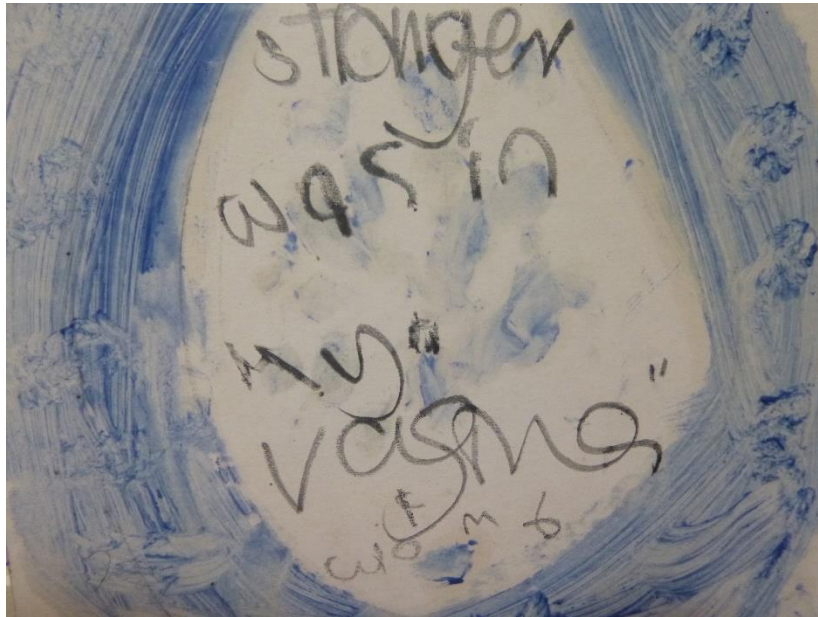


**Figure 13: Authentic Movement**



**Figure 14: Authentic Movement**

## Session Four



**Figure 15: Untitled Painting**



**Figure 16: Earth Pigment Painting**

## 5. Artist D

### Session One



Figure 17: Reflexive Drawing

### Session Two



Figure 18: Reflexive Drawing Seeds for Ritual Artwork

## Session Four



**Figure 19: Movement Improvisation**

## Ritual Artwork



**Figure 20: The Shroud**

## **APPENDIX E**

### **‘Grounding Grief’ Ritual Artwork Video**

**Duration 19 Minutes**