

Embodied storytelling and the ecological entanglements of
distress: practice research of somatic movement through
polycrisis.

Fabienne Formosa

Submitted to Goldsmiths, University of London
As Required for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Visual Cultures

Date: 1st February 2024

Declaration.

I Fabienne Formosa hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented is my own. The knowledge produced through this thesis is informed by verbal conversations, collaborative embodied and non-verbal research with human and more-than-human others. Where I include the work of others, this is always clearly credited and where knowledge is co-produced through movement research with more-than-human others this is always stated, and the sites named.

It is important to state that my observations on the presence of more-than-human collaborators in this work, such as bodies of woods, waters, and cats, do not in themselves provide critical insight into the lived experiences of plants and animals in this research inquiry. In essence, what is documented here is species interaction, with an emphasis on the relational quality that can be translated into written, visual, spoken, non-verbal, and movement languages, rather than, for example, vibrational contributions from more-than-human co-creators.

Through the research I have come to conceive of my citation practice as one of giving thanks. Traditionally in the academy we only cite published work, leaving many who would have directly contributed to the body of work invisible. I am committed to citing the relationships that played a significant role in the creation of my practice research. In this way, I intend the citation practice to perform a conception of the self as interdependent, as well as making ecologies of thinking and feeling visible.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	6
Acknowledgments	8
Abstract	9
1. Chapter One: Introduction	10
1.1 My Story	10
1.1.1 Meditation for Mental Health.....	10
1.1.2 Plant Medicine and the Moving Body.....	15
1.1.3 Insights from the Field.....	16
1.1.4 The Emergence of the Practice Research.....	20
1.1.5 An Overview of this Doctoral Research.....	25
1.2 Why Practice Research?	31
1.2.1 The Practice Research Model.....	31
1.2.2 Ecologies of Thinking: Praxis.....	34
1.2.3 The Multimodal Media Guide.....	35
1.2.4 Introducing the Collaborating Artists.....	37
1.3 Chapters Overview	39
2. Chapter Two: Literature Review	43
2.1 Introduction	43
2.2 Antipsychiatry	44
2.2.1 Mad Studies.....	50
2.2.2 My Point of Entry: The Recovery Narrative.....	60
2.2.3 Ecosophy.....	63
2.3 Embodied Research: Practice as Research	65
2.4 Dance and Movement	70
2.5 The Link with the Environment and Ecology	71
3. Chapter Three: Methodology - Positioning the Self in a Time of Ecological Crisis ..	77
3.1 Introduction	77
3.2 Autoethnographic Methodology	78
3.3 Situated Knowledges	82
3.4 Embodied Therapeutic Culture	85
3.5 The Globalisation of Mental Health and Embodied Practices	87
3.6 A Practice of Self as Methodology	91
3.7 An Ecological Conception of the Self	93
3.8 Embodied Practices	101
3.8.1 Embodiment as a Decolonial Tool.....	102
3.8.2 Embodied Research.....	108
3.9 Post-humanism & Technology	113
4. Chapter Four: Methods Chapter	117
4.1 Introduction	117
4.1.1 An Opening to my Practice.....	117
4.1.2 An Overview of the Research Design.....	119
4.1.3 Introduction to Chapter Contents.....	119
4.2 The Moving Body as an Ecologically Entangled Medium	120

4.3 Research Design	125
4.3.1 Ethical Considerations	125
4.3.2 The Method of Dreaming	131
4.3.3 Site-specific	133
4.3.4 Guided Audios as Method	134
4.3.5 Guided Movement Practice	135
4.3.6 Themed Guided Journey	136
4.3.7 The Weekly Guided Audios	137
4.3.8 Movement Improvisation	155
4.3.9 Voicing and Mark-Making	156
4.4 Digital Methods	157
4.4.1 Documentation	157
4.4.2 Debrief Sessions	158
4.4.3 Debrief Calls	159
4.5 Reflections on the Collaborative Group Work: Meaning-making	161
4.6 Conclusion	163
5. Chapter Five: Thematic Analysis	164
5.1. Context for the Project	164
5.2 Introduction	168
5.2.1 The Materials I Consider for the Analysis	171
5.2.2 The Themed Guided Journey	173
5.2.3 Moving in a Post Covid World	174
5.2.4 Absence	176
5.3 Time and Neoliberalism	178
5.4 Technology	180
5.4.1 Community Engagement	180
5.4.2 Exacerbated Experiences of Distress Caused by World Events	182
5.4.3 Acted as a Conduit for Personal Frustrations	183
5.4.4 Missed Connections	184
5.4.5 Exacerbated Material Inequalities	184
5.5 Eco-Somatics	186
5.5.1 The More-than-human as a Partner in Movement Practice	186
5.5.2 Illness: On Environments and the Porousness of the Body	194
5.6 Practice Research Outcomes	202
5.6.1 Dance and Movement	202
5.6.2 Untangling the Knots: Resistance as a Way into Movement Practice	203
5.6.3 The Camera as Gaze	206
5.6.4 Mark-Making and Resistance	212
5.6.5 Radical Inclusion	214
5.7 Companion Species	217
5.7.1 Non-human Animal Teachings	218
5.7.2 (Unexpected Stories About) Joy and Playfulness	225
5.8 Socio-political Entanglements	230
5.8.1 Material Environments: Housing	230
5.8.2 The Personal in Political Entanglements: Hong Kong	237
5.9 Conclusion	240
6. Chapter Six: Conclusions and Considerations for Further Research	241
6.1 Introduction	241
6.1.1 The Aims of the Praxis	241
6.1.2 The Themed Movement Journey	241
6.1.3 What I did and why	242

6.2 The Political Potential of the Body to Disrupt Hegemonic Forms of Power.....	242
6.3 Contribution to Mad Studies Scholarship.....	243
6.4 Embodied Practice as a Decolonial Tool Outcomes.....	243
6.4.1 Contribution to Non-Hierarchical Practice.....	244
6.4.2 Being in Relationship with the More-than-human: Becoming.....	244
6.4.3 Practice Research and Legitimacy of Knowledges: Decolonising the Academy.....	245
6.5 Collective Meaning-making and Group Work Outcomes.....	246
6.6 A Practice that can be Shared.....	247
6.7 Time and Neoliberalism.....	248
6.7.1 Radical Inclusion in the Dance World.....	248
6.7.2 Self-care.....	248
6.8 Conclusion.....	249
6.9 Limitations of this Study and Considerations for Future Research.....	249
Bibliography.....	253
Appendix.....	262
Section A: Guided Scores (Written versions).....	262
Section B: Informed Consent Form.....	285
Section C: “Long but Important E-mail”.....	298

List of Figures

Figure 1. "emerging" automatic drawing.....	12
Figure 2. Still from "unearthing body memories in Brixton, London, UK", Video.....	15
Figure 3. "pushing the sun away", Camden, London, UK, Photo.....	18
Figure 4. "Shrooms", Hampstead Heath, London, UK, Photo.....	19
Figure 5. Still from "pink-orange sky, Dingli Cliffs, Malta".....	20
Figure 6. "paper butterfly", Brixton, London, UK, Photo.....	22
Figure 7. Still from "presence", Video.....	42
Figure 8. "scapegoat" doodle, Photo.....	45
Figure 9. Still from "shadow projections, Highgate Wood, London, UK," Video.....	47
Figure 10. "I created monsters" doodle, Photo.....	50
Figure 11. "difference", St. Pancras, London, UK, Photo.....	51
Figure 12. Still from "fire serpent dance in Queens Wood, UK", Video.....	53
Figure 13. "good grief" doodle, Photo.....	55
Figure 14. "loss" doodle, Photo.....	57
Figure 15. "just be happy" doodle, Photo.....	60
Figure 16. "processing" doodles, Photo.....	63
Figure 17. "wounded healer", Brockwell Park, Brixton, London, UK, Photo.....	69
Figure 18. Still from "Valia_entangled", Video.....	79
Figure 19. "top of the tepee" Photo.....	96
Figure 20. Priiya Prethora "Tracing Faces" Audio.....	102
Figure 21. Still from "Severed Roots" Brixton, London, UK, Audio-Video.....	106
Figure 22. Collaborative artwork, dancingTao "Roots and Culture" workshop, 2017.....	108
Figure 23. "shedding" doodle, Photo.....	110
Figure 24. Still from "greening of the self, Queens Wood, UK" Video.....	123
Figure 25. "dreaming", Camden Lock Regent's Canal, London, photo.....	131
Figure 26. "searching" Sliema, Malta, Photo.....	133
Figure 27. "fire" drumming circle, Hackney Marshes, London, Photo.....	136
Figure 28. "Body Memories" Guided Audio.....	137
Figure 29. "Changing Waters" Guided Audio.....	140
Figure 30. Still from "Amanda_Changing Waters" Video.....	142
Figure 31. "Snaking Ways" Audio Guide.....	144
Figure 32. "blossoming bulbs" Guided Audio.....	144
Figure 33. "sprouting bulbs", Photo.....	145
Figure 34. "blossoming bulb", Photo.....	146
Figure 35. Still from "Priiya_Heavy Balloons", Video.....	147
Figure 36. "Heavy Balloons" Guided Audio.....	148
Figure 37. "heavy balloons" doodle, photo.....	148
Figure 38. Heidi "Heavy Balloons" Drawing, Photo.....	150
Figure 39. Amanda "Heavy Balloons" Drawing, Photo.....	151
Figure 40. "Spider" Onslow Gardens, Muswell Hill, London, UK, Photo.....	152
Figure 41. "Spider Dance" Guided Audio.....	153
Figure 42. "vulva" automatic drawing.....	156
Figure 43. "Juliana Da Silva Queiroz Murilo", Muswell Hill Road, London, UK, Photo.....	164
Figure 44. Still from "finding flow in Queens Wood Cabin" Video.....	175
Figure 45. Still from "Heidi on time and neoliberalism" Video.....	178
Figure 46. Still from "Amanda_Technologies of the Self" Video.....	182
Figure 47. Still from "Amanda Missed Connections" Video.....	184
Figure 48. Still from "Priiya_Moving Outdoors Video".....	186
Figure 49. Still from "The womb of the wood: Queens Wood Clearing", London, UK, Video.....	188
Figure 50. Still from "a meditation on the wind, Lunow-Stolzenhagen, Germany", Video.....	191
Figure 51. Still from "Forest Bathing, Highgate Wood, London, UK" Video.....	194
Figure 52. Still from "movement in stillness, Highgate Wood, London, UK" Video.....	196

Figure 53. A reminder to take a moment to just be. A drawing by Hannah Formosa, 2020.....	198
Figure 54. Still from "Amanda_Untangling the Knots" Video.....	203
Figure 55. Heidi "Blank Pages" Photo.....	204
Figure 56. Still from "sensing lava, Snæfellsjökull Peninsula, Iceland, Video.....	205
Figure 57. Tammy "Writing", Photo.....	207
Figure 58. Still from "Nevena_Mark-Making", Video.....	209
Figure 59. "resistance" doodle, Photo.....	212
Figure 60. Still from "Heidi_ with swiss ball", Video.....	214
Figure 61. "Ladybird Kiss", Glastonbury Tor, UK, Photo.....	217
Figure 62. Heidi "Poison" Photo.....	219
Figure 63. Still from "Heidi and Kahu", Video.....	221
Figure 64. Still from "Priiya Snaking Ways" Video.....	223
Figure 65. "embodying methodology" Photo.....	225
Figure 66. Still from "Amanda_Joy" Video.....	227
Figure 67. Amanda "Body Memories" Photo.....	231
Figure 68. Still from "Priiya_Body Memories", Video.....	233
Figure 69. "Thesis burning fire ceremony", Queens Wood, UK, Video.....	252

Acknowledgments.

My most sincere gratitude to my primary supervisor Dr. Alice Andrews for her dedicated guidance and care. My thinking with Alice infuses the thesis throughout, particularly her continuous invitation to meet resistance with curiosity and disagreements as a commitment to 'staying with the trouble'. It is thanks to Alice's generosity with space and time that I could turn my PhD into a critically engaged playground to experiment with practice and theory in a way that, I hope, proves to be generative. Thanks to my secondary supervisor Dr. Marina Rova whose rich and insightful advice enabled me to carefully consider each choice of method in the creation of the practice. Thanks to the Embodied Research Network for the formative conference, symposium, and for the conviviality.

My thanks to Counterfield collective, my colleagues and friends: Paola Debellis, Dr. Mercedes Fernández Ayarzagoitia, Georgia Perkins, Callum Bradley, Killian O'Dwyer and Marie Crick, whose solidarity and companionship helped me through the madness of doing a PhD and offered me a supportive space to experiment with ideas (as well as have fun) alongside making sense of things. My heartfelt gratitude to the collaborating artists for taking this leap with me, this project would not have been possible without your *invaluable* contributions.

Thanks to my blood family, who taught me everything there is to know about the guiding principles at the heart of my practice – listening to intuition, trusting inner knowing, fearlessly following heart whispers and dancing, *especially* when everything is falling apart. Together with my sisters Rachel, Rebecca and Liza, we learnt about counter-culture, self-organising, non-hierarchical, queer and alternative ways of living from our parents Maria and Manuel. Thanks to the Formosa family wound, serving as the starting point for this project, guiding me on a lifelong path navigating the freedoms, as well as the costs, of living a non-conforming lifestyle. Thank you to my niece Hannah for inspiring me and to my nephew Eli for truth-telling.

My thanks to my chosen family, life companions and allies during this project: Bells Davidson, Heidi Rogers, Matthew Warshaw and Sam Ludford. Dr. Irene Fiordilino for sharing her research on praxis before it was published when the thesis was unravelling. Manuela Benini and Carolina Mota for the inspiration, laughter and magic. It takes a village, they say. I wouldn't have been able to complete the PhD without these relationships and the communities I form part of.

I dedicate this PhD to my nanna, Imelda Bason, who always offered a peaceful haven with a drop of vermouth and a space for twiddling our thumbs. The feline creatures, Kenwood Ladies' Pond, Queens and Highgate woods; my partners in movement, writing, and research.

Abstract.

This practice-based doctoral research is an interdisciplinary study sitting at the intersections of mental health and eco-somatic movement practice. The project is concerned with the ways in which mental distress is treated as the problem and responsibility of individuals rather than a complex intermesh of personal and ecological entanglements. The thesis principally uses autoethnographic and embodied methods to situate this question of the individualised subject within a specific set of concerns. Some of the contemporary issues that feature in the project include the mental health crisis in London, neoliberalism, systemic injustice, and the climate crisis. I analyse how these urgencies matter when considering the material and situated lived experience of distress.

The situated response I establish works from my own applied experience weaving embodied practice with mental health work in a third-sector crisis recovery service in London. Moving within the ecology I was plunged into from the onset of my PhD, somatic movement further led me to develop my practice from within contemporary personal and collective experiences, including ongoing precarious housing situations, climate justice organising in 2019, social lockdowns during the global coronavirus health pandemic in 2020-2021, and the energy and cost of living crisis in London in 2022-2023. These conditions evolved my movement practice during this time to incorporate collaborative group work, as well as outdoor spaces, which form the crux of my research into embodied relationality with the more-than-human.

I write this autoethnographic embodied storytelling in the context of repositioning my practice outside mainstream mental health services, and moving into the field of community arts, wellness and beyond. This re-orientation involved moving across disciplines to experiment with transdisciplinary work and alternative theoretical paradigms to those that orientated my initial training in psychology, deepening and expanding the ecology within which this research unfolds. The research is therefore situated within the activist scholarship of mad studies, posthumanist, new materialist and eco-feminist studies to incorporate an ecological understanding of embodied subjectivities in relationship with the more-than-human.

1. Chapter One: Introduction.

1.1 My Story.

1.1.1 Meditation for Mental Health.

As a white European female growing up in the Christian tradition, more specifically the Roman Catholic dominated culture of the Maltese Islands, reading Eckhart Tolle's "The Power of Now"¹ was life-changing for me. I was socialised to live my life in constant remorse for my past to evade moral condemnation for my sins in my present, in the hope of an eternal life in heaven. Not that it mattered whether I lived a good life or not, for as a woman, I was told that I was born carrying sin in my bones. It was thanks to Eckhart Tolle that I was first introduced to non-Western spiritual practices and the gift of cultivating presence by paying attention to the present moment. Like millions in the West, I am indebted to Eckhart Tolle for making concepts that were completely new to me accessible, and meditation, a way of life that I could share even though I did not grow up in South Asia.

While reading for my undergraduate degree in Philosophy, I took most of my optional modules in Far Eastern Philosophy. Consequently, my personal and academic interest in meditation grew deeper. Toward the end of my studies, I started going to The School of Practical Philosophy in Valletta,² where I learnt about Advaita Vedanta and the philosophy of non-duality. The School of Practical Philosophy in Malta stems from The School of Philosophy and Economic Science in London.³ My learning was led by people who have devoted their lives to teaching the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, the grammatical notions of Sanskrit, the Bhagavad Gita, and who were themselves advanced meditation practitioners. However, the school was predominantly run by local white European scholars, and whilst the teachings were honoured for their spiritual dimensions, meditation was not taught within the cultural lineage of yoga,⁴ as is traditional in India. I learnt focused attention meditation, a meditation technique involving the silent repetition of a mantra visualised around the third eye. Nevertheless, like many in the West, I started practicing meditation as a mental practice, making an enemy of the ego and misunderstanding matter or the body as something that ought to be transcended.

¹ Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, 1st edition (London: Yellow Kite, 2001).

² 'The School of Practical Philosophy in Malta', The School of Practical Philosophy in Malta, accessed 22 November 2021, <http://practicalphilosophymalta.eu/>.

³ 'Welcome to the School of Philosophy and Economic Science', School of Philosophy, accessed 22 November 2021, <https://schoolofphilosophy.org/>.

⁴ By this I mean the school did not run yoga classes and did not teach meditation as a progression from the embodied practice of yoga while I attended the school.

Learning meditation techniques and observing the effects of chanting in Sanskrit on my bodymind led me to pursue an M.Sc in Psychology. In Western Psychology, language is considered to be the main medium for self-reflexivity.⁵ Michel Foucault claims self-verbalisation is a central practice in Western technologies of the self, as can be traced from the Greek practice of note-taking, evolved into the Christian practice of confession and further developed into the “talking cure” in contemporary self-help and pop psychology discourses.⁶ Michal Pagis observes how the key features of therapeutic cultures consistently include self-verbalisation, chronicling observations about the self and internal feelings, engaging the dialogical self through inner dialogues, and talking with the aim of increasing awareness and gaining insight about one’s internal reality.⁷ For non-Western embodied⁸ practices and techniques to be incorporated in global therapeutic culture, they had to be “secularized” and “adapted” to Western psychological individualised understandings of bodyminds. Therefore, this leads me to deduce that self-reflection, as a valued way of gaining self-knowledge in Western culture, may differ considerably from other technologies of the self that have infused contemporary wellness culture and are customarily suspicious of language and internal dialogue as a channel for self-knowledge.⁹

During my master’s, I learnt the open monitoring meditation technique called Vipassanā meditation at a ten-day silent retreat in Herefordshire.¹⁰ This meditation practice is taught by S.N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, an Indian teacher who was born in Burma and then moved to India to teach meditation. Vipassanā meditation originated in Southeast Asia and involves a discipline of scanning sensations on the body in a cyclical fashion for the pursuit of enlightenment, according to the Buddhist tradition. The retreat involves refraining from verbal and non-verbal communication to turn one’s attention inward and forgo all technological devices giving access to the outside world (including any reading or writing materials). Every day, I was woken up by the sound of a ringing bell at 4 am and meditated for 11 hours in a hall with other practitioners for 10 days. It was one of the most painful and uncomfortable experiences of my life. I was suddenly confronted with my internal voice, a voice I hadn’t realised had become cynical, and painful emotions I had spent the year trying to self-medicate away resurfaced. Up until then, I had only practiced meditation sitting in a comfortable position in a chair or lying down. This practice required everybody able sitting cross-legged for the whole duration of the meditation. By day 8, I started

⁵ Mead and Vygotsky cited in Daniel Nehring et al., eds., *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures*, 1st edition (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 177.

⁶ Michel Foucault cited in Nehring et al., 1.

⁷ Nehring et al., 177.

⁸ By embodied I understand the act of embodying and the conscious state of awareness of the bodymind as an integrated unit i.e the state of being embodied.

⁹ Nehring et al., *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures.*, 177.

¹⁰ ‘Vipassana Meditation’, accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.dhamma.org>.

having out-of-body experiences. I had the opportunity to speak to one of the teachers sitting on the retreat, who advised me to open my eyes when it happened and let the seeing that I am in my body bring me back to feeling grounded.



Figure 1. "emerging" automatic drawing.

- fab

The process of cultural translation developed as monks and teachers in India encountered a growing need to use language about yoga and meditation teachings that made sense to European and American travellers who did not have a Buddhist or Hindu background.¹¹ Cultural translation is the use of Western psychological language to explain Eastern embodied practices to a Western audience. This translation process continued to evolve as more teaching schools were established to interpret Eastern practices in a secular context, without the spiritual jargon.¹² Even though the focus for many non-Western alternative healing techniques is aimed at “stilling” or “silencing” the “noise” created by the ruminating mind,¹³ in practices like Yoga and meditation - techniques that have roots in Hindu and Buddhist traditions with deeply spiritual beliefs - we turn to the body as a channel for self-healing and self-knowledge.¹⁴ Given that Western practices are traditionally

¹¹ McMahan cited in Nehring et al., *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures.*, 177.

¹² Wilson cited in Nehring et al., 179; Susan Bassnett, “Postcolonialism and/as Translation,” *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, September 1, 2013.

¹³ Nehring et al., 177.

¹⁴ By self I understand here an expanded sense of self, an interdependent self where the healing of the self is not separate from the healing of the other and the world.

focused on the verbalisation of the self, and the process of cultural translation does not always involve the cultural differences informing the worldview of non-Western audiences when techniques are extracted from their cultural specificity and lineage is overlooked, the process of cultural translation can be problematic.

Retrospectively, I observed that as a result of learning meditation techniques in a Western context, I missed out on the way meditation is traditionally taught in India. Like many people learning meditation in the West for well-being, I misunderstood meditation as a discipline predominantly focused on “stilling” the mind. Little did I realise that the battles I fought with my mind for not falling still were because meditation was probably not the best thing for me at the time. It was increasing my anxiety as I practiced to dissociate rather than to enhance my felt sense and embodied awareness.¹⁵ Years later, when I started practicing yoga, I learnt that traditionally in India, meditation follows from a yoga practice. When meditating after yoga, the mind effortlessly falls still, and the experience of peace arises,¹⁶ but after engaging the body, not as a separate practice from it. This leads me to suggest that in the secularisation and translation processes of non-Western practices to the West, sometimes, important dimensions get lost. As Western practitioners, we seem to pick and choose what we want and need to utilise. However, in plucking techniques from their cultural lineage, we are also taking practices out of important contexts that may be relevant to some people’s experiences. It may even be dangerous and detrimental to some of us rather than bringing calm and tranquillity.

Even though, like many Westerners, I am indebted to cultural translation processes that made non-Western concepts and practices accessible to me, there were also dangers and pitfalls in learning meditation techniques outside of their cultural specificity. As a European, misunderstanding meditation as a practice of mind resulted in a widening gap between body and mind because, as a psychologist, I was interested in what I could extract from meditation as a cognitive training tool to enhance my cognitive capacities. This suggests that when translating non-Western practices to Western audiences, there are also significant cultural differences in conceptions of the embodied self, namely, the difference in the interconnectedness between body and mind, and dualism, that are also important to translate if misconceptions are to be avoided. The only way we can do this, I argue, is by teaching techniques within their cultural lineage, as part of a whole, to show how they follow on from other practices and may even be dependent on a shift in worldview and not just extracted for their cognitive enhancing capacities or well-being benefits.

¹⁵ The philosopher and psychologist Eugene Gendlin coined the term felt sense to refer to the connection between the body and the mind as experienced in the form of subtle bodily sensations.

¹⁶ In Buddhism, the experience of peace gets its chance by attending to suffering and interdependence, rather than turning from it, so the experience of healing may be different from what many have come to expect in the West.

Given the focus on language in Western culture and, by implication, the emphasis on thought and self-reflection as a vehicle for gaining insight into oneself in order to gain self-knowledge, one can see why non-Western practices like meditation, with a focus on stilling the mind, are appealing to Western audiences, especially people who are experiencing high levels of anxiety and are generally tormented by their own mind. However, whilst this may bring peace to a person with an assumed sense of embodiment, it may lead to dissociation and increased levels of anxiety for a person whose worldview is informed by a split between body and mind due to the Cartesian dualism inherited from the Enlightenment.

I open this chapter with autoethnographic material about my experience as a researcher to problematise the translation of “non-western” practices into the West and to make an argument for embodiment. By drawing from my personal experience, I can show why I chose embodied research methodologies for my project. Having shown how cultural translation of non-Western practices for Western audiences without teaching cultural specificity can be problematic, I will, in my research, be able to frame how I approach the moving body as a decolonial tool to undermine hierarchies of being and legitimacies of knowledges in the neoliberalisation and globalisation of mental health.¹⁷

¹⁷ See section 3.5.

1.1.2 Plant Medicine and the Moving Body.

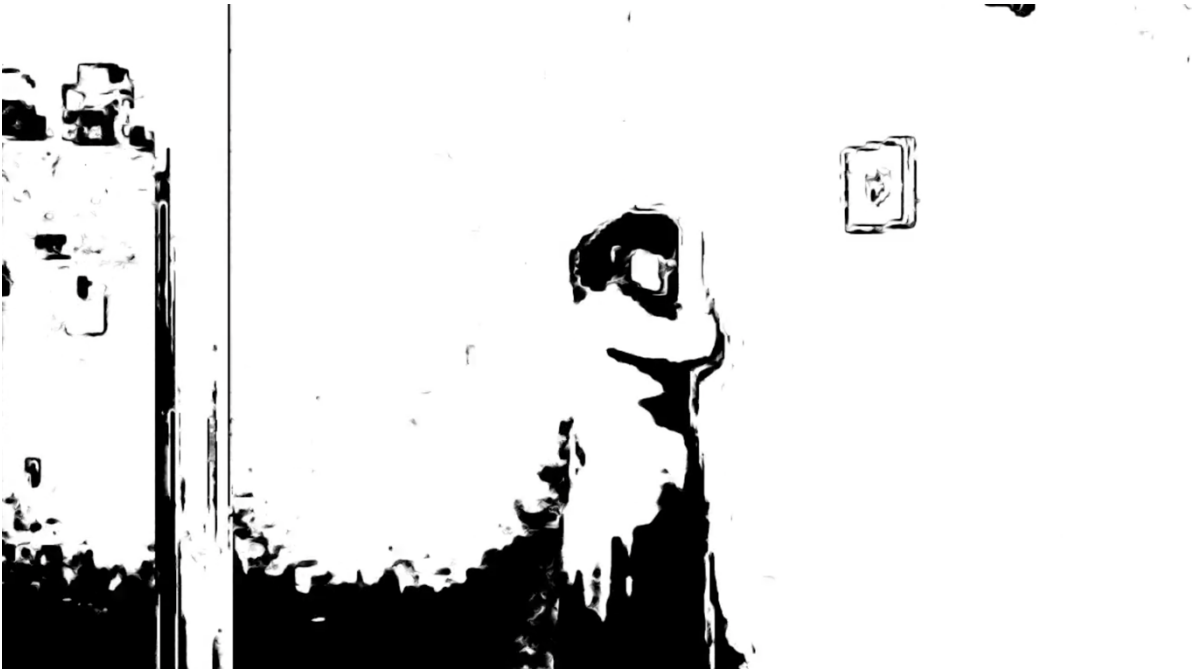


Figure 2. [Still from “unearthing body memories in Brixton, London, UK”](#), Video.

Transcript

I am. I am a woman. I am awake, asleep, conscious at times, consciously unconscious at other times. I am light and dark and everything in between. I find myself in movement, in the ecstasy of dance, in the joy of surrendering to dancing with my shadow, and in stillness as I sit with the crows to meditate under Frida, my mother, my tree.

I don't think I ever told you of Frida, have I? She is a magnificent oak tree that lives in Peckham Rye Park. I still remember the day she whispered to me first and welcomed me into her. I had just been to the Peyote ceremony in a tepee in a magical garden of a family house. It was on the same night I had my first Temazcal experience. I remember my head pounding that night. Partly because of the Temazcal, but also because I had told the Shaman¹⁸ that my biggest fear that night, of working with the plant medicine for the first time, was that I would shit myself and I wasn't given any food because of this. I remember how scared I was of the earth and having the earth on me. We said, “To all my relations”, and had to kneel our way into the Temazcal. It was humbling, kneeling my way inside as I sat on the moist earth and fell into darkness.

¹⁸ I give thanks to my ceremony guide Rafa Semilla who works with the Wixárika lineage and the indigenous people of Mexico. This experience marked the beginning of my ongoing practice with the felt sense. 'Inti & Waira Events', Inti & Waira House, 27 January 2024, <https://intiwairahouse.com/events>.

After the fire spoke to me that night,¹⁹ I went home and felt angry. I didn't know that the grandfather spirit would stay with me long after the grandfather circle ended.

It was Frida that held me. I remember her swishing and swaying and how the wind embraced me as I moved toward her. I spent months on my knees purging and purging what felt like not only stories of this life, but what also felt like stories of lives that have long passed. It would rise from within me, a coil that would unravel, and as it unravelled, I purged and purged some more. I clung onto her as I purged and felt her strength come into me. I would go to her morning and night, and as worlds surfaced in my body to pull and contract, she held me still.

One of the reasons I struggled with containment and going into lockdown was because of having my movements contained. I wondered, how will I survive without the freedom to move, to wander, to dance? Then my friend Eloise sent me a podcast by Charles Eisenstein,²⁰ and in it, one woman shares her story of relating with a tree, and through meditating and caring for this tree, this woman observed that "it is our mobility as humans that tricks us into feeling separate from the earth." "The tree", this woman says, "doesn't have any problem with feeling separate from the earth. The tree doesn't have superiority, inferiority, equality complexes. Because of our mobility, we have the illusion of separateness."

- fab

1.1.3 Insights from the Field.

Following the completion of my M.Sc in Psychology, I started working in the mental health field with the intention of exploring the possibility of later pursuing a doctorate in Clinical Psychology.

Through immersing myself in work with others whilst simultaneously embarking on my own healing journey, which has also included personal therapy,²¹ I learnt that the distress that I was personally

¹⁹ My thanks to one of the fire guardians, Sean Chiddy, who turned to me and asked me "have you spoken to the fire?" It is thanks to Sean and his insistence that I speak to the fire that this moment marks the beginning of my relationship with the fire serpent and psychedelic medicine. Sean was working as a therapist for the NHS at the time. He now works at a healing centre in Soltara in Peru, where they work with indigenous Peruvian Shipibo healers.

²⁰ 'Podcasts | Podcasts', 21 December 2021, <https://charleseisenstein.org/podcasts/>.

²¹ My thanks to the low-cost therapy scheme at the Gestalt Therapy Centre, Camden, and the free drop-in and counselling service The Caravan in the St. James Courtyard, Piccadilly, that made it possible for me to access therapy when I would not have been able to afford it otherwise. Whilst I am critical of psychological therapies that focus exclusively on personalising narratives, the Gestalt and Transpersonal approaches to therapy enabled me to explore my personal narrative whilst navigating experiences of crisis. I make use of verbal therapies whenever I need a removed person and process that is not a close loved one. In this sense, I do not consider movement and verbal processing as mutually exclusive but rather as potentially mutually enhancing depending on the needs and the context. 'Counselling and Psychotherapy Training', The Gestalt

experiencing due to unstable housing, for example, was not only a personal problem but a shared and systemic one. Similarly, as we moved through a web of ecological crises i.e “polycrisis” in 2020,²² with the climate crisis on the one hand and the global coronavirus pandemic on the other, I could directly observe the shared dimensions of distress as they became more visible, and material inequities exacerbated.

Centre, accessed 11 January 2024, <https://gestaltcentre.org.uk/>; ‘The Caravan’, SJP, accessed 29 July 2024, <https://www.sjp.org.uk/social-justice/caravan-counselling/>.

²² Financial Times editor and economic historian Adam Tooze coined the term “polycrisis” in 2022 which refers to a cluster of intersecting crises with compounding effects posing grave and long-term risks. This term was therefore incorporated retrospectively into the thesis as the research was conducted during the time this phenomenon was emerging.



Figure 3. “pushing the sun away”, Camden, London, UK, Photo.

“I know it’s a little bit weird, but I’m finding all this sunshine unsettling,” I told my therapist in a session yesterday. Today, I went to do a shift in a crisis recovery house, and we had two people go to the tracks while experiencing suicidal ideation, one of whom was actively self-harming and 4 out of 12 people on increased welfare checks, as part of our suicide prevention strategy. One of the two people who went to the train tracks requested hospital admission. The ambulance couldn’t come to help with the second client as emergency services were holding back calls due to insufficient resources to respond to increased incidents. This feels like Christmas all over again. All human emotions are valid, regardless of how bright it is out there. You don’t have to feel happy. If you’re not ecstatic that it’s sunny, you are not alone, just reach out.²³

- fab

²³ Thanks to Samaritans for the work they do – a 24-hour helpline run by volunteers in the UK. ‘Samaritans - Here to Listen’, Samaritans, accessed 11 January 2024, <https://www.samaritans.org/>.



Figure 4. "Shrooms", Hampstead Heath, London, UK, Photo.²⁴

²⁴ I include this photo of "magic mushrooms" graffiti, sometimes referred to by their street name "shrooms", to acknowledge the vital role psilocybin has played in my practice research. I started microdosing with psilocybin while performing the literature review of this project. The effects of psilocybin often helped me see the project from a fresh perspective, especially when feeling stuck on a problem. I later started using psilocybin therapeutically to aid my healing process. Whilst somatic movement is an excellent practice to enhance the felt sense and uncover hidden memories, like many practitioners, researchers and educators within the field of psychedelic research, I hold that psychedelics are powerful tools to aid therapeutic and creative processes, especially when dealing with complex trauma. Like other medicinal plants and fungi, if psilocybin is abused, it may turn to poison and may have adverse consequences. I also find it important to integrate the insights gained through the psychedelic experience with guided embodied, verbal and creative practices. "PsyCare UK Welfare & Harm Reduction" <https://www.psycareuk.org> is a network of trained professionals to aid with the integration of psychedelic experiences.

1.1.4 The Emergence of the Practice Research.

I start this thesis with autoethnographic material on how my practice research emerged. I do so by building a self-narrative²⁵ about my experience as a researcher to establish how my professional creative practice emerged in the context of my work in mental health institutions, and later repositioning outside mainstream mental health services in alternative health and online, using digital environments, during the Coronavirus pandemic. I weave this with material that I have produced through an ongoing personal creative practice working with somatic movement to evidence the important role of autoethnographic methodologies in this context.

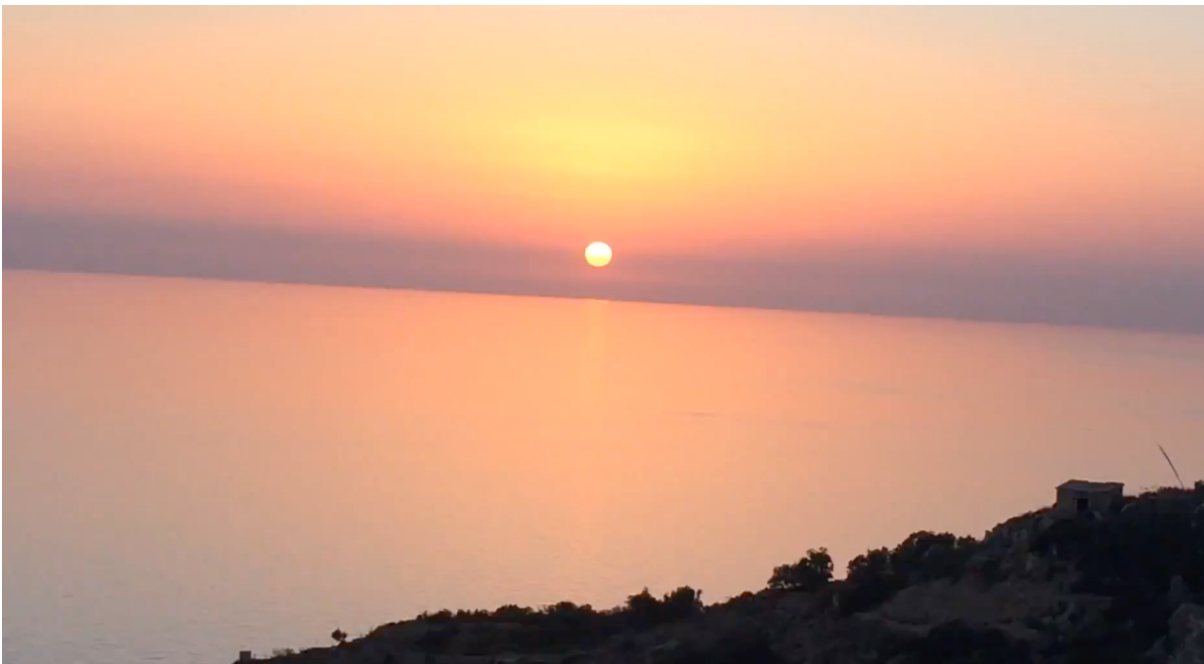


Figure 5. [Still from “pink-orange sky, Dingli Cliffs, Malta”](#).²⁶

“We took them to the edge and bade them fly. They held on. “Fly!” we said. They held on. We pushed them over the edge. And they flew.”

- Guillaumen Apollinaire²⁷

And fly into the pink-orange sky, I must.

²⁵ By self-narrative, I am referring to autobiographical narrations of self/inner monologues/ narratives we share with others that refer to self.

²⁶ Dingli Cliffs are a scenic point in Malta. Geographically Malta is a slope making Dingli Cliffs one of the most popular sites for people that want to take their life effectively, as told by my godmother and tour guide Natasha Farrugia.

²⁷ Guillaumen Apollinaire cited in Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*, 1st edition (Rider, 2008).

Holding space for creative bodymind practices at Islington Crisis House was, in all its different rhythms, like dancing a soul dream. I am grateful for all the grassroots activist networks I form part of whose ceaseless solidarity and contagious passion for social and systemic justice has nourished me through my time working in mainstream services, urged me to confront and contest outdated modes of working and visibly or invisibly, enabled me to search for and bring to fruition an embodied way to work with people experiencing distress. I would not have been able to create a space that allowed people an alternative way to encounter themselves, myself, in the role of a health professional, their bodies, their minds and their experience of crisis in the way that I did if I wasn't nourished by the artist and activist communities I am held by.

Setting up a creative practice and working with alternative understandings of distress at Islington Crisis House was quite the whirlwind; from navigating the fury of bureaucratic processes, dreaming and weaving with collaborators, aching and grieving but still believing when no one showed up and trusting that the seeds were germinating underground when it felt dark and quiet. From exquisite moments of pure joy when people did engage, and magical things happened. To feeling the density that threatened to eat everything up, disbanding all the groups after 7 months of watering and tending when it was still too fragile and couldn't survive pandemic-hit London. To choosing to trust, breathing out, letting it all go and gasping in pure joy again as I watched all the work, all the planting, the seeding, and the sowing unexpectedly take root and shoot into more intimate one-to-one work. Organically, it blossomed, despite the hostile conditions,²⁸ it flourished, and it turned out to have a life of its own, albeit short; it was sweet and tender. It was meaningful to me to be able to share my practice with people there and to see people make it their own.

²⁸ I elaborate on the hostile conditions I am referring to here which generated the urgency for the research in the next section where I discuss how the Recovery Model, and the way it has been appropriated by mainstream mental health services was disrupted.

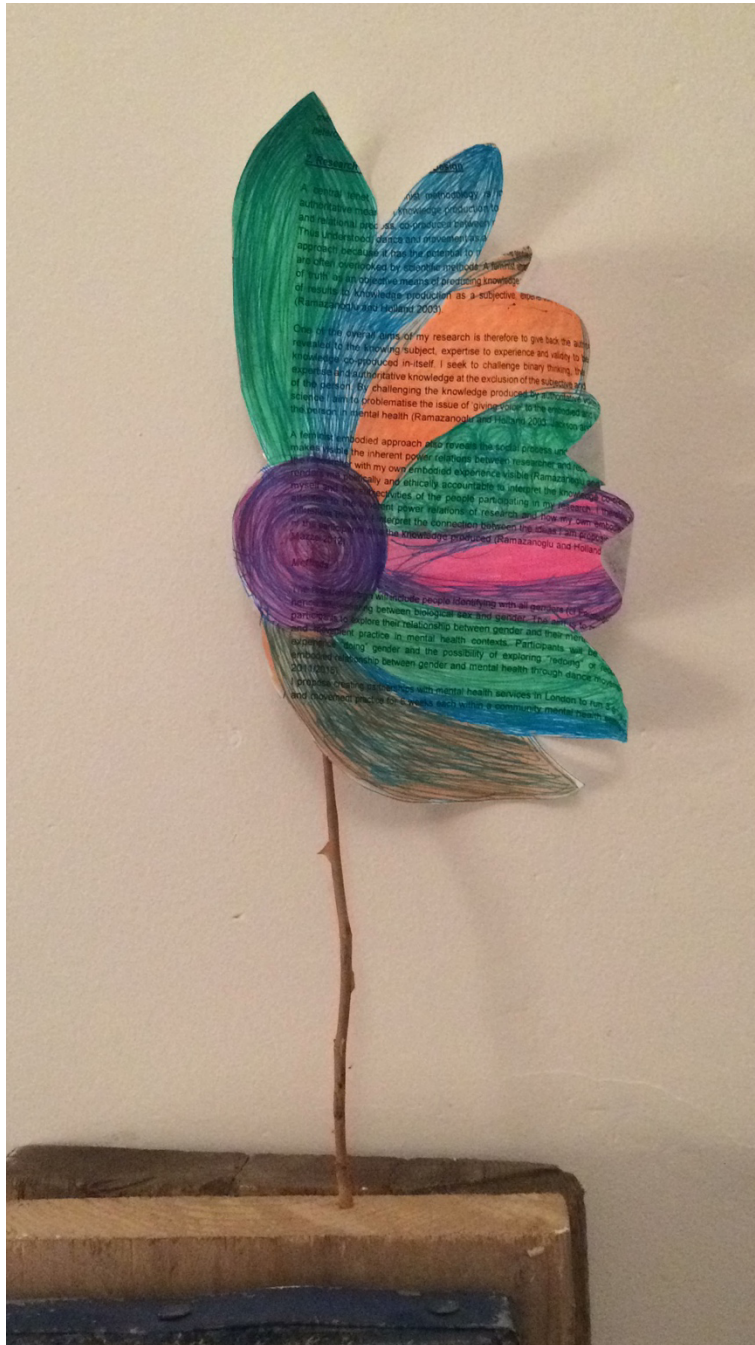


Figure 6. “paper butterfly”, Brixton, London, UK, Photo.²⁹

- fab

²⁹ This is an example of how creative process informed my thinking for this project. I elaborate on the multimodal media and the rationale behind the application of this methodology in this project in section 1.2.3.

In the early stages of the project, I was planning to carry out the practice research component through my role offering creative bodymind practices at Islington Crisis House - a crisis recovery service operating on the Recovery Model in London.³⁰ Seven months into the launch of the practice, the global Coronavirus pandemic hit London. In anticipation of the peak of the pandemic, psychiatric wards had to be cleared as much as possible to make beds available for the number of patients that were expected to need critical care due to Covid-19. Overnight, wards became places only for people who were an imminent risk to themselves or others. People's suitability to stay on wards was being determined not according to normalcy but by posing the question: is this person an imminent threat to themselves or others?

During the pandemic, I observed all discourses of normalisation, clinical responsibility, and recovery being suspended to deal with the imminent threat of the virus. We were no longer discussing if the person had capacity or not, that is, if they were able to retain information, weigh information, whether they were responding to voices or unseen stimuli – normalisation and recovery were no longer the issues of concern. The pandemic troubled the concept of Recovery as understood in mainstream mental health services and started exposing mental health as a shared experience of vulnerability when living in a time of circumstantial uncertainty and distress.

Due to the social distancing measures that were implemented by the service, all the groups I was facilitating, including groups I was co-facilitating with volunteers, were disbanded. Observing these changes in understandings of mental health on the wards, the crisis recovery service and experiences of mental distress³¹ increasingly becoming shared experiences in the wider population, led me to further experiment with shifting the practice research outside of the institution and to explore moving back and forth between my own embodied dance movement practice and an online storytelling group I started running with climate crisis activists called "Climate Café".³² My practice at the crisis recovery service led me to move the practice research outside of the institution to collaborate with other embodied practitioners and dance movement artists in the wider population.

³⁰ This practice research emerged from five years of working in third-sector crisis recovery mental health services in London, operating on the dominant approach of the Recovery Model. I discuss the history of the Recovery Narrative, how it has been co-opted by third-sector mental health services in the UK and how this was my entry point into the scholarship on critical mental health in sections 1.1.5, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

³¹ I situate the practice research in the social framework of mad studies and refer to mental health issues as "distress", which includes diversity in mad experience and people identifying with the designation "neurodiverse". I elaborate on the history of the field of mad studies in 2.2.1.

³² My thanks to Bess Herbert, daughter of one of the women of Greenham Common, who came up with the idea for the climate café and created a space for us to create and feel together in a time of crisis. It was through meeting with Bess, the other facilitators, Oliver Furlong, who ran the poetry group, Cathy Eastburn, who introduced us to Joanna Macy's *The Work that Reconnects* and the participants, that I conceived my practice to be a form of embodied storytelling. I include all these details here to show how it is thinking with a community of people through practice that forms my contribution to knowledge.

Even though there were many speculations about how the Coronavirus pandemic emerged, one that struck me the most was the UN's environment chief, Inger Anderson, who linked Covid-19 to the destruction of wildlife and the climate crisis in an article in the Guardian entitled "Coronavirus: 'Nature is sending us a message', says UN environment chief"³³ saying that "“never before have so many opportunities existed for pathogens to pass from wild and domestic animals to people”... “Our continued erosion of wild spaces has brought us uncomfortably close to animals and plants that harbour diseases that can jump to humans.” As biologists Lantham and Woolhouse suggest, “75% of all emerging infectious diseases come from wildlife.”³⁴ This and an emerging array of other scientists believe that the Coronavirus pandemic is intimately connected, and potentially, but one of the ensuing pandemics resulting from the climate crisis suggests that we cannot consider the impact of one crisis without the other.

Nevertheless, in the first few months of launching the project in the service, before the pandemic, I experienced low levels of engagement with all group activities, despite the high turnover of clients and diverse client group using the two-week service. The experience of attempting to set up a well-being sub-service in a 2-week stay crisis recovery service was important for my project because it was this practical experience of offering embodied practices there that informed my decision to situate my research outside of mental health institutions to work with the wider public. How such work sits with the commissioned partnership agreement of the particular service and borough in London, relationship with local NHS mental health units, community teams and other mental health services offering activity-based, creative art therapies and social prescriptive services would be important service user research. However, an in-depth analysis of the structural issues of the service is outside the parameters of this project since the scope of the project does not focus on crisis recovery services and service user engagement.

My work at the crisis recovery service taught me that being “in crisis” requires a certain level of sensitivity and gentle care that can only be attained over longer periods than that allowed within the timeframe of this research project. Facilitating the delicate process of challenging deeply entrenched power hierarchies and systemic oppressive normative structures with people who have become accustomed to taking the passive role of “the patient” (even though the service is designed to be person-centred) may require a long-term process. Although some people may be ready to step into their power, it would be unethical to try and offer such an intervention without

³³ Damian Carrington Environment editor, 'Coronavirus: 'Nature Is Sending Us a Message', Says UN Environment Chief', *The Guardian*, 25 March 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/coronavirus-nature-is-sending-us-a-message-says-un-environment-chief>.

³⁴ L. H. Taylor, S. M. Latham, and M. E. Woolhouse, "Risk Factors for Human Disease Emergence," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences* 356, no. 1411 (July 29, 2001): 983–89.

providing adequate long-term aftercare. It quickly became evident that, with the resources I had available to me, I did not have the capacity to hold the complex and varied responses that sometimes emerge from people's initial engagement with embodied practices.

I was, therefore, faced with deciding whether to step into a more prescriptive role to increase engagement with the practice. This would have required assuming the expert role and working with a traditional power hierarchy based on me as the facilitator holding the expertise. It could have become another form of oppression in addition to sanism, capitalism, neoliberalism³⁵ and patriarchy. Instead, I chose to come to terms with the time and space that some clients who may be unfamiliar with embodied practices may need for the process to unfold organically and for the practice to be led by their own embodied responses. Introducing participants to embodied practice to enable engagement with the project would have required additional resources and a longer timeline. This decision led me to move my practice research to work with other embodied practitioners instead of taking a top-down approach to my work with clients at the crisis recovery service. This shift in focus enabled me to preserve the integrity and ethics of my mental health work, safeguarding the delicate process that a person experiencing a mental health crisis may need when working in mental health institutions.

1.1.5 An Overview of this Doctoral Research.

As an embodied practice researcher working at the intersections of mental health and the arts, I became interested in the way in which mental distress is treated as the problem and responsibility of individuals rather than a complex interplay of personal and ecological entanglements. Western understandings of mental health often also use highly circumscribed forms of storytelling of cure like the Recovery Narrative, a “technology” widely used by mental health professionals, to prescribe a return from madness³⁶ to “normal” existence measured by one's ability to participate in the economic paradigm of individual productivity. I find these normative understandings to be deeply problematic when we are living in a time of multiple ecological crises and so much of our internal experience is influenced by what is happening around us. This mismatch between the dominant narratives espoused by psychological sciences and the tendency to overlook the complex ecological entanglements contributing to mental health compelled me, like many others within, for example, the Mad Studies Project, Climate and Multispecies justice, the Climate

³⁵ The principles of free market capitalism and consumerism.

³⁶ The term “mad” started being appropriated by people from the mental liberation movement in the 1960's to challenge the reductionist assumptions of the psy sciences and the oppressive effects of the medical model as a critical alternative to pathologising labels like “mental illness” or “disorder”. I elaborate on the history and evolution of the term in the “Mad Studies” section 2.2.1.

Psychology Alliance³⁷, Institutional Psychotherapy³⁸, Psychologists for Social Change³⁹, Mental Health Resistance⁴⁰, Feminist and Community Psychology networks⁴¹ networks, to find alternative ways of understanding experiences of distress that may start to problematise individualising narratives when considering the social, political and environmental causes as well as the personal and internal dimensions.

For my doctoral research I invited a group of artists to engage with a guided movement improvisation journey looking to unpick the personal, political and ecological complexities in the lived experiences of distress. Hence, through the practice, I sought to research how moving bodies may tell stories about the personal and contextual entanglements of distress and the potential embodied research practices hold in performing entangled storytelling to resist or undermine hierarchies of being. Given the historical context within which I carried out my research, that is, during a time of global health pandemic, the project evolved to use digital environments to perform this research. However, given the way the pandemic exacerbated the systemic inequalities and injustices many of us were oppressed by and further exposed the material and situated inequalities that affected our daily lives, I trusted that choosing to carry on with my research project at that particular time, would offer richer insights into each of our particular situatedness to contend with. I suggest that this methodological design enabled us to generate material that went further than inviting artists to engage with the research in a centralised space.

I took an experimental approach to the research and developed a thematic journey in the form of guided scores from my own embodied practice of moving with the research questions. I then sent participating artists an audio recording of each of the scores to facilitate their participation in the project and to guide them to generate movement material in relation to the themes the project investigates. The practice research took place over approximately nine weeks, involving six weeks of solo movement practice and weekly group debrief conversations during the nine-week period. I sent the artists a weekly audio recording of a themed guided journey linked to the research questions over the six weeks. The artists were then invited to record their practice and share some of the material they generated through the guided somatic movement journey. In-between themes, they were invited to a 1-hour online weekly group debrief session, where we had the opportunity to

³⁷ 'Climate Psychology Alliance', Climate Psychology Alliance, accessed 29 December 2019, <https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/>.

³⁸ Academic Accelerator, 'Institutional Psychotherapy: Most Up-to-Date Encyclopedia, News & Reviews', Academic Accelerator, n.d., <https://academic-accelerator.com/encyclopedia/institutional-psychotherapy>.

³⁹ 'Psychologists for Social Change', PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE, accessed 29 December 2019, <https://www.psychchange.org/>.

⁴⁰ 'Mental Health Resistance Network', Disability News Service, accessed 24 November 2022, <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tag/mental-health-resistance-network/>.

⁴¹

reflect on personal and shared experiences with other participating artists. The collective aspect of the research focused on how the practice may offer ways to forge intimacies and novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress given the ecology of our time.

Initially, I designed the project so I would spend three weeks with the artists, sifting through individual contributions following the six-week themed solo movement practice. I intended the research analysis to emerge from our group's creative process as we co-created a collaborative audio-visual piece. However, due to personal and shared reasons at the time of conducting the research, which I elaborate on in Chapter 4, section 4.5, the group entrusted me, as the researcher, with creating the audio-visual piece. After transcribing the group debrief conversations and analysing the verbal content alongside the individual creative material, I decided not to edit the film. Instead, I included the video content unedited to adhere to my non-hierarchical and collaborative ethos guiding my artistic research. This decision led me to focus on the group conversations for the meaning-making of the research, emphasising the tensions between personalised and collective experiences in a time of polycrisis.

The observations from my applied work in crisis recovery services first led me to the field of critical mental health and the activist scholarship of mad studies to question hegemonic forms of power in the methods used by psychological sciences. In recognising the importance of orientating my practice research to focus on the aspects of mental health that are shared, I applied mad studies theory to the methods of autoethnography and somatics. This way, I could collect counter-hegemonic narratives to those produced from positions informed by psychological expertise. I then incorporated posthuman, new materialist and eco-feminist frameworks to enable me to research the relationality between self, material environments and the more-than-human. Framed by these methodologies, which I elaborate on in chapter three, the practice research sought to respond to the three research questions:

- How can moving bodies tell alternative stories about the material and situated entanglements of distress?
- Can embodied research practices perform entangled storytelling to resist or undermine hierarchies of being?
- How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress, given the ecology of our time?

I then established the group work using movement scores and embodied storytelling to research collective experiences through the group verbal conversations and creative output. I only invited embodied practitioners and artists who were already working with the moving body in their practice to participate in the research. This is because the research questions relate to embodied practice and to keep it feasible for participating artists and myself to generate material that responds to the research questions within the available timeframe. In this way, the practice research outcomes may contribute to the activist scholarship of mad studies in challenging the notion that experiences of distress are solely the responsibility of the individual through embodied practice.

My reasons for choosing to shift my research practice from engaging people from the wider population and outside mental health services to exclusively inviting artists were also theoretically informed by the literature on mad studies scholarship particularly Cresswell and Spandler's article "*Solidarities and Tensions in Mental Health Politics*". In their article Cresswell and Spandler discuss an "inconvenient complication" within the field of Mad Studies and its "tight" definition of madness as "dialectically connected to the psy disciplines", reducible to sanism, internal to the system and lacking in "internal differentiation" in the experience of madness.⁴² Therefore, the research findings from working with artists and embodied practitioners outside of mental health institutions may contribute to mad scholarship by extending the work to include the experiences of people from the wider population who may not have directly encountered psychiatric oppression. The embodied experiences of those outside of mental health institutions may offer rich insight into mad experiences that may be exacerbated by systemic injustices and ecological crises. The research may show the relevance of cultivating "practices of resistance" informed by the critical thinking of mad theory outside of mental health institutions.⁴³

Furthermore, the initial trajectory of my project was severely disrupted by the circumstances I was plunged into. I could have stopped the research, but I chose not to. Informed by the posthumanist and new materialist literature I was thinking with, I considered how the conditions I found myself having to contend with as potentially reflective of a new way of "living and dying",⁴⁴ to use Donna Haraway's terms, on a "damaged planet".⁴⁵ As more and more deforestation happens and we see more of the devastating effects of the climate crisis, the pandemic may very well have been the

⁴² Mark Cresswell and Helen Spandler, 'Solidarities and Tensions in Mental Health Politics: Mad Studies and Psychopolitics', *Critical and Radical Social Work* 4, no. 3 (18 November 2016): 357–73, <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986016X14739257401605>, 4.

⁴³ Cresswell and Spandler., 4.

⁴⁴ Anna Lowerhaupt Tsing cited in Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, *Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 136.

⁴⁵ Haraway, 69.

first of many to come.⁴⁶ Consequently, I considered how my task as a crisis recovery worker and embodied researcher was to devise embodied strategies that responded to that particular situated moment, which necessitated a certain practical method to evolve rather than waiting to work with more favourable conditions. I understood this in light of Haraway's materialist critical ecological methodology that invites us to look for the entanglements, to "stay with the trouble," not to turn away from suffering, to understand how it is related to wider ecologies, and to develop capacities to respond (response-ability) creatively within our situated positions. In this sense, my research is a way of being with, an attempt at befriending and co-creating by moving with each crisis that surfaced in the environments I was embedded in -crises- caused me and others distress. As Gregory Bateson puts it:

"you are partly blown by the winds of reality and partly an artist creating a composite out of the inner and outer events".⁴⁷

Moreover, my participatory approach evolved me to focus on sensing, experiencing and articulating experience, rather than aesthetics. In inviting the artists to document their movement practice using audio-visual technologies, the research also offered the possibility for a visual movement language to be developed. In this respect, I was influenced by dance movement artists working with experimental, postmodern and post-dance like Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer and Lucinda Childs, whose visual language is often described as minimalist art.⁴⁸ I was also influenced by contemporary dance movement and visual artists like Antonija Livingstone, who works with slow somatic movement as subversive acts, non-human companion animals like gigantic snails, serpents and materials like water, mud and manure.⁴⁹ Drawing on these influences, I used imagery as method and task-based improvisation inspired by visual art, non-human animals and natural elements to generate material.⁵⁰

In building this fluid capacity of the practice to respond to the different needs of the project, I continued to offer it with all the necessary adaptations to circumstances as we collectively moved through the Coronavirus pandemic. During this time, I let the changes I learnt to make inform my

⁴⁶ Carrington, 'Nature Is Sending Us a Message'.

⁴⁷ Gregory Bateson cited in Carolyn Ellis, "Heartful Autoethnography," *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 5 (September 1, 1999): 669.

⁴⁸ Kate Guadagnino, 'The Pioneers of Postmodern Dance, 60 Years Later', *The New York Times*, 20 March 2019, sec. T Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/t-magazine/postmodern-dance.html>.

⁴⁹ Familiar Studio, 'Antonija Livingstone', [text/html](https://movementresearch.org/), Movement Research (Movement Research, 2 July 2020), <https://movementresearch.org/>, <https://movementresearch.org/>.

⁵⁰ I reference these minimalist artists in connection with the visual language of this thesis, which incorporates automatic drawings, doodles and unedited video content focusing on mark-making, process and art-making created within the context of ordinary everyday moments and the gestures that arose from bodily sensations. The visual language therefore centres the felt sense in relationship with self, other and the more-than-human.

orientation to changing environments so my practice is able to continue to be ecologically responsive, evolving to creatively meet the needs posed by the limitations and restrictions living, practicing and researching in a time of ongoing crisis brings. Therefore, my doctoral research stemmed from the polycrisis entanglements I was working through, and it was shaped by the material, situated freedoms and restrictions of the emergent ecology my project was immersed in. It is, in fact, this emergent direction that positioned the work to use digital platforms, bringing the intimate connection with the environment and ecology to the forefront.

The doctoral research has evolved my creative practice to become nomadic. My practice now seems to have a life of its own; it is no longer bound to mental health institutions. I offer it in different spaces and places, where a practice of somatic movement is able to respond within specific and situated entanglements from healing to activist, art-making and community arts spaces.⁵¹ This orientation of the project framed by eco-feminist and new materialist methodologies speaks to Haraway's notion of response-ability and links to the ecological entanglements that follow.

⁵¹ 'Embodied Practice | Fabienne Formosa | London, England', Fabienne Formosa, accessed 30 May 2021, <https://www.fabienneformosa.com>.

1.2 Why Practice Research?

1.2.1 The Practice Research Model.

The practice research model started being used in the UK around the mid-1980's, when academic institutions started adopting the methods and outcomes formerly used by independent art, music, theatre and dance conservatoires "as evidence of findings in modern institutional research contexts".⁵² As Irene Fiordilino argues in her doctoral thesis "*Transitory Architecture: Artistic, Methodological, and Theoretical Insights into a Choreography-Based Project of Practice Research*".⁵³ the term practice research flattens the hierarchy between practice and research traditionally associated with the production of knowledge within academic research contexts.⁵⁴

A primary research objective of my project is to investigate how the incorporation of embodied and situated knowledge, through the practice as research model, can disrupt established hierarchies determining legitimacy of knowledges in both global mental health and academic institutions. By implementing this practice research model in my project, I am not only able to structure the development of my interdisciplinary practice but also challenge the conventional hierarchy between theoretical and practical outcomes as forms of knowledge production within the research project itself.

Since the 1960s, the use of art psychotherapy in the medical model system has offered a counter-narrative to medical views of psychological distress. I can't imagine what psychiatric wards would be like without such interventions as arts therapies. Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) practices are not only applied within medical model frameworks, but they are also widely integrated into educational, charitable, and refugee organisations,⁵⁵ in prisons,⁵⁶ end of life⁵⁷ and brain injury

⁵² Robin Nelson cited in Irene Fiordilino, 'Transitory Architecture: Artistic, Methodological, and Theoretical Insights into a Choreography-Based Project of Practice Research.' (City University, Northampton Square, London: Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance., 2023), 21.

⁵³ Fiordilino, 21.

⁵⁴ Fiordilino, 21.

⁵⁵ Katia Verreault, "Dance/Movement Therapy and Resilience Building with Female Asylum Seekers and Refugees: A Phenomenological Practice Based Research," *Intervention: Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas* 15, no. 2 (2017): 120–35; Sabine C. Koch and Beatrix Weidinger-von der Recke, "Traumatized Refugees: An Integrated Dance and Verbal Therapy Approach," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 36, no. 5 (November 1, 2009): 289–96.

⁵⁶ Dawn Caroline Batcup, "A Discussion of the Dance Movement Psychotherapy Literature Relative to Prisons and Medium Secure Units," *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 5–16.

⁵⁷ Megan Dillenbeck and Jo Ann Hammond-Meiers, "Death and Dying: Implications for Dance/Movement Therapy," *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 31, no. 2 (October 23, 2009): 95.

units,⁵⁸ which shows the remarkable potential art therapies hold in physical, mental and emotional healing.

However, the increasing focus of DMP on standardising manualised applications in institutional settings to adhere to NICE⁵⁹ guidelines and maintain its status as an evidence-based recommendation raises questions about how DMP, and the arts therapies more broadly, are preserving their integrity when practiced in clinical settings. These disciplines have developed from a rich history of political activism and resistance, carving out a space for the arts therapies to be validated as treatments on psychiatric wards governed by reductivist paradigms. In this sense, it may be argued that oppressive norms may also distort the role of art therapies in the way they are integrated into a medical model system.

My project enters the field of practice research by identifying a form of new activist scholarship which considers the potential application of the multiple modalities that this practice offers -- from mixed dance and creative movement lineage -- to respond to current frameworks of power in dance and therapeutic settings within an expanded field of movement studies. The unique signature of this practice, marked by a resistance toward oppressive norms, has yet to be met within current dance and proximate fields such as applied dance, as well as health professional communities of practice, thus responding to some major deficiencies within the field of dance and therapy.

This research thesis seeks to respond to these deficiencies through the form of storytelling across multiple modes⁶⁰ as a way of cultivating polyvocal practices of creative attention, to navigate curatorial practices around hosting and navigating collated research materials, and story as a way to foster critical objectivity navigating within institutional structures. By critical objectivity, I am referring to here to my strategic use of embodied storytelling and the methodology I developed through this research⁶¹ to collectivise and publicise what are traditionally personalised stories focusing on responsibility and cure.⁶² In this research, I mobilise the form of storytelling through embodied actions as interventions with the aim of producing a thesis that is also an anti-narrative.

As a researcher, I am therefore able to develop a counter-narrative through my own movements within the form of storytelling at a meta-level in the writing of this research through embodied

⁵⁸ Sharon Chaiklin and Hilda Wengrower, *The Art and Science of Dance/Movement Therapy: Life Is Dance* (Routledge, 2015).

⁵⁹ 'NICE | The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence', CorporatePage, NICE (NICE), accessed 31 August 2020, <https://www.nice.org.uk/>.

⁶⁰ See section 1.2.3.

⁶¹ See chapter 3.

⁶² See section 2.2.2.

actions such as disclosing, confessing, withholding, recounting, contesting and sharing, which could be considered a form of anti-narrative. These embodied actions, particularly where I then highlight the points of convergence between the individual stories and, therefore, the 'shared elements', thus making the political orientation explicit through this contextualisation of what story here is doing with embodiment and what these elements of story as embodied actions are, in turn, doing with story.

1.2.2 Ecologies of Thinking: Praxis.

Fiordilino's adoption of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt definition of *praxis* as the integration of theory and practice,⁶³ and "a profound synergy of practice and theory, such that they cannot be separated neither in the processes nor in the outcomes",⁶⁴ aligns with the formation and scope of my practice from its emergence with the mental health field to the academy and its creative, activist and research outcomes.

In my practice research, I employed somatic movement scores in the form of prompts, invitations, and tasks. These were informed by my background in psychology and practical experience in crisis recovery services. Additionally, they were influenced by my autoethnographic research conducted in community, artistic dance spaces, and academic settings.

My role as researcher and nomadic movements across various disciplines and fields serve as the anchor for my practice research. My practice is shaped by the theoretical methodology I have developed with Visual Cultures, the department, and hence, the ecology of thinking with which I have carried out this doctoral research. The practice was also informed by the somatic and movement practices that I have explored and researched within the various contexts in which I dance and move.

This practice is a method and an essential component of my methodology. It is moulded through a practice of theoretical thinking, underscoring the interconnectedness of theory and practice. It also stands as one of my findings, encompassing elements such as guided imagery, embodied writing, and group reflective practice. These combined components illustrate the depth and breadth of my research, which is enriched by the confluence of theory and embodied experience.

⁶³ Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt cited in Fiordilino, 'Transitory Architecture: Artistic, Methodological, and Theoretical Insights into a Choreography-Based Project of Practice Research.', 22.

⁶⁴ Fiordilino, 22.

1.2.3 The Multimodal Media Guide.

I use a multimodal media methodology in the writing of this thesis to evidence both the processual evolution of the creative practice and practice research outcomes. In terms of text, I include poems and italicised vignettes containing autobiographical material by the artists and myself, which I then draw from for the autoethnography. I include the autobiographical material that was shared by the artists as creative writing outcomes during their engagement with the group work component of the practice research in various parts of the thesis and mark each of the poems and vignettes with the artist's name below the content.

The selection of my own autoethnographic material I mark with a shortened version of my name as "fab". This designator is placed below each vignette to differentiate them from academic writing. However, the vignettes are integrated into the formal academic text to trouble the hierarchy between academic and embodied knowledge in research. I also include vignettes containing excerpts from the oral conversations we had during group reflective practice as coloured text images to differentiate the oral knowledge from the written word.

I intersperse audio and visual media throughout the thesis to evidence the evolution of my thinking, the experiences that informed methodological choices, the methods and the collective practice research outcomes in the form of photos, short videos, audio recordings and mark-making. The figures containing audio and video in the description are hyperlinked to online streaming platforms like Soundcloud and Vimeo,⁶⁵ which can be accessed by clicking on the link. The photos include a title and credit but no written description to let the visual content perform the storytelling. The video content is in unedited form, capturing transient moments and focusing on the gestural as an embodied visual language over refined movement sequences, speaking to the principles of minimalist art.⁶⁶ Where photos are taken in particular sites that played a part in my thinking and creative process, I include the names of those sites, thus forming part of my citation practice as one of giving thanks to the non-human sites that played a part in my ecology of thinking.

Finally, I also include photos of drawings that were produced using the method of "automatic drawing" and "doodles" that evidence the mark-making process,⁶⁷ with some underpinning the development of the practice and others acting as practice research outcomes. The visual storytelling is one of the ways I intend the academic writing to perform the practice research aim to

⁶⁵ 'Discover the Top Streamed Music and Songs Online on Soundcloud', SoundCloud, accessed 20 December 2023, <https://soundcloud.com/discover>; 'Videos on Vimeo', accessed 29 January 2024, <https://vimeo.com/>.

⁶⁶ See section 1.1.5.

⁶⁷ See section 4.3.9.

undermine legitimacy of knowledges. Through the visual narrative I therefore seek to animate the thesis to give the reader a felt sense experience of the organic and alive energy of the project, which was constantly moving and shapeshifting. The project was never fixed or static, and I hope that in using this methodology of multimodal media the thesis can offer a glimpse into the practice research. A list of figures for all media is included in the beginning of this document.

1.2.4 Introducing the Collaborating Artists.

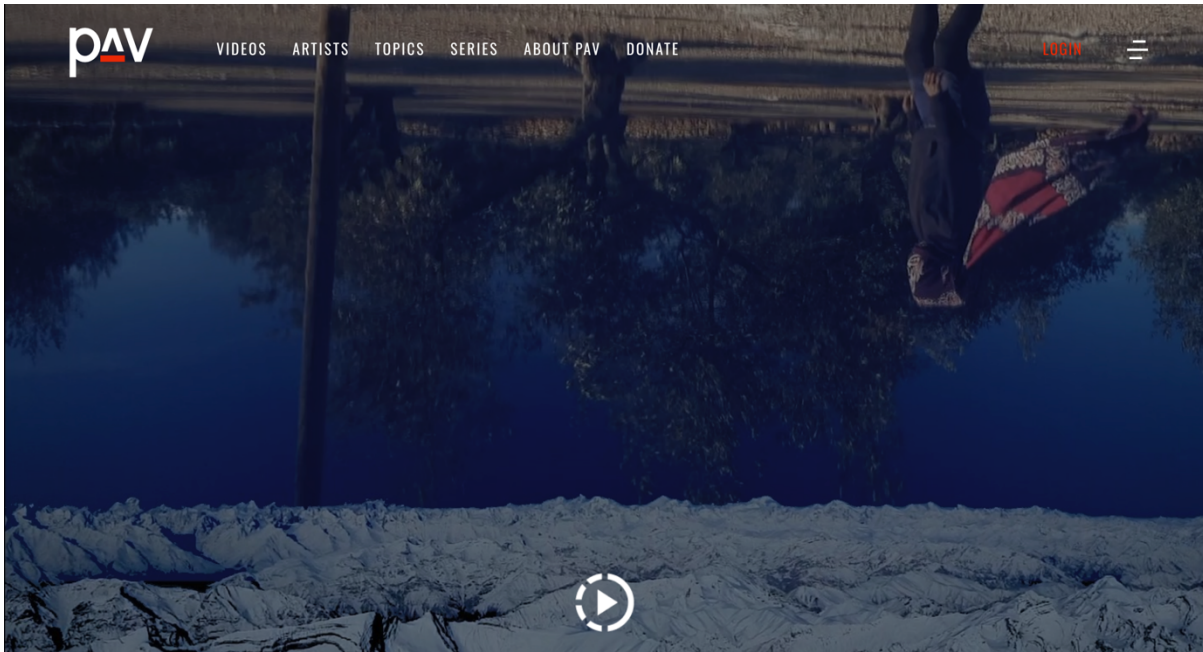
Amanda Camenisch is an artist and healer. Working with immersive installation, sculpture, film, sound and performance she initiates individual and collective experiences fostering creative exploration and nurturing connections between individuals and the world. Her practice often involves working with underrepresented communities through long-lasting engagements and socially engaged practice. Her methodology encompasses research and wellbeing practices with a trauma-informed approach.

Together with the artist Therese Westin, she has been commissioned by the 2023 Brent Biennial to work with the Asian Women Resource Centre, a local safe house, on a long-term artwork with various private and public outcomes. Together with Westin, she is currently working on another long-term participatory project titled LYRA, to be performed in London in 2024.

Heidi Lee Rogers is a queer, Pākehā writer and storyteller from Aotearoa, New Zealand. She plays with creative embodiment through fictional and nonfictional narrative, drawing on her unschooling background and her life-long experiences of hypersensitivity and chronic illness. Heidi has an affinity for approaches that centralise bodily awareness and moving in respectful, authentic, and empowering ways, particularly in relation to young people and nonhuman nature. Her doctoral thesis explores representations of health, illness and anticipatory grief in NZ YA fiction, and includes an original YA climate fiction following a girl gang on a mission to save ancient kauri tree, Tane Mahuta from kauri dieback.

Priiya Prethora is a moving body trained in traditional Indian folk, theatre and martial art practices. They have been in Europe since 2022 and search for journeys, adventures and intimacies through their sounding body. To translate disassociation and dreams they work with sound, physical movement and immersive space textures. Since the start of the project they have been on the road, living and working in queer self-sustained communities and moving in unexpected places, leaving unseen traces. Dancing in the mountains and forests also led them to complete a film project (film image and link below) entitled “*Your Wounds Bleed Me*”.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Priiya Prethora ‘*YOUR WOUNDS BLEED ME تمہارے زخموں سے میرا خون* | Performance Art Video’, accessed 30 December 2023, <https://performanceartvideo.org/videos/your-wounds-bleed-me>.



Video link: <https://performanceartvideo.org/videos/your-wounds-bleed-me-تمہارے زخموں سے میرا خون>

Tammy Tsang (She/They), originally from Hong Kong, graduated from Northern School of Contemporary Dance (BA Hons, First 2021). Tammy is exploring and developing her interdisciplinary practice, as their way of understanding and caring for the world that we inherited. Exploring between but not limited to improvisation, marking- making and writing, based around the thinking body. She has performed with artists including Sandrine Monin, Phil Sanger and Joseph Mercier, and has received the PANIC! Bursary (2021) from The Tetley to create an installation and digital documentation. Most recently Tammy performed in *Summer Camp* as part of the GlitterBomb Dancers in 2023. Besides performing, Tammy is also a qualified Pilates instructor (matwork and neuro Pilates) and bodywork practitioner whose interest lies in practices such as the Skinner Releasing Technique, the Feldenkrais Method and experiential anatomy.

Nevena Stojkov is a movement director working across theatre and screen. Bringing her background in dance, yoga and theatre, Nevena's practice involves finding the principles within practices and crafting them to fit the needs of the task. Her interests lie in improvisation across art practices, the experience and the outcome, the things it reveals and creates.

Valia Katsis is a performer who has just graduated from the MA Acting course at East 15 Acting School. She previously studied BA International Relations and Arabic and so is interested in the intersection of art and socio-political issues, specifically feminism and migration. She has danced all her life, mostly in the context of ballet and contemporary but has also ventured into styles including street dance, salsa and lindy hop. She is also part of E33 Dance company - a dance

company mixing a lot of elements of different dance styles. Her current dance training focuses on a fusion of contemporary dance and capoeira, working with Aneta Zwierzynska. She is a co-founder of theatre company 'Lemon Shed' where she co-produced, co-wrote and performed a piece called 'BAR' as part of Camden and Clapham Fringes.

1.3 Chapters Overview.

This thesis begins with autoethnographic material about the evolution of the practice, building a self-narrative about my work with others, first within mental health institutions, then repositioning my work outside mainstream mental health. It details the conditions that led me to use digital environments in 2020 and the evolution of my creative practice in community arts, the well-being industry, and beyond. The introduction also includes an outline of the rationale for the project, the methodologies, and the research questions to which the practice research is oriented.

Chapter two offers a literature review of the scholarship the project builds on. I start by situating the research within the activist scholarship of mad studies, posthumanist, new materialist and eco-feminist studies to incorporate an ecological understanding of embodied subjectivities. Following a review of the literature and practices I build on, in chapter three, I proceed to discuss the embodied, autoethnographic and decolonial methodological frameworks orientating my research to unearth autobiographical stories. In taking a feminist embodied approach and drawing from my own autoethnographic material, I explore how the telling of my own embodied story may get tangled with others' stories as I document and craft my thesis. The project responds to Donna Haraway's call for situated knowledges⁶⁹ and the problems of universalism in globalised approaches to mental health by both inviting in participants' situated entanglements and immersing myself as researcher, attempting to resist and undermine hierarchies of being.

I use the autobiographical content to make cultural inferences about lived experiences of distress as sociocultural and ecological phenomena interconnected with our internal landscapes. I then situate embodied methodology within the discussions of globalising mental health and how they rely on "translation" and "legitimation" processes that effectively undermine all other non-scientific ways of knowing and understanding distressing experiences. I focus on this specific aspect of the multi-faceted problematisations the Mad Studies project raises to then suggest how both the theoretical and practical methodologies of embodied research may sit within a wider movement of decolonising mental health.

⁶⁹ Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

The project approaches embodiment as a decolonial tool, not to centre the argument on decolonising mental health by focusing on particular cultural practices but rather to approach embodied practice in mental health as political. The project furthermore acknowledges that we cannot understand mental health as detached from relations of care with the land and other human and non-human animals in a particular space and time. It is a doing that we as a collective must do, a form of remembering that we are immersed in a context, that the neoliberal individualised self is an illusion, that we are always part of a whole, and that whether we care about our relations with animate and inanimate others, we are embodied and we are entangled.⁷⁰

Chapter four outlines the methods I used to generate the research and the call for recruiting a group of artists to engage with a themed guided journey developed from my own movement practice exploring the research questions. I discuss the ethical considerations involved and the use of technology and digital environments. An emergent direction in the research evolved as a response to the ecology of our time. I frame the use of tech in posthumanist and new materialist theory and approach technology as an enhancement to what bodies can do, suggesting that even though the practice evolved to use digital environments as a response to the social restrictions due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it enables the practice to go beyond it. I also reflect on how technology enables me to reach more deeply into each of the participant's personal situated entanglements.

Chapter five offers a thematic analysis of the content that emerged through the practice research of this project by primarily focusing on the oral conversations during the weekly group debrief reflective practice, where we had the opportunity to reflect on personal and shared experiences. This emerged as the central component of the project. We politicised experiences that would otherwise be personalised whilst also accounting for the personal dimensions in the material generated through the somatic movement practice. The nine-week hour-long weekly group reflective practice and the creative responses offered by the artists inform the meaning-making and thematic analysis of my thesis. I transcribe the verbal conversations and include the relevant aspects of the conversations in the form of vignettes together with other visual and creative research outputs evidencing the practice. Through the group work, we were able to identify which of the personal threads unearthed through the themed solo movement journey were collective experiences, thus exposing the links between the personal, social and ecological justice issues I sought to uncover.

⁷⁰ Ben Spatz, *Blue Sky Body: Thresholds for Embodied Research*, 1st edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), xv.

Finally, the thesis ends with an outline of the contributions and conclusions I draw from this research in chapter six. I also discuss the limitations of the study and considerations for future research. I suggest that the individual and collective outcomes of this practice research may problematise some of the dominant (individualising) discourses prevalent in mental health today. Through this work, I sought to explore how we can inform some of the different ways in which we can think about how our bodies are entangled with environments in our current times and how we might respond to these as humans, artists, academics, and scientists.

This thesis may, therefore, contribute to scholarly research in the fields of Mad Studies, Autoethnographic and Embodied Research and may have the potential to inform the public about mental distress in the wider population, people not necessarily using the mental health system and finding ways of articulating experiences outside the language of pathology, through movement and storytelling. The methodology and methods developed through this practice research may have applications for artists, practitioners and activists working in mental health, health and transformative justice work. The practice methods may also serve as an autonomous aid for individuals seeking to move independently with their experiences of distress in a time of crisis.

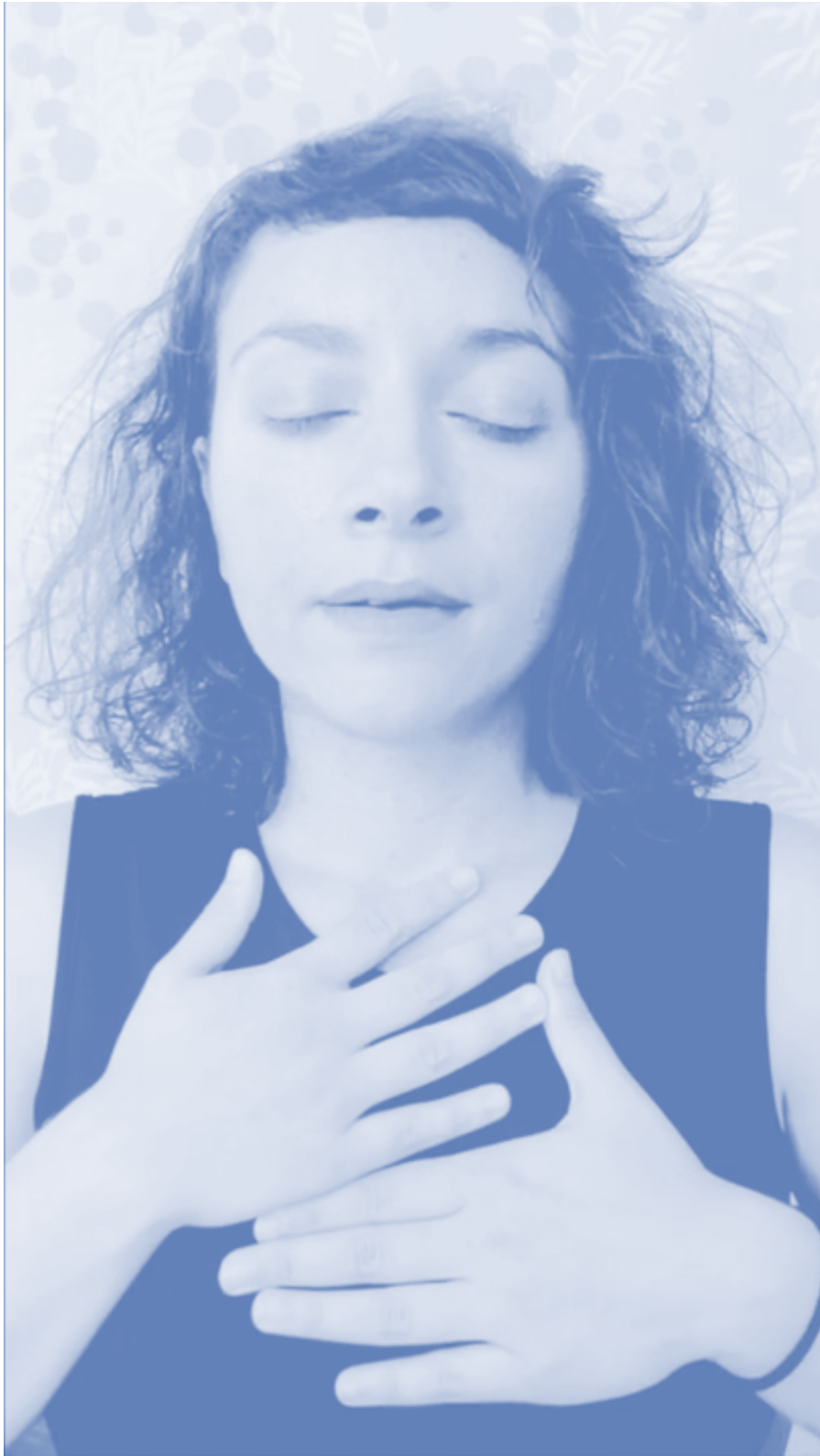


Figure 7. [Still from "presence"](#), Video.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review.

As a little girl, I remember being fascinated with this thing called mind. How it seemed to be so important and so elusive, something that grown-ups would fear losing or having lost. I remember being woken up in the middle of the night, my dad having to rush to help take grandma Jessie back to hospital because she would have lost it again, her mind, or as they would put it, her grasp over it. How powerful was mind, I would ponder, if its absence meant havoc and its presence peace. My beautiful grandmother, diagnosed with schizophrenia when she was just a young girl, she just couldn't get a grasp over it, if only she could hold onto it long enough. Long enough to be a mother, a wife.

You're going to be like her.

*She's going to be like
her,*

they would whisper.

would whisper.

It skips a generation, they say.

- fab

2.1 Introduction.

Why does it create such distress to think someone is "out of their mind"? Is this distress necessary? Where does it come from? In order to address these questions, in this chapter I will review some -- but by no means all -- of the current discourses around mental health and madness. While doing so I will clarify my research questions. Since the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the Western world has developed medicalised individual models of madness and distress which inform understandings of mental illness and psychiatric reductionism today. The Rationalist Scientism of the 18th century also led to the ideologies of the political right and through its alliance with global pharmaceutical corporations, individualised understandings of mental illness are therefore also a product of contemporary neoliberalism.⁷¹ At a time when regressive political ideologies are on the rise and an increasing number of people are experiencing higher levels of distress due to the destructive effects of the wider economic, social and political policies of

⁷¹ Brenda A. LeFrançois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Canadian Scholars' Press, 2013); ix-xi; 11.

neoliberalism, diverse social understandings of distress and madness are required to meet the needs of diversity in mad experience. I draw from the activist scholarship of mad studies to question the dominance of the scientific paradigms espoused by the psy sciences⁷² when considering personal experiences of distress and work with theoretical frameworks that incorporate the ecology of the person's embodied experience, as well as the biological elements, to see if we can find alternative ways of articulating experiences of distress, through an embodied storytelling practice.⁷³

2.2 Antipsychiatry.

The mad studies project evolved out of the antipsychiatry movement which later developed into mental health consumerism. According to Rissmiller and Rissmiller, in their review of the "Evolution of the Antipsychiatry Movement into Mental Health Consumerism,"⁷⁴ antipsychiatry grew from a wedge which developed between psychoanalytic psychiatrists and biological psychiatrists in the 1950's with the latter challenging the former that their treatment was costly, unscientific and ineffective. Sociologists merged with scholarly psychoanalysts and called out the compulsory admissions to institutions, coercive treatments of neuroepileptic drugs, psychosurgical and convulsive treatments of patients as abuses in the name of science. The movement grew in momentum as it joined forces with the counterculture movements of the 1960s which were rebelling against racial, sexual and political injustice. Amongst its many allies, antipsychiatry owes its intellectual rigor to four seminal thinkers, with Michel Foucault, R.D Laing, Thomas Szasz and Franco Basaglia working in France, the United Kingdom, United States and Italy respectively. The common thread that brought these thinkers together was the shared conviction that subjectivity is constructed within these conditions that have normalised certain states of mind and an assumption of separation.⁷⁵

⁷² The term "psy sciences" as a collective term for psychiatry, psychology, psychoanalysis and other psychotherapies was coined by Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, a historical analysis on how these disciplines became entangled with new forms of government.

⁷³ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume; ix-xi; 11.

⁷⁴ David J. Rissmiller, D.O and Joshua H. Rissmiller, 'Evolution of the Antipsychiatry Movement Into Mental Health Consumerism', *PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES* 57, no. 6 (2006): 4.

⁷⁵ David J. Rissmiller, D.O and Joshua H. Rissmiller; 863.

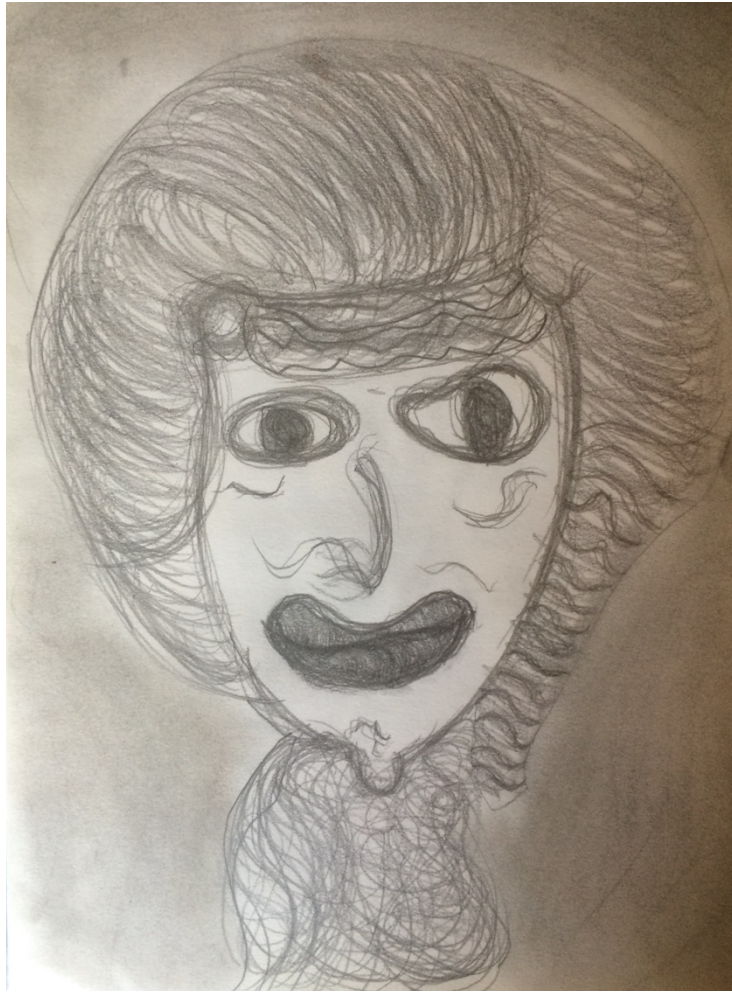


Figure 8. "scapegoat" doodle, Photo.

- fab

In "*Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*"⁷⁶ Michel Foucault developed his material-discursive understanding of mental illness by tracing its historical underpinnings. Foucault noted how external, economic and cultural forces define the social construct of madness.⁷⁷ In order to challenge binary thinking about the body and the mind, the institutionalisation of expertise and authoritative knowledge at the exclusion of the subjective and embodied experience of the person, I start by anchoring my research in Foucault's analysis of the history of madness, where he illustrates how the Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, defined the split between nature and science. In doing embodied practice research, and giving epistemological value to the body,⁷⁸ I seek to trouble the binary between expertise and experience

⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1965).

⁷⁷ Rissmiller, D.O and Rissmiller; 863.

⁷⁸ B. Allegranti, *Embodied Performances: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011); 12-48.

and to research the potential embodied practice holds in articulating the political complexity of embodied experience outside of the language of pathology.⁷⁹

Yeah, I did my masters in movement direction and teaching last year, which was intense. Ever since I finished my masters, I've just been trying to not do anything that resembles the stuff that I was doing in my masters. So, I just ran away to a remote island in Scotland, and I was just farming and climbing mountains and fixing boats. The stuff that I really enjoy doing. I love doing a lot of physical work, so I'm trying to find more and more things to do with my hands to sweat out the anxieties of the world.

- Priiya

The Enlightenment, also marked by Cartesian ontology and the split between body and mind, dichotomised subjective and objective knowledge, creating a hierarchy between knower and known, and crucially, between reason and unreason. I adapt Foucault's post-structuralist power-knowledge-discourse nexus of madness to my understanding of mental health. Foucault shows how hierarchical and binary oppositions gave rise to the power relations and the discourse (knowledge about the subject) that structured contemporary social understandings of madness.⁸⁰ Foucault traces the discourse on madness to have directly emerged from the dualistic thinking birthed by the Enlightenment, that placed reason not only as separate and distinct from unreason, but also superior to it. Foucault states that understanding of madness, which later came to be defined by the psychological sciences as illness and disease is reflective of the disease of a civilization that is defined by a dichotomy between reason and unreason. Foucault theorises that it was this paradigm shift that consequently created fear of unreason and a social need to dominate and control a person that is unreasonable by the reasonable. In this way, Foucault shows how the institutionalisation of the mad person owes its roots to a discourse that was shaped by the power relations created by the Enlightenment.⁸¹

Foucault concludes that contemporary psychiatric scientific understandings of mental illness and the institutionalisation of the mentally ill are akin to the discourses that led to the confinement of lepers in the Middle Ages who needed to be secluded to prevent contamination with uninfected people in the rest of society. Thus highlighting how the discourse that structures psychiatry and

⁷⁹ Caroline Ramazanoglu, *Feminist Methodology Challenges and Choices* (London ; Thousand Oaks, [Calif.], London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif., London: SAGE, Sage, 2002); Alecia Youngblood Jackson, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data across Multiple Perspectives / Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A Mazzei.*, [1st ed.] (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

⁸⁰ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 102-110.

⁸¹ Foucault, 10-14; 27, 59-65; 68-69; 73-79, 87; 101-102; 184.

psychological sciences today are too shaped by power relations. Places of confinement for Foucault, later called the asylum and the clinic⁸² were places to send the outcasted to experience in themselves what the Enlightened reasonable man could not face to experience in himself.⁸³



Figure 9. [Still from "shadow projections, Highgate Wood, London, UK," Video.](#)

- fab

While Foucault was writing in France in the 1960's, R.D. Laing was working in England with other authors like Frantz Fanon (who was working in largely colonised countries) and observed that people's behaviours very often corresponded to social expectations and concluded that behaviour owes its origin to society.⁸⁴ For example they noted how Black people often behaved in

⁸² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (S.I: Routledge, 2002).

⁸³ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 42; 185-192.

⁸⁴ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, Reprint edition (London New York: Penguin Classics, 2001).

stereotypical ways and women conformed to normative expectations of passivity and femininity.⁸⁵ Goffman, one of Laing's co-authors, added that patients who presented with institutionalised behaviour often also had social responsibilities previously stripped from them. Laing therefore concluded that social causality is inherent to mental illness.⁸⁶ Psychoanalysts contemporary to Laing were also exploring the relationship between social context and mental illness. In 1960 "The Myth of Mental Illness" was published by Thomas Szasz and was quickly adopted by the antipsychiatry movement and continued to gain momentum with Szasz's convictions that schizophrenia was not a result of a brain lesion. However, organized psychiatry continued to gain power as it was legitimised by the state to suppress dissidents and non-conformists. Szasz launched the Libertarian Party in 1971 to stop the government's utilisation of psychiatry to control the minds of its citizens.⁸⁷

The Libertarian Party joined forces with the Citizens Commission of Human Rights cofounded by Hubbard shortly after its launch in 1971 and together they advocated for the incarceration of psychiatrists and their abuses to be treated as crimes against humanity. Contemporary antipsychiatry activist groups in the 1970's continued to form alliances with the "Mental Health Bar" and the legal battle to end involuntary institutionalisation of mental patients spearheaded by antipsychiatry attorney Bruce Ennis. The impact of these activist groups and their allies led to hundreds of thousands of involuntary patients being released from state hospitals at the time. This surge in victorious legal battles eventually led to the deinstitutionalisation movement in Europe a decade later with Franco Basaglia as its leading proponent in Italy. Basaglia worked in an asylum in Trieste and held that mental illness was an expression of human needs and not a biological disease in the brain.⁸⁸

Over the next decade Basaglia mobilised the antipsychiatry movement and led the Italian National Reform in 1978 which abolished all compulsory asylum admissions and established community hospital psychiatric units as an alternative. This restructuring in Italy initiated the "democratic psychiatry movement" culminating with the closure of hundreds of psychiatric institutions in Europe, Ireland, Finland, Australia and New Zealand. Despite its growth and accomplishments, the antipsychiatry movement started to diminish in the 1980's with the discovery of the neurotransmitter. These scientific discoveries revealed a naivety in the biopsychosocial model and social constructivist understandings of mental illness and the evidence indicated that schizophrenia

⁸⁵ Rissmiller, D.O and Rissmiller, "Evolution of the Antipsychiatry Movement Into Mental Health Consumerism,"; 863.

⁸⁶ Rissmiller, D.O and Rissmiller, 864.

⁸⁷ Rissmiller, D.O and Rissmiller, 864.

⁸⁸ Rissmiller, D.O and Rissmiller, 864.

was partially biologically based.⁸⁹ My project builds on the mad project that evolved out of the anti-psychiatry movement (see next section 2.2.1) which recognises that experiences of distress are complex entanglements of social and political factors but also recognises neuro-diversity meaning, for some, biological elements are also at play.

Further, I return to Foucault's notion of discourse here to indicate that the problems remained after the deinstitutionalisation movement – namely that the privileging of reason and oppression of mad behaviours have become internalised within the discourse and power-knowledge nexus. This suggests that institutions aren't needed if the disciplinary power is in our heads and wielded across multiple spaces of governance. A focus of the embodied practice research is to offer a space to reflect on social expectations that can be internalised, for example, colonial mindsets, racism, ableism, cis-hetero-patriarchy, as well as sanism and forms of capitalism and how these may intersect with experiences of distress. Thus, exploring the potential an embodied practice holds in undermining hierarchies of being through cultivating an awareness of the felt sense through somatic movement (for e.g., resting instead of producing as a form of self-care countering neoliberal demands in capitalist contexts).

⁸⁹ Rissmiller, D.O and Rissmiller, 864.

2.2.1 Mad Studies.



Figure 10. "I created monsters" doodle, Photo.⁹⁰

- fab

The term “mad” started being appropriated by people from the mental liberation movement and the first wave of antipsychiatry in the 1960’s as a way of resisting sanism, mind control, oppression, promoting human justice, and to offer people a way to self-identify, as a critical alternative to pathologising labels like “mental illness” or “disorder”.⁹¹ The term offered an entry point into the fields of power as they play out in the lives of people encountering organised psychiatry. The word mad emerged to name and respond to mental, emotional, spiritual, and neuro-diverse ways of being. It was not intended to be used to romanticise or overlook the psychic suffering that is experienced by neurodiverse people. Rather, it was used to validate and recognise experience outside of the language of pathology -- even when the experiences are not shared. Hence, the

⁹⁰ “*There are some stories that I do not want to tell. Is that okay?*” On navigating choicefulness, vulnerability and a private self as an autoethnographic researcher.

⁹¹ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, 9.

appropriation of the term mad came to be used to challenge the reductionist assumptions of the psy sciences and the oppressive effects of the medical model. Consequently, the mad movement offered a way for histories of encounters with the psy disciplines and psychiatry to be more easily situated within the wider institutional, cultural and historical contexts.⁹²



Figure 11. “difference”, St. Pancras, London, UK, Photo.

- fab

⁹² LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, 9–10.

Following from other Western identity-based social movements like the critical activism of disability, queer, black and fat identities, self-identifying as mad offered a way to restore dignity and pride to difference. This later came to be known as the “mad pride movement”.⁹³ Taking up the term “mad” came to be recognised as a political act in-itself. It evolved to serve people encountering psychiatric systems to resist them. Interestingly, the mad pride movement builds on Foucault’s philosophy on how power relations are played out in the way they inform knowledge about subjectivities through discourse. Therefore, how discourse can be strategically used as a medium to reverse power when the labels used to denigrate are appropriated by the very same people they oppress as with disability, queer, black and fat identities mentioned above. Broadly, the term “mad” refers to emotions, thoughts and behaviours that do not conform to dominant social constructions deemed “normal” by psychiatry.⁹⁴ This gives rise to an identity-based politics at play within mad studies. However, this is more specific to the mad pride movement and not all voices within mad studies affirm such a politics, allowing lived experience, as understood in mad studies scholarship, to be potentially more mobile holding an affirmation of madness as a way to resist rational identity categories, and policed borders of identity.

I situate my practice research in the social framework of mad studies and refer to mental health issues as “distress”, which includes diversity in mad experience and people identifying with the designation “neurodiverse”.⁹⁵ Mad studies is an emerging discipline which evolved from the mad movement. The term “mad studies” was coined by Richard Ingram in 2008 with the rise of mad scholarship by mad movement activists who were also members of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault (CAPA) in Toronto. Mad scholarship emerged from mad scholars looking to politicise and theorise the knowledges and history of those deemed mad by focusing on revisiting, excavating, documenting, rewriting, understanding, and teaching a mad people’s history within the academy.⁹⁶ I refer here in particular to the book “Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies”⁹⁷ an important publication that attempts to introduce this new field of research.

⁹³ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, 9-10.

⁹⁴ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, 10.

⁹⁵ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, ix-xi; 11.

⁹⁶ Bruce M. Z. Cohen, ed., *Routledge International Handbook of Critical Mental Health*, 1st edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 107.

⁹⁷ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume.



Figure 12. [Still from “fire serpent dance in Queens Wood, UK”, Video.](#)

- fab

In their article analysing solidarities and tensions in modern mental health politics,⁹⁸ Cresswell and Spandler identify two main tendencies differentiating the Mad Studies⁹⁹ project in Canada from Psychopolitics and welfarism in Europe and the United Kingdom. Whilst the driving force of Psychopolitics is on welfarism and medication, the tendency of Mad Studies is to valorise the raw experience of madness by challenging psychiatric oppression and sanism with mad identity.¹⁰⁰ This field is important for my research because it enables me to orientate the practice so that I too may valorise lived experience over expertise in my work with others, both within the academy and beyond. Hence, undoing some of the power hierarchies I have been formally trained into within mental health institutions, to look outside, and to politicise distress by exploring the shared

⁹⁸ Mark Cresswell and Helen Spandler, “Solidarities and Tensions in Mental Health Politics: Mad Studies and Psychopolitics,” *Critical and Radical Social Work* 4, no. 3 (November 18, 2016): 357–73.

⁹⁹ Upper case of the use of the term “Mad” as opposed to lower case “mad” to “signify the politicisation of madness as an oppressed identity by” Cresswell and Spandler., 3. I capitalize “Mad” when referring to Mad pride and Mad Studies as a discipline or project. I use lower case for “mad” in the rest of the thesis since my research focuses on shared mad experience and distress, outside of mental health institutions.

¹⁰⁰ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume; 97.

dimensions of such experiences. Framing the research with post-humanist feminist and embodied theoretical frameworks, I approach the practice as embodied storytelling and a “technology of the self”¹⁰¹ with which to challenge sanism and the underlying linearity in the Recovery Narrative as I will unpack below.¹⁰²

Mad studies privileges lived experience over psychiatrist-led resistance (anti-psychiatry). It spills over from social activism advocating for peer run services, consciousness raising, psychiatric survivor research and enters the academy either through critical disability studies or as its own transdisciplinary field.¹⁰³ A significant focus of mad scholarship is to serve as a “systemic critique of psy violence, epistemic injustice and sanism”.¹⁰⁴ Whilst the crux of mad studies is the politicisation and theorisation of mad experience through scholarly work within the academy, it still has implications within social activism, encompassing both the social action of mad activists, and mad scholarship. Therefore, mad studies is an organic, evolving discipline and project, with no one group claiming authority over what the discipline is and what it may evolve into. As a result, mad studies draws conflicting attitudes and readings to it.¹⁰⁵

Even though there is no consensus over what the parameters of mad studies are and what the discipline can do, another potential definition of what mad scholarship includes, at least, in part, is social, relational, identity-based, anti-oppression approaches to depoliticised understandings and frameworks of distress as “mental illness”.¹⁰⁶ What distinguishes mad studies from other critiques of psychiatry is that it is those deemed mad doing the theorisation of mad experience, thus centering the knowledge of psychiatrised bodies that have been silenced, erased and suppressed by other disciplines, including anti-psychiatry.¹⁰⁷ An important distinction that differentiates mad studies from critical psychiatry is the shift from consumer narratives to knowledge production and mad activist scholarly research being done directly by those deemed mad. The important distinction here is *who* is doing the theorising, herein lies the subversion in knowledge production between consumer narratives and the scholarly research produced by mad activist scholars within the Academy.¹⁰⁸ This theorising is important as through this work it is “Mad standpoints looking outward” as well as “exposing the violence of the psychiatric apparatus”¹⁰⁹ so it is not only the

¹⁰¹ Michel Foucault et al., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

¹⁰² Angela Woods, Akiko Hart, and Helen Spandler, “The Recovery Narrative: Politics and Possibilities of a Genre,” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 2019.

¹⁰³ Cohen, *Handbook of Critical Mental Health*, 108.

¹⁰⁴ Cohen, 108.

¹⁰⁵ Cohen, 108.

¹⁰⁶ Cohen, 109.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, 107–8.

¹⁰⁸ Cohen, 108.

¹⁰⁹ Cohen, 108.

world (normative standpoints) looking in on those deemed mad but those deemed mad looking outward and analysing the wider world through a mad gaze.¹¹⁰



Figure 13. “good grief” doodle, Photo.

- fab

However, according to Cresswell and Spandler, the problem with mad identity with its tendency to challenge psychiatric oppression and sanism with identity politics is the binary between the mad

¹¹⁰ Cohen, 108.

and the non-mad that it builds on and reinforces.¹¹¹ In their article entitled “Breaking Open the Bone: Storying, Sanism and Mad Grief”¹¹² Poole and Ward distinguish between what they call “normal” or “good” grief and “Mad grief”. “Good grief” they argue is time-limited and linear, and welcomes help or intervention from others whilst “Mad grief”, on the other hand, is defined as a “resistance practice”, which refers to raw experience that opposes or “breaks the rules” of “good grief”, as defined by the “grief disorders” sanctioned by the DSM.¹¹³ Creswell and Spandler point out that the inherent identity-based struggles influenced by anti-psychiatry and Mad Pride movements within the Mad Studies project also highlights a tension within the project, namely that in challenging the oppression of psychiatry with Mad identity the project neglects people who are having mad experiences but not engaging with psychiatry or the medical model system to which my project responds.

¹¹¹ Creswell and Spandler, ‘Solidarities and Tensions in Mental Health Politics’.

¹¹² LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume; 94-104.

¹¹³ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, 97; American Psychiatric Association and American Psychiatric Association. Task Force on DSM-IV, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.



Figure 14. "loss" doodle, Photo.

- fab

The authors further cite Nev Jones and Timothy Kelly's contribution to "Madness, distress and the politics of disablement"¹¹⁴ in their article entitled "Inconvenient complications: on the heterogeneities of madness and their relationship to disability"¹¹⁵ and draw out that it is complexity and heterogeneity, not just sanism, that is constitutive of mad experience. Therefore, an "inconvenient complication" to mad studies, they argue, is its "tight" definition of madness as "dialectically connected to the psy disciplines", reducible to sanism, internal to the system and lacking in "internal differentiation" in the experience of madness. Therefore this is one way my embodied research may contribute to the mad project and what many mad scholars seek to address; namely, the relevance of people having mad experiences outside of the institution and people that are not directly subjected to psychiatric oppression by cultivating "practices of resistance" outside of mental health institutions.¹¹⁶ I orientate my practice research with an autoethnographic methodology¹¹⁷ in order to draw from my lived experience as the granddaughter of a woman who was diagnosed with mental illness but who also, in my own embodiment, experienced the oppression of normativity through my parent's fear that I too one day might develop mental illness due to our family's genetic predisposition.

In their chapter review of mad studies in the "Routledge International Handbook of Critical Mental Health", Rachel Gorman and Brenda LeFrançois conduct an assessment of recent scholarship in mad studies, and propose that, the intersections of mad studies with settler colonial studies, critical race theories, queer and trans of colour studies may offer a mad theory that "can be understood as a critical social theory in its own right, through grasping social relations beyond a narrow study of psychiatric systems and people who have been mostly subjected to them".¹¹⁸ Mad theory as social theory may help us to understand the ideologies underpinning mental health as a social apparatus upholding dominant notions of normativity and morality "integral to ongoing processes of colonization, racism, labour exploitation and state violence".¹¹⁹ Thus concluding that a mad analysis of non-psychiatry related social policies may also be included within mad studies.¹²⁰ It is therefore the plurality of oppressed voices that the transdisciplinary scholarship of mad studies holds, which offers an analytic framework of mad studies as a discipline that, although it emerged from the grassroots social activism of the mad movement, its applications have the potential to go beyond psychiatric systems and psychiatric oppression. I intend my project to research these complexities with a group of artists outside of mental health institutions who may have lived experience of distress through embodiment and somatic movement.

¹¹⁴ Helen Spandler, Jill Anderson, and Bob Sapey cited in Cresswell and Spandler, 4.

¹¹⁵ Spandler, Anderson, and Sapey, 43-56.

¹¹⁶ Cresswell and Spandler, 4.

¹¹⁷ See section 3.2.

¹¹⁸ Cohen, *Handbook of Critical Mental Health*, 108-9.

¹¹⁹ Cohen, 109.

¹²⁰ Cohen, 108.

Further, according to Cohen, given the history and evolution of mad studies as a discipline, for the potential of mad theory to be considered as a critical social theory, it must be understood in relation to “identity-based social movements within a Western capitalist context”.¹²¹ This understanding is contested by indigenous and majority world activist communities such as the tension it raises with “a set of conditions for knowledge production”¹²² intimately intertwined with identity politics. Even if mad identity is appropriated to advance the strategies and aims of the mad movement it is nevertheless based on Western, capitalist conceptions of the self and non-Western conceptions of self may differ from the underlying notions of self driving identity-based social movements in the West. My project responds to this tension within mad studies and in applying embodied methodology to experiences of distress in mad studies, the project offers a complication of the “set of conditions for knowledge production”¹²³ related to mad identity by turning to embodied research as a decolonial tool and inviting in indigenous and Eastern, as well as Western conceptions of self.

Approaching the research from this angle positions the practice with the potential to respond to the contestations raised by major world and indigenous activist communities and may contribute to the evolution of mad theory in its implications to broader understandings of mental health as a social apparatus to uphold dominant normative values. In practical terms, if white people recount their stories of being psychiatrised as being colonised we run the risk of centering the stories of dominant subjectivities as well as erasing the experiences of black and indigenous peoples who have the experience of being both psychiatrised, racialised and colonised bodies. One does not equal the other – likening one to the other is a way of erasing the other - if it is both then it is double hence the over-representation of Black and indigenous peoples in psychiatrised systems in the Western world.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Cohen, *Handbook of Critical Mental Health*, 109.

¹²² Cohen, 108–9.

¹²³ Cohen, 109.

¹²⁴ Cohen, 110.

2.2.2 My Point of Entry: The Recovery Narrative.



Figure 15. "just be happy" doodle, Photo.

- fab

My practice research emerged from 10 years of personal embodied practice experimenting with various bodymind techniques and five years of working in third-sector crisis recovery mental health services in London, operating on the dominant approach of the Recovery Model.¹²⁵ Although the practice research is performed, outside of the institution, it was shaped by my work within it. The Recovery Narrative (RN) is a key tool in constituting recovery on an individual level in the types of services I was based in. Whilst the concept of recovery emerged from the consumer and survivor movements of the 1970's and 1980's as a radical idea to challenge the dominance of psychiatry, there has been little critique into the mobilisation and consequences of its use as a technology widely used by mental health professionals.

Successful recovery is thematically and functionally measured by the achievement of recovery from mental distress through compliance with psychiatry, biomedical models, clinical approaches and recovery from trauma through an independently chosen path. It is a highly circumscribed form of storytelling of cure, a return from madness to "normal" existence measured by one's ability to participate in the economic paradigm of individual productivity.¹²⁶ The Hearing Voices Movement,¹²⁷ offers an interesting alternative within mainstream mental health services that is not oriented towards normativity and productivity. Whilst some people within the network reject biomedical models, others use psychiatric medication to deal with the distress caused by unshared experiences. The multiplicity of voices within the movement reflects people for example taking psychiatric medication to help with easing voices telling them to self-harm whilst still taking an alternative approach.¹²⁸

This definition of "Recovery" is critiqued by groups within the psychiatric survivor movement such as "Recovery in the Bin"¹²⁹ and even mainstream practice as it is claimed to have been co-opted by mainstream mental health services and policy makers in the early 2000's to push a neoliberal agenda.¹³⁰ Today, there is much debate on the definition of recovery and the epistemological, ontological and political differences of recovery as understood by survivor-led movements and the way that it has been co-opted by mental health professionals and integrated into a medical model system. Further, marginalised identities might disproportionately experience the socio-economic conditions that affect mental distress and its poor treatment. Dominant understandings of Recovery

¹²⁵ S. Bonney and T. Stickley, "Recovery and Mental Health: A Review of the British Literature," *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 15, no. 2 (March 2008): 140 – 53.

¹²⁶ Angela Woods, Akiko Hart, and Helen Spandler, "The Recovery Narrative: Politics and Possibilities of a Genre," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 2019.

¹²⁷ "Hearing Voices Network: Welcome," accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.hearing-voices.org/>.

¹²⁸ I develop this theoretical analysis further in my discussion on the globalisation of this logic as a form of neocolonialism in chapter three, section 3.5 to show how a decolonial approach to mental health is necessary.

¹²⁹ 'Recovery in the Bin', Recovery in the Bin, accessed 29 May 2021, <https://recoveryinthebin.org/>.

¹³⁰ Woods, Hart, and Spandler.

dependent on insight and validation by an homogenized and normative audience oppresses and silences the stories of those that identify as “unrecovered”, those using services and needing support on a long-term indefinite basis, people identifying as disabled and generally those who have not recovered, for whom distress persists.¹³¹ A focus of my practice research is to experiment with the potential of “doing and undoing” these normative and hegemonic narratives of recovery by unravelling the complexities generated by situated and material entanglements.

In the “Routledge Handbook of Critical Mental Health”¹³² Simone Fullagar points out how Foucault’s work also served to inform contemporary debates about the discursive shift we have seen with the implementation of the Recovery Model in mental health research, services and policy focusing on personal, instead of professional approaches to illness. Fullagar shows how a narrative formulated in terms of recovery from madness to “normality”¹³³ invokes an essential self to return to that is hiding beneath the disorder. By analysing the discursive formation of the notion of recovery in terms of a discourse-power-knowledge-nexus then we can see how assumptions about empowerment are inherent to the systems operating on ideals of recovery.

This can be seen by how mental health approaches built around orientations of recovery, focus more on “individual choices” and the personal meaning abstracted through one’s journey, as somehow going beyond treatment by expert professionals. Nevertheless, the recovery journey is still situated within the medical system. The difference in the Recovery Model is a shift in orientation toward personal empowered choices presented as crucial to the recovery but now instead of having the oppressive systems outside of the individual and coming from the psy professionals, in this model we see the dominant understandings of normalcy and morality internalised by the person experiencing distress via neoliberal and entrepreneurial notions of the self and disciplinary powers being internalised.¹³⁴ As Poole articulates, the way the notion of recovery was co-opted by the Recovery Model from the recovery movement individual choice and the neoliberal self was emphasised to suggest that when the person is empowered enough, they can rise beyond illness and normalise themselves.¹³⁵ However, through this implementation, we also see a silencing of the critical engagement of psychiatric survivors within the recovery movement.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Woods, Hart, and Spandler, 'The Recovery Narrative'.

¹³² Cohen, *Handbook of Critical Mental Health*.

¹³³ Cohen, 43.

¹³⁴ Cohen, 43.

¹³⁵ Jennifer Poole and Janet Durbin, 'Behind the Rhetoric: Mental Health Recovery in Ontario', *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 31, no. 2 (September 2012): 119–21, <https://doi.org/10.7870/cjcmh-2012-0017>.

¹³⁶ Cohen, 43.

2.2.3 Ecosophy.



Figure 16. "processing" doodles, Photo.

- fab

I incorporate Pierre-Félix Guattari's "The Three Ecologies" into my research to frame my understanding of human subjectivity with an ecosophical theoretical framework, including environmental, as well as internal, and social relational registers, to an ethico-political articulation of human subjectivity.¹³⁷ I use Guattari's theoretical framework to help with this move and also to show that a person's material ecology is always already entangled with one's environment whether one is conscious of this or not. Through the practice, I seek to confront normative understandings of recovery and to resist dominant individualised understandings of distress by co-producing diverse embodied narratives. Thus, embodied storytelling articulates the entanglements of biological, social, political and ecological dimensions comprising lived experience. I situate my research within the humanities and not within the psy sciences, precisely because of the urgent need Guattari articulates for a mental ecology and consequently new ecological practices, that are conceptualised in terms of an aesthetico-existential process, as opposed to the pseudo-scientific paradigms of the psychological sciences.¹³⁸

An aesthetico-existential process, like the artist, is continually reinventing itself.¹³⁹ There is an emphasis on creative becoming (which also resists identarian politics as restrictive and oppressive). My rationale for doing practice research is inspired by Guattari's call to resist the dominance of psy sciences by emphasising multiplicity, in keeping with Guattari's thought and practice of micropolitics).¹⁴⁰ Whilst I build on Guattari and turn to his notion of aesthetico-existential paradigms for the artistic-embodied methodology that I work with, instead of doing the work from within the institution and performing institutional analysis, I respond to the problem of the

¹³⁷ Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London ; New York: Continuum, 2005).

¹³⁸ Guattari, 39-40.

¹³⁹ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, *Mad Matters*.

¹⁴⁰ Guattari, 39-40.

application of reductivist paradigms in the psy sciences, in overlooking the complexity of the entanglements of experiences when applied to human experiences of distress, by positioning my project within mad studies.

Institutional analysis in Guattari's sense is a kind of institutional psychotherapy emerging from a crisis in forms of institutional power in France in the 70's. It included practices of letting the patients participate in the running of the institution. Hence it did factor in lived experience, and a multiplicity of subject positions across roles are analysed. Institutional analysis also understands all participants in an institutional space to be engaged in micropolitics of desire. Thus in analysing the institution, one is also analysing subjectivity, across different scales. However, this work begins from the centrality of the institution that gathers subjectivities together and my project does not, although it does gather people together under certain criteria. Therefore, while I may be rejecting institutional analysis as a methodology, the function of institutions (including the educational one I am labouring in) may be relevant to the project.

Thus, building on Guattari's and Donna Haraway's emancipatory and situated politics, my project wishes to follow embodied stories, rather than institutional ones, how they matter and have power too. As in her book "*Staying with the Trouble*" Haraway claims:

"it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with). It matters what matter we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories."¹⁴¹

My project looks outside of the mental health institution to artistic, alternative and activist communities to research the experiences of how artists may find ways, through the moving body, to tell stories of distress, through creative practice. Participants invited into the practice research may not have used psychiatric services and may not identify with mad identity, the oppression of psychiatry and sanism. Thus, rather than advocating for and corroborating identity politics, it looks beyond the institution to respond to the problem of the dichotomy between the mad and the non-mad, the neurodiverse and the sane, and the inevitable binary mad identity requires, which reinforces the otherness of the mad person. Framed in this way, the project thus researches madness and mad experience firstly as a problem of our time: a time of multiple ecological crises

¹⁴¹ Marilyn Strathern cited in Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*; 13.

and, secondly, madness and experiences of distress, in all its variations, as a human experience that may not need to be pathologised. Here I pose my first and second research questions:

1. How can moving bodies tell alternative stories about the material and situated entanglements of distress?
2. Can embodied research practices perform entangled storytelling to resist or undermine hierarchies of being?

Further, feminist research builds on Guattari's institutional analysis and micropolitical work. Hence, I also situate the research within feminist theoretical frameworks. A central tenet of feminist methodology is characterised by a moving away from authoritative means of knowledge production, to understanding knowledge production as a social and relational process, co-produced between researcher and researched.¹⁴² Thus understood, a dance movement artistic-embodied practice offers an intersectional approach because it has the potential to make visible gender, politics, class, race and disability that are often overlooked by scientific methods. A feminist embodied approach displaces the pursuit of 'truth' as an objective means of producing knowledge dependent on the validity and justification of results to knowledge production as a subjective, experiential, political and social process.¹⁴³ A feminist embodied approach also reveals the social process underlying the research and makes visible the inherent power relations between researcher and researched; making myself, the researcher with my own embodied experience, visible.¹⁴⁴ This renders me politically and ethically accountable to interpret the knowledge co-created between myself and the subjectivities of the people participating in my research. I therefore also draw attention to the inherent power relations of research and how my own embodied experience influences the way I interpret the connection between the ideas I am proposing, the experience of the participants and the knowledge produced.¹⁴⁵

2.3 Embodied Research: Practice as Research.

Drawing from dance movement improvisation as an art form, I apply an artistic-embodied methodology, as a strategy to co-produce a counter-hegemonic embodied storytelling practice. The practice seeks to resist, disrupt and trouble the key thematic features of recovery as co-opted by the neoliberal agenda, and biomedical models of distress focusing exclusively on internal/biological causes for illness and distress. I draw from somatic movement improvisation

¹⁴² Allegranti, *Embodied Performances*.

¹⁴³ Ramazanoglu, *Feminist Methodology*.

¹⁴⁴ Ramazanoglu.

¹⁴⁵ Ramazanoglu; Alecia Youngblood Jackson.

practices for their focus on internal sensations versus more traditional dance forms emphasising external performance focusing on the audience. Following the movement improvisation practice, I then follow an embodied methodology of writing from the body.¹⁴⁶

I build on artistic practices that resist normative and oppressive practices in mental health contexts, like La Borde¹⁴⁷ clinic in France; Soma in Brazil; artist's projects like James Leadbitter's MadLove: a designer asylum,¹⁴⁸ The Aesthetics of the Oppressed¹⁴⁹ and autoethnographic, visual and performative work like Sarah Pini's and Ruggero Pini's phenomenological account of Sarah Pini's experience of cancer and illness in their body. I adapt a creative embodied approach to resist the biomedical model's understanding of the person experiencing illness as a subject, identified with the pathology, rather than a person diagnosed with the disease, to resist the "patient" body and find alternative ways of experiencing illness.¹⁵⁰ I conceive the movement improvisation practice as an embodied storytelling practice like Liane Loots who adapts Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa", to turn to dance as a fluid way of embodied storytelling, that goes beyond a privileging of reason and the mind. Liane Loots treats the embodied self as a site to rewrite stories and approaches both autoethnographic narratives and collaborative choreographic processes through the medium of dance as a corporeal storytelling tool. Further, she approaches the performative body as embedded in social practices and a vehicle with which to tell stories about the self and the multiplicitous engagement with the world the body is entangled with.¹⁵¹

Like Beatrice Allegranti,¹⁵² in her collaborative project on the performativity and reconstruction of the gendered self in "*Embodied Performances*", I take an experimental approach of facilitating the

¹⁴⁶ Hélène Cixous cited in Allegranti, 77.

¹⁴⁷ Poetry Foundation, 'Notes Toward a New Language: On La Borde by Cynthia Cruz', text/html, Poetry Foundation (Poetry Foundation, 31 May 2021), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2015/04/notes-toward-a-new-language-on-la-borde->

¹⁴⁸ James Leadbitter, "Madlove: A Designer Asylum," *The Vacuum Cleaner* (blog), accessed April 21, 2021, <http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk/madlove-a-designer-asylum/>.

¹⁴⁹ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, New ed., Get Political (Pluto Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Pini and Ruggero Pini, "Resisting the 'Patient' Body: A Phenomenological Account," *Journal of Embodied Research* 2, no. 1 (May 29, 2019): 2 (20:05).

¹⁵¹ Hélène Cixous cited in Liane Loots, "Embodied Storytelling: Using Narrative as a Vehicle for Collaborative Choreographic Practice – a Case Study of FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY's 2016 HOMELAND TRILOGY (South Africa and Senegal)," *South African Theatre Journal* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 58–71.

¹⁵² My thanks to Dr. Beatrice Allegranti who was my director of studies for the first six months of my doctoral training with the Psychology department at the University of Roehampton before I transferred to the Visual Cultures department at Goldsmiths College, University of London. It was thanks to Dr. Allegranti that I was first introduced to the concept of mental health as a confluence of social, political and personal factors, through her body of work particularly *Embodied Performances: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011). It was also thanks to Dr. Allegranti who advised me on the ways I could step into developing a creative movement practice despite not having a formal dance education background - by taking a weekly dance improvisation class and having a weekly yoga practice - that I could integrate physical training with my academic research. This initial work laid the foundations to later weaving embodied practice

embodied storytelling practice by first exploring the research questions in my own embodied practice, before facilitating the process for others.¹⁵³ In doing so, I work with Paul Preciado's concept of auto-theory in "Testo Junkie"¹⁵⁴ and what he describes as the "auto-guinea pig" in his use of testosterone, as a radical way to deconstruct the social conditioning and construction of the gender he was assigned at birth. I weave in an autoethnographic component to my practice research and explore my own situatedness in relation to the entanglements of the people I collaborate with. Like Allegranti and Preciado, I hold that I, too, must experience within myself and use my own body, as a medium with which to research my own materiality before holding space for others' exploration of auto-entanglements and facilitating process for others. Through the practice of autoethnography, as an embodied researcher, I am not directing the artists' movements but rather my intention is to create a space for others to explore their embodied narratives, in the way I have done myself. I do not seek to tell people what they should explore, but to open up a space, that invites people to explore, following their own entanglements.

The "auto-guinea pig"¹⁵⁵ principle is essential, according to Preciado, for creating the right conditions for "micropolitical action"¹⁵⁶ and the possibility of writing and rewriting, or doing and undoing, our self-narratives, through the performative component of embodied storytelling. Building on this theory, I approach the corporeal collective embodied storytelling, and my own autoethnographic practice, as an experimental form of subjective knowledge production, for collective transformation, as a form of "psychopolitical care".¹⁵⁷ In this sense, the practice may serve as a form of "political therapy"¹⁵⁸ by imbuing the body with political power and creating a space for alternative forms of "dissident subjectification".¹⁵⁹ Using a variety of somatic methods, I seek to transform the body into a "political archive",¹⁶⁰ in order to unravel the complex entanglements of the person's subjective and situated knowledges. Like Preciado, I do this by approaching the body as an instrument, what he calls, a "techno-living cultural archive",¹⁶¹ to cultivate a practice of embodied storytelling that politicises experiences of illness and distress.¹⁶²

with my crisis recovery work in mental health which evolved into my creative practice and, my PhD - into practice research co-supervised by Dr. Marina Rova at Goldsmiths College from the end of 2019 until the spring of 2023.

¹⁵³ Allegranti, 77.

¹⁵⁴ Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (Espasa Calpe; The Feminist Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁵ The use of the term guinea-pig by Preciado here is, in part an attempt to reclaim agency within the violences of medical science and biological essentialism. I read it as less a concern with rendering the body passive and more with recognising complex forms of agency that can be consciously "hacked" through certain practices.

¹⁵⁶ Preciado, 362.

¹⁵⁷ Preciado, 378.

¹⁵⁸ Preciado, 378.

¹⁵⁹ Preciado, 385.

¹⁶⁰ Preciado, 389.

¹⁶¹ Preciado, 389.

¹⁶² Preciado, 362–395.

Like Nilüfer Ovalıoğlu Gros' "Carrying the Nest: (Re)writing History through Embodied Research", I use guided imagery and include chants, myths and tales to facilitate the movement practice. Nilüfer Ovalıoğlu Gros uses various embodied techniques, and her own pregnant body, to guide her through her embodied experience of the Armenian Genocide, in her homeland Turkey, so that she could confront the historical wound of her ancestors, by evoking the collective utterances of the sonorities of the Armenian diaspora in two different sites: Southeast Turkey and France. She instrumentalised her own pregnant body, by likening her embodied experience of carrying the fetus, with the carrying of the Armenian people that were exiled. Through creating soundscapes from the diverse sonorities of Southeast Anatolia, and video performance, she composed her own lament of the massacre and exile of her ancestors, thus confronting and (re)writing the history through her own embodied way of carrying her ancestral wound.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Nilüfer Ovalıoğlu Gros, 'Carrying the Nest: (Re)Writing History Through Embodied Research', *Journal of Embodied Research* 2, no. 1 (26 November 2019): 3 (23:30), <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.23>.



Figure 17. "wounded healer", Brockwell Park, Brixton, London, UK, Photo.

- fab

I respond to the first two research questions by first exploring them in my embodied practice. Through my embodied exploration, I created a themed guided journey in the form of scores linked with the research questions, and then used the scores to facilitate a six-week guided practice for a group of artists. I used various social media channels via the artist and activist communities I form part of to offer collaboration on the project. I sent interested collaborators a written manual and audio versions of the scores, and then invited participants to share their embodied stories or excerpts from their practice using media and forms of their choice including audio-visual, written or mark-making content. The research is designed to be site-specific¹⁶⁴ to investigate how the situated ecology may be entangled with our internal landscapes in experiences of distress.

2.4 Dance and Movement.

In the 1960's, a pioneering group of artists, including filmmakers, composers, choreographers, and avant-garde performers, embarked on a radical exploration of improvisation and choreography rooted in everyday, ordinary movements.¹⁶⁵ This groundbreaking collective of artists coalesced to create the Judson Dance Theater, which became a hub for experimental work.

The Judson Dance Theater prioritised key principles that emphasised following one's intuition and spontaneous impulses during improvisation. These principles took precedence over the pursuit of technical perfection and a fixed aesthetic in performance. This approach granted dancers greater artistic freedom and ushered in a more democratic perspective on dance. This shift effectively rejected hierarchical structures and blurred the traditional boundaries between performers and spectators.

Central to the philosophy of the Judson Dance Theater was the deliberate abandonment of prescribed rules and restrictions in their dance exercises. This break from convention was driven by both aesthetic and political motivations, as the movement sought to challenge the restrictive principles and hierarchical organisation of the modern dance world.

Over the following two decades, this dance form continued to evolve, eventually giving rise to post-modern and post-dance movements. The Judson Dance Theater welcomed a diverse array of participants, encompassing both trained and untrained dancers. It offered innovative dance scores designed to encourage movement in unconventional spaces, contributing to the ongoing transformation of the dance landscape.

¹⁶⁴ See section 3.3.3.

¹⁶⁵ Madeleine Compagnon, 'Yvonne Rainer, Postmodern Dance, and You', JSTOR Daily, 27 April 2020, <https://daily.jstor.org/yvonne-rainer-postmodern-dance-and-you/>.

In 2020, Yvonne Rainer, one of the principal founders of Postmodern dance, responded to the unique circumstances of the Covid-19 quarantine by creating a dance piece that individuals could perform in the confines of their own home. Rainer encouraged the audience to reimagine their living rooms as stages and to follow the instructions she shared with *"The New York Times."*¹⁶⁶ The piece, titled *"Passing and Jostling While Being Confined to a Small Apartment"*¹⁶⁷ was an adaptation of Rainer's 1963 work, "Passing and Jostling," which she modified to address the challenges of social isolation during the 2020 quarantine.

The instructions were intentionally simple, requiring no formal training to execute. Participants were invited to "pass" and "jostle" with their housemates or the furniture within their living spaces. The sole requirement was a willingness to explore movement and space, guided by an openness to improvisational movement within the defined parameters of the piece. The new iteration of "Passing and Jostling" reminded us to adapt to our circumstances and to make the most of the space we had available to us even if the space we were confined to was limited.¹⁶⁸

As an untrained dancer myself, collaborating with a diverse group of experienced and inexperienced dancers, I apply postmodern dance principles to my movement practice. This movement philosophy enables me to focus on following intuition, impulses and sensations over perfecting technique and aesthetics.

2.5 The Link with the Environment and Ecology.

Systems in mental health that value objectivity over subjectivity, and define recovery from madness according to one's ability to participate in an economic paradigm, are operationalising the same neoliberal agenda that values development over sustainability, and promotes the exploitation of natural resources, which now threatens our ecological stability.¹⁶⁹ With the recognition of the increasing risk of public health-threatening viruses, and exploring this new reality I was plunged into, I started posing my research questions to my own embodied autoethnographic practice. My circumstances strengthened one of the primary aims of my research: to contest linear understandings of recovery and mental health as though it is something that can be produced via

¹⁶⁶ Brian Seibert, 'A D.I.Y. Dance for Your Home, From Yvonne Rainer', *The New York Times*, 24 March 2020, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/arts/dance/yvonne-rainer-do-it-yourself-coronavirus.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Seibert.

¹⁶⁸ Compagnon, 'Yvonne Rainer, Postmodern Dance, and You'.

¹⁶⁹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 47.

the implementation of medication and recovery models. It also further revealed the porous¹⁷⁰ relationship between body, mind and our material environment.

Performing my research during a time of global public health pandemic, and an ongoing climate crisis, informed an emergent direction of my practice research to consider the entanglements of the material and ecological dimensions in the embodied experience of distress, together with the internal and socio-political dimensions. The particular material situatedness of the person experiencing distress seems to be crucial in a time, “of living and dying”¹⁷¹ on a “damaged planet”.¹⁷² If living with an imminent threat of illness is a way of “living and dying” in a time of extinction, then my embodied practice, and embodied storytelling of distress, must focus on embodied ways of communicating mad experience by looking at different mental ecological registers, rather than an ideology of cure, focusing on the production of recovery.

In this sense, this emergent direction, led by the circumstances that were actively restricting and therefore molding the practice research, led to my third research question: How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress, given the ecology of our time? With the emergence of my own novel way of living, and consequently, weaving an autoethnographic component into the practice research, my role as researcher evolved from one intervening within the system and seeking to transform mental health institutions, to co-curating embodied knowledges of mad experience in the wider population, as a collective experience. This became evident as the notion of recovery as an attainable goal was increasingly becoming contested by the ecological and climate crisis, with ongoing bodymind illness and distress as the new normal. The practice research responds to this third research question by offering weekly group debrief sessions that allow artists to collectivise the practice as well as reflect on shared experiences.

Here I build on artistic practices like the work of body-centred performance artist Latai Taumoepeau. The artist choreographs her performances, adapting the cultural tradition of Tonga, and composes poetry and songs to tell stories about her homeland, the Island Kingdom of Tonga and her birthplace Eora Nation, Sydney. Through her artistic practice Taumoepeau confronts the issues of race, class, the female body and the threat of displacement faced by many island inhabitants, as a result of climate change.¹⁷³ I adapt an embodied methodology in order to

¹⁷⁰ Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington, Ind. : Chesham: Indiana University Press ; Combined Academic distributor, 2010), 86–87.

¹⁷¹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 69.

¹⁷² Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing cited in Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 136.

¹⁷³ QAGOMA, “Latai Taumoepeau,” Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), accessed June 24, 2020, <https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/the-9th-asia-pacific-triennial-of-contemporary-art-apt9/artists/latai-taumoepeau>.

articulate the complex entanglements of personal and collective autobiographical counter-histories emphasising subjective experience and the layers of embodied experience demarcating power structures and oppression such as: gender, class, disability, race, marginalised identities and groups specific to the person's body and socio-political, cultural and environmental contexts. I seek to trouble homogenised survivor identities, and the concept of recovery as a coherent and intelligible story having a beginning and an end, to create an embodied-artistic practice built on other ways of experiencing life as valuable outside of neoliberal demands.

I am also inspired by the works of performance artists working with non-human components in their artistic practices. Specifically, I seek inspiration from dance movement and visual artists like Antonija Livingstone who builds some of their work on the methods of slow somatic subversions and cultivating ecologies of attention through performance and plastic arts. Livingstone works with improvised movement meditations and nonhuman companion animals like gigantic snails, serpents and materials like water, mud, manure.¹⁷⁴ I adapt guided imagery and incorporate imagined contact and relating with nonhuman companion species like spiders, as a way of facilitating the improvised movement material so that I too may confront, create and recreate the ways in which bodyminds are entangled with their non-human counterparts and environments.

In selecting the methods for collecting and documenting material, I build on the guerilla narrative project mapping public environmental humanities Toxic Bios.¹⁷⁵ The project builds on a genre of environmental writing recognised in the United States as a form of autobiographical writing. The genre was produced by marginalised groups denouncing environmental injustice by creating a counter-history. The aim of the project is to trouble and resist mainstream dominant scientific narratives focused on progress by blending personal and collective stories and histories, with science and politics. The Toxic Bios project employs a "guerilla narrative" methodology, as a strategy to collate counter-hegemonic embodied storytelling of toxicity and waste, by combining the stories of individuals and communities affected by contamination. The aim of the project is to resist mainstream narratives through multiple co-produced knowledges and documenting them in various ways including video, audio and written text. The practice of "guerilla narrative" uses storytelling as a counter-hegemonic strategy with an explicit political aim as a powerful tool to resist and trouble dominant mainstream narratives.

In order to facilitate the practice of writing one's subjective embodied experience of their situated material environment, I build on the material memoirs of Audre Lorde in Stacy Alaimo's book

¹⁷⁴ Familiar Studio, "Antonija Livingstone," text/html, Movement Research (Movement Research, June 27, 2020), <https://movementresearch.org/>, <https://movementresearch.org/people/antonija-livingstone>.

¹⁷⁵ "Toxic Bios," accessed June 27, 2020, <http://www.toxicbios.eu/#/stories>.

“*Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self*”.¹⁷⁶ I build on this work because I too understand autobiographical embodied practice as an attempt to forge novel ways of knowing ourselves through our bodies, and producing embodied stories as a critique of the divide between expert and personal knowledge via data. Authors like Audre Lorde,¹⁷⁷ Candida Lawrence,¹⁷⁸ Zillah Eisenstein,¹⁷⁹ Susanne Antonetta¹⁸⁰, Sandra Steingraber¹⁸¹ adapt the practice of material memoirs to examine their own personal life story through a scientific lens and produce material memoirs, as an alternative way of producing knowledge to expert discourse. As positioned in Susan Squier’s “Liminal Lives”, to resist the dichotomy between autobiographical subjective ruminations and objective scientific knowledge; between internal experiences and external material environments.¹⁸²

Material memoirs focus on body politics and the ecological body as constituted by the material agencies of the political, the biological and the economic. They build on the longstanding feminist maxim that the personal is political. The understanding that the body is permeable, challenges the medical model’s individualised understanding of disease to encompass an ecological understanding of the body and illness. In their study of the body and nonhuman environments, the ecological body is understood to be porous. As described by the Mexican American Braceros, when they informed the interviewer that the pesticides in their fields were making them ill from closely observing their bodies as an instrument to measure the health of the land, they value their own subjective embodied knowledge over scientific knowledge about their land. In this sense, the embodied accounts collated in the form of material memoirs present a case for illness as an environmental justice issue.¹⁸³

I adapt Donna Haraway’s¹⁸⁴ String Figure theory to co-create what she calls “sympoietic”¹⁸⁵ or collective and interdependent embodied storytelling of “response-ability”.¹⁸⁶ Haraway defines this phrasing of the term “response-ability” as “collective knowing and doing”¹⁸⁷ referring to ethical

¹⁷⁶ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*.

¹⁷⁷ Audre Lorde cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

¹⁷⁸ Candida Lawrence cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

¹⁷⁹ Zillah Eisenstein cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

¹⁸⁰ Susanne Antonetta cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

¹⁸¹ Sandra Steingraber cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

¹⁸² Susan Squier cited in Alaimo, 87-95.

¹⁸³ Alaimo, 90–91.

¹⁸⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

¹⁸⁵ This is Haraway’s neologism that attempts to resist the self-focus of the term autopoiesis considered to be the foundational system for the reproduction of life.

¹⁸⁶ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Haraway, 34.

sensitivity and one's ability to respond accordingly.¹⁸⁸ Thus, through the embodied practice my project seeks to write the body as a thinking practice; to think with the body, as Haraway proposes, as a fierce response to the violence of Capitalist ideologies and Anthropocentric thinking¹⁸⁹ and through dance and movement improvisation methods, to facilitate this practice of thinking with the body and tracking stories in the body like string figures.¹⁹⁰ To think with the body so we can consider possibilities of recuperation both on a personal bodymind level and more widely. I approach the artistic practice by thinking with the body through movement, to cultivate ecological relationality and response-ability for art science worldings of the experience of madness and living on a damaged planet.¹⁹¹ I liken the urgent need to recuperate the relationship to the body and valuing subjectivity in mental health to Haraway's call for recuperating our relationship to Gaia (the Earth), as a species, for multispecies environmental justice. Both recuperations depend on the resistance of neoliberalism and the economic paradigm focused on production through alienation. A situated material semiotics of madness, may lead to unexpected combinations and collaborations, that lead us to move away from hope or despair, to mindful matter and consciousness raising.¹⁹²

Haraway argues that narratives of apocalyptic futures are a product of human exceptionalist and Anthropocentric thinking. She calls for the shattering of binaries between science and art, as a way of rethinking model systems as an organism, where the biotic and abiotic stories of the earth are the main stories that inspire our thinking, in challenging the god-like Anthropos and patriarchy.¹⁹³ I approach the artistic practice sympoietically and through thinking with the body through movement, seek to cultivate ecological relationality and response-ability for art science worldings of mad experience and living on a damaged planet.¹⁹⁴ I think with Donna Haraway, and an embodied methodology, so that my practice may map out the potential ways in which we may start to break this binary, between objective and subjective, that continues to dominate understandings of mental health today.

Haraway argues that we need to change the story but this will not be done through the self-indulgence of Anthropocentric thinking, egotism, despair, cynicism or the discourse of progress.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁸ Kassahun Weldemariam, "'Becoming-with Bees': Generating Affect and Response-Abilities with the Dying Bees in Early Childhood Education', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 41, no. 3 (3 May 2020): 391–406, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1607402>.

¹⁸⁹ Haraway, 1-2.

¹⁹⁰ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 14.

¹⁹¹ Haraway, 67.

¹⁹² Haraway, 19-22.

¹⁹³ Haraway, 50-64.

¹⁹⁴ Haraway, 67.

¹⁹⁵ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 51.

Haraway refers to Anna L. Tsing¹⁹⁶ and her analogy of the matsutake mushroom for collaborative survival as a way of living in the ruins¹⁹⁷ becoming with, making with¹⁹⁸, staying with and weaving the trouble, concern and care like string figures as a way of living¹⁹⁹ and dying with the trouble of damaged worlds²⁰⁰ through collective interdependencies. I adapt Tsing's proposition of caring and thinking, a practice of showing in the "flesh" and the body, the stories as a way of collaboratively surviving through being disturbed and being contaminated if we approach practice with radical curiosity.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: University Press, 2015).

¹⁹⁷ Haraway, 37.

¹⁹⁸ Haraway, 137.

¹⁹⁹ Haraway, 42.

²⁰⁰ Haraway, 150.

²⁰¹ Haraway, 37.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology - Positioning the Self in a Time of Ecological Crisis.

3.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, I describe the methodologies and the practical methods I use to orientate the practice research. I do this in the context of my experience as a researcher criss-crossing across the disciplinary fields of Psychology, Applied Mental Health, Visual Cultures and Somatic Movement. I start this thesis with an autoethnographic account on how my practice research emerged in the introduction.²⁰² Following on from this careful positioning of both the research project and myself as researcher, I start this chapter with a discussion on the field of autoethnography, to reiterate the important role of this methodology as the backbone of this research.

I then proceed to articulate how embodied methodologies are important strategies for challenging the globalisation of reductivist mental health discourses. When using the term global mental health, I am referring to “the globalisation of biomedical psychiatry as a form of neo-colonialism; [involving] the imposition of western values, customs and practices on non-western cultures” as defined by Thomas et al.²⁰³ Further, as similarly understood by Summerfield, “WHO [World Health Organisation] global initiatives as rooted in neo-colonial power relationships and as ‘medical imperialism, similar to the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems in the colonial era’”.²⁰⁴

I then further frame the research in embodied theoretical and practical methodological frameworks. In elaborating on these frameworks, I illustrate how the practice offers ways to pull in our ecological entanglements through an embodied storytelling practice. By ecological entanglements, I understand the daily material and situated context the person is immersed in, including the immediate geographical environmental climate, and how this interacts with the person’s biological predispositions and internal landscape. In this sense, the project builds on the scholarship and activism of the Mad Studies Project, as well as the activism of Climate and Multispecies Justice, the Climate Psychology Alliance, Institutional Psychotherapy, Psychologists for Social Change, Mental Health Resistance, Feminist and Community Psychology networks and work that is questioning the idea that experiences of distress, or madness, are instigated exclusively by our internal biological dispositions. Building on this activist scholarship, the practice is then orientated to include social, political and environmental factors, when considering experiences of

²⁰² See section 1.1.4

²⁰³ Thomas et al. cited in China Mills, *Decolonizing Global Mental Health: The Psychiatrization of the Majority World* (Routledge, 2014), 6.

²⁰⁴ Thomas et al. cited in Mills, 6.

distress. Finally, I discuss how technology, the use of digital environments, and the shift from an individual engagement with the practice to producing collective knowledge, are used to forge intimacies, in a world where we are pushed further apart.

An overarching intention of the research is to explore embodied and artistic ways of articulating complexity in the lived experience of distress. The outcomes produced through the embodied storytelling practice seek to respond to the personalisation and depoliticisation of distress, by reductivist paradigms dominating understandings of mental health, including the well-being industry, in the United Kingdom. I suggest that the outcomes of this research may contribute to scholarly research in the fields of Mad Studies, Autoethnographic and Embodied Research, and have the potential to communicate the often-overlooked complexity constituting distressing experiences. The project seeks to do this through the body and creative movement practice, as well as through the written or spoken word, as alternatives to the language of pathology.

In addition to unravelling complexity, the research outcomes may also serve to raise awareness about distress caused by systemic and material inequalities. This includes how a time of polycrisis may impact mental health and exacerbate the inequalities causing distress. Further, in working with people not necessarily using mental health services, the research may offer insights into distress, as a shared and collective experience. In this sense, the project outcomes may challenge normative understandings of mental health, regarding it as the sole responsibility of the individual, by exploring some of the different ways in which we can think about, and consequently respond to, distressing experiences as an intermesh of personal, sociopolitical and environmental factors in our current times.

3.2 Autoethnographic Methodology.

Autoethnography evolved from the field of Anthropology and is a distinctive form of self-narrative that is increasingly applied in social sciences. What distinguishes autoethnography from other forms of self-narratives is the way in which researchers use their personal stories for cultural analysis and social interpretation.²⁰⁵ Starting from the premise that culture and the personal are intimately intertwined,²⁰⁶ I apply Ellis and Bochner's triadic model for autoethnography as a composite of culture (ethno), research process (graphy) and self (auto).²⁰⁷ In this sense, I frame the project as autoethnographic because I analyse how the cultures within which I am immersed

²⁰⁵ Heewon Chang, "Autoethnography as Method", *Developing Qualitative Inquiry*, 2008, 43.

²⁰⁶ Chang, 43–44.

²⁰⁷ Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject", *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.)*, 1 January 2000, 733–68.

influence the choices I make in the development of my research process. I understand the concept of self to be mobile across cultures, politics and ideologies but my project seeks to explore the potential inherent in understandings of selfhood as interdependent that can arise in many guises. Albeit recognising that as well as being connected and interdependent, the self is *also* individual, separate, particular (as I indicate in section 3.2 below). Thus, my working definition of self is paradoxical, one that allows being simultaneously open and closed, individual and collective.



Figure 18. [Still from "Valia entangled", Video.](#)

I invited participants to collaborate with me on my practice research so that it expands into a collective process. This is important for the project because it seeks to explore how we can come together in a time when we are pushed further apart. It is also important because I am interested in the multiplicity by which experiences of distress may be articulated and understood. I then draw from the autobiographical content we offer into the project, to make cultural inferences about lived experiences of distress as sociocultural and ecological phenomena, interconnected with our internal landscapes.²⁰⁸ Autobiographical process and product can take on multiple forms, in the case of my project, I include creative writing, drawings, poems, somatic movement, audio-visual and mark-making material.²⁰⁹ Thus, placing the research within the small but growing genre of embodied autoethnography. Whilst both autobiographical and autoethnographic practices engage

²⁰⁸ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 48.

²⁰⁹ Sherick A. Hughes and Julie L. Pennington, *Autoethnography: Process, Product, and Possibility for Critical Social Research* (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2017), 169, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483398594>.

with self-narrative, and both participants and I create autobiographical content, it is only I, the researcher that is conducting the autoethnographic research.

Through the autoethnographic methodology, I integrate the autobiographical material into my autoethnographic narrative, to infer social and cultural interpretations about experiences of distress in the UK as part of the meaning-making and analysis of my research. Like the psychology student Sylvia Smith in the article "*Heartful Autoethnography*",²¹⁰ I also did not have access to self-reflexive practices as part of my psychological studies. In the UK, the discipline of psychology is considered a social science based on detached objectivity, and personal story is seen as a threat that might bias the research if included. My experience of working in the mental health field is limited to third-sector mental health recovery services. In some services I worked in, it was part of the culture to include weekly self-reflexive team meetings. However, mainstream services remain immersed in a culture that enshrines the medical model system. I was constantly at the mercy of the clinical gaze that engulfed any attempts by myself and other staff to include our personal story in our work with clients. It was important for me to share elements of my own lived experiences of distress, to humanise the relationship between myself and the client, to foster empathy.²¹¹

In choosing to carry out the research for my PhD using autoethnographic and embodied methodologies, I am allowing myself, as researcher, the insertion of personal interpretation into the research process.²¹² The position I am taking is not only a personal choice, but it is also necessary for the purposes of the enquiry. However, the aim of including my subjective position into the research process is not to tell my story for its own sake, but rather to show how my lived experience, both personally and professionally, has shaped my research process and how this matters to the fields of research my project speaks to, namely: the mental health field, mad studies, feminist studies and creative practice. I use the term "lived experience" here as understood by Ellis and Bochner,²¹³ scholars of communication arts. The term acts as a label which carries an autoethnographic orientation and one which links autoethnography as a methodological approach to the field of mad studies - a field that is, at heart, defined by the privileging of lived experience in understandings of mental distress.²¹⁴ Having considered the possible ethical implications of doing this work in depth before inviting artists to take part in my research, I was then in a better position to invite artists to engage with the practice research from their own embodied positions. In this way, I proposed a methodology and a practice that can be shared.

²¹⁰ Ellis, 'Heartful Autoethnography'.

²¹¹ I first started experimenting with autoethnographic material online via the social media platform 'Facebook'. My thanks to Sarajayne Worman (Sam Wells) who always responded sensitively to these posts. These tentative first steps enabled me to later work with autoethnographic research.

²¹² Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 45.

²¹³ Ellis and Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity'.

²¹⁴ Chang, 47.

Following Ellis, in my thesis I include “*heartful*”, evocative, autobiographical and artistic text, as a way of including my vulnerable self, emotions and bodymind²¹⁵ as researcher. I trust that this will not only enable me to examine how my experience as researcher is imbued with meaning, but also how my process is concerned with social, ethical and political consequences. It also enables me to reposition myself as researcher, participating artists and the reader as coparticipants, engaged in a dialogue fostering compassion and empathy. Thus the project seeks to constitute a multiplicity of voices, fusing the art of living life with the research.²¹⁶ I argue that finding meaningful ways of engaging readers with social and personal context is important, especially in the scientific and clinical fields from which this project was borne.²¹⁷ Bringing in my vulnerability as researcher can be a powerful and, I suggest, may also be a therapeutic way for participants and readers to connect with me. I intend this to be a performative action to further dismantle traditional power hierarchies. Thus, the autoethnographic process may allow us to come closer to the lived experience of being human and part of the wider ecology of the planet.

Since the “I” as researcher and the research itself cannot be disentangled, I write in my story as autoethnographer to analyse, reflect upon and interpret it within my wider sociocultural and political climate.²¹⁸ In autoethnography, the focus on the self supports an understanding of culture and society through subjective narrative.²¹⁹ Thus, as Duckart puts it, “self is a subject to look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding of a societal culture”.²²⁰ The key to any autoethnographic study is critically analysing and contextualising the self-narrative in the relevant sociocultural environment.²²¹ In the case of my project, through autobiographical content, I seek to understand how culture and society create illness and how the collective storytelling practice may reveal insights into the sociocultural conditions of the particular context of my research. I also explore how my own immersion in the sociocultural context of doing the research plays out in the material generated and analysis produced. This move from personal to collective narratives is important for the project’s aim, which is to help foster an ecology that resists neoliberal individualism through cultivating a listening culture within the collective which has the capacity to hold others across difference. Investing time in relationship building is key to counter the fear and

²¹⁵ David Edward Shaner, *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Study of Kūkai and Dōgen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985). The term bodymind as a compound term was coined by David E. Shaner in his thesis “The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism” to describe an approach that understands the body and the mind as an integrated unit resisting the mind and body dualism inherent in the Western traditions.

²¹⁶ Ellis, ‘Heartful Autoethnography’, 669.

²¹⁷ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 51.

²¹⁸ Chang, 46.

²¹⁹ Chang, 49.

²²⁰ Duckart cited in Chang, 49.

²²¹ Chang, 51.

distrust prominent within the polarising context of populist politics and the so called “culture wars”.²²²

3.3 Situated Knowledges.

I now turn to discuss how I apply Donna Haraway’s critical theory of situated knowledges, as another methodology in the project, in order to position the practice research as resisting the “God’s eye view” of science.²²³ A trained biologist turned feminist and philosopher of science and culture, Haraway attempts to break from the disembodied “God-like” eye²²⁴ of objective knowledge of the Western canon, what she articulates as “the problem of objectivity in science”, in her paper “*Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*”.²²⁵ This was part of a larger movement within post-structuralist thought which has been widely influential. Haraway offers a feminist critique of objectivity by highlighting the urgent need for situated knowledges, to untangle the “dichotomy on the question of objectivity”, and the binary between masculinist scientists and embodied others.²²⁶ She asks: “What is the problem of the psychological sciences?”²²⁷ In the first instance, the problem with science is the universalising of reductionism as the standard for legitimacy in knowledges. Haraway then elaborates that this universalisation of science is also linked with capitalism, globalism and the global sciences. The hierarchy between objectivity and subjectivity, implicated by science and ascribing objectivity as the mark of what can count as knowledge, is inherently positivist and is what Haraway calls, “scientific positivistic arrogance”, concluding that it is “the dominance of scientific reductivism”, that is the problem.²²⁸

The argument for situated knowledges is linked to that of autoethnography in terms of showing how there is no objective, “God’s Eye” view – but the argument here goes a step further, in so far as it includes a science and technology studies and feminist focus. This is relevant to the project because it will help me to respond to the problems of globalising cultures and appropriation named above. Even though this is a relatively old theory from the 80s, given that I am carrying out my research in a Western theoretical culture, using postmodern and poststructuralist methodologies, it

²²² A “Culture war” is conflict between social groups holding different ideologies and the struggle for dominance.

²²³ By “the God’s Eye view of science” Donna Haraway is referring to scientific methodological approaches defined by the researcher’s detached objectivity toward the subjects of the research, making universal claims and thus overlooking the particular situatedness of the subjects.

²²⁴ By “God-like” eye I am referring to the link Haraway is resisting between the God-like power scientific ways of seeing have historically claimed and which Haraway casts as an object of faith.

²²⁵ Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, 575.

²²⁶ Haraway, 575–76.

²²⁷ Haraway, 580.

²²⁸ Haraway, 580.

will support me with the work my project seeks to do in terms of unlearning the binaries of European thought from within. Something, as I will go on to address, that turning to indigenous cultures alone when dealing with binaries would not, at least not in the same way.

Haraway urges the reader away from binary oppositions by shifting the focus onto vision and “a doctrine of embodied objectivity”.²²⁹ She illustrates how embodied objectivity incorporates both paradoxical and critical feminist science projects and renders itself as “situated knowledges” that are predicated on the heart of scientific objectivity, instead of taking the position of the “distant knowing subject”, assuming the position of an embodiment of vision. Unlike scientific objectivity, which is intimately tied to capitalism, colonialism and male supremacy, Haraway shows how an embodiment of vision resolves the problem of multinationalist, postmodern culture with a technologically mediated “partial perspective”, promising “objective vision” because it is partial, embodied and situated. Feminist objectivity is not about universalism, transcendence and a distancing or a “splitting” subject- object relations but about limited location and situated knowledges.²³⁰ Therefore, according to Haraway, embodying vision is a way of undoing what the God’s eye view of science is attempting to do by offering partial, local and situated observations instead of making universal claims. Taking a site-specific approach to the research and inviting participating artists to engage with the practice research in their own environment is informed by this situated methodological framework. Designing the project in this way may offer diverse insights into each artists’ particular situatedness, thus challenging dominant understandings, which often overlook the immediate physical environment interplaying with the person’s experience.

Haraway proceeds to argue that “unlocatable knowledge claims are “irresponsible”, “unable to be called into account” and run the “danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating vision of those less powerful, while claiming to see from their positions”.²³¹ This call to accountability is important for my project because, as we see with dominating forms of power in mainstream mental health services in the UK and the globalisation of mental health, those accredited with psy expertise (mental health professionals trained within the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychoanalysis), are assumed to know more than the person having the experience of distress.²³² Therefore, this methodology, arguing for situated knowledges, challenges the idea of scientific objectivity when considering experiences of distress. When thinking about bodyminds, the emphasis is on the locality of the experience and any claims made are always partial and never

²²⁹ Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', 581.

²³⁰ Haraway, 581–83.

²³¹ Haraway, 584.

²³² The term psy disciplines or psy sciences as a collective term for psychiatry, psychology, psychoanalysis and other psycho-therapies was coined by Michel Foucault in his book “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison”, a historical analysis on how these disciplines became entangled in new forms of government.

applicable across time and space. If there is any hope of transforming Western systems of knowledge and ways of seeing, location should be the politically engaged attack on the doctrine of objectivity, from globalised understandings to webbed connections and local knowledges to “epistemologies of embodied objectivity”.²³³

This theoretical methodology is one of the reasons why the practice research evolved to be site-specific, framing one of my three research questions: Can embodied research practices perform entangled storytelling to resist or undermine hierarchies of being? The focus of this question emphasises Haraway’s critique of “hierarchies of being” that were established within scientific modernity. My project is situated within this critique, seeking to introduce into it a specific engagement with embodied practice and story-telling, directed towards building new worldings, spaces and collective practices. It frames the practice to hold and incorporate the situated ecology of both my own and participants’ lived experience of distress, as entangled with our own internal landscapes. In taking this feminist embodied approach, I seek to explore how the telling of my own embodied story may get tangled with others’ stories as I document and craft my thesis. Thus, the project seeks to respond to Haraway’s call for situated knowledges and the problems of universalism in globalised approaches to mental health. Through this work I seek to explore how we can inform some of the different ways in which we can think about how our bodies are entangled in the environment/culture in our current times and how we might respond to these as humans, artists, academics, and scientists.²³⁴

The “root of all violence” in Western culture, according to Ben Spatz, is the dichotomy created by distancing itself from things and people in trying to be objective about them and thereby making “objects” out of things and people in losing “touch” with them.²³⁵ This is the same violence as Western cultural understandings of madness and the focus on objectivity, with the application of scientific paradigms in the psy sciences to madness. Reductivism overlooks the complex entanglements of madness. Reductivist paradigms are also based on the legitimacy of psy expertise, the scientific position, objectivity and the objective gaze, which leads to an objectification of the other and a commodification of madness.

I undertook my research during the Coronavirus pandemic in London using digital environments while seeking to respond to the question of indigeneity of our times during the rising visibility of racial oppression and protest in mainstream culture. Not only am I situated in London, but I am

²³³ Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’, 583–88.

²³⁴ Jason Farman, “Stories, Spaces, and Bodies: The Production of Embodied Space through Mobile Media Storytelling,” *Communication Research and Practice* 1, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 101–16.

²³⁵ Ben Spatz, *Blue Sky Body*, 19.

doing my research with Goldsmiths College, a neoliberal institution. By “neoliberal institution”, I understand the way in which neoliberal principles, that is, free market capitalism, informs the structure and practices of the University, as reflected in policies governing the course programmes, conceiving of staff as producers, and students as both producers and consumers.²³⁶ As a result of the neoliberalisation of my PhD programme, my project has become in-itself a commodity and I struggle to support myself due to the impact institutional politics have on me as researcher.

My research responds to the situatedness of my research project. I use embodied practice to research experiences of distress in London, and attempt to collectivise individual experiences through weekly reflective group debrief sessions. In this way, the context of my project matters for my research because of the way the pandemic exposed inequalities, the impact of ecological catastrophe and the interconnectedness of the world – and importantly, the need for social justice work. My research explores whether embodied practices of storytelling might help navigate the mental distress of this. I do this by employing the different methodological approaches of autoethnography, technologies of self, indigeneity and situated knowledges, and consider how each of these different methodologies brings in a different situated set of questions that matter for my situated project. The practice research is then in a position to generate material that might offer insights about how the question of embodiment may serve as a way into understanding the particular conditions of the mental health crisis in London. Further, working with artists may serve as a situated site of precarity within this context where I locate my research.

3.4 Embodied Therapeutic Culture.

In order to understand the relevance of approaching embodiment as a decolonial tool, in this section I illustrate particular practices that inform my research. I also critically analyse the increasing popularisation of appropriating non-Western practices promoting a turn to the body as a medium for self-knowledge, self-healing and understanding the self in the West. A turn which Pagis refers to as “embodied therapeutic culture”.²³⁷ The appropriation of these practices raises questions about cultural appropriation within a globalising mental health system. I argue that practicing embodiment is a way into articulating our situated entanglements, but that secularising practices like Yoga and meditation, which originally have roots in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, leads to the loss of a conception of an underlying “subtle” self when appropriated for Western ideological ends. One of the advantages of secularisation is that because of the emphasis on the

²³⁶ Alpesh Maisuria and Mike Cole, ‘The Neoliberalization of Higher Education in England: An Alternative Is Possible’, *Policy Futures in Education* 15, no. 5 (1 June 2017): 602, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317719792>.

²³⁷ Nehring et al., *Global Therapeutic Cultures*, 177.

body, embodied therapeutic culture is not clearly defined as relating to the psy disciplines. Embodied practices build on techniques and discourses that challenge body-mind dualism, blurring the distinction between mental and physical health in a way that the psy disciplines may not always do.²³⁸ This is one of the primary reasons why in my practice I too turn to embodied practices and use some of these techniques in my work with others. Nevertheless, I argue that when non-Western practices are secularised and appropriated into an individualistic Western culture, the inherent conception of self as deeply spiritual, interconnected with all life and interdependent with others is lost, and with it the potential for healing, undoing the violence of the separate, individualised culture of the self, disconnected from all life.

I admit that this way of framing practices in terms of a non-Western and Western binary sits uneasy with me. I am actively thinking with a feeling of being stuck in this simplification of “non-Western” practices as non-dualistic, recognising that it is a generalisation, there is also dualism in many non-Western traditions and there is non-dualism in Western traditions. I want to get out of making these generalisations, but I am still searching how to. I explore this as part of my story searching for non-duality in the West, the history of esotericism in Western thought, experience with altered states of consciousness and the healing dimension of dance. I am curious about the histories of women who had a connection with nature and healed with nature and who were persecuted and killed as witches in Europe. Someone once suggested I ought to look at the pain and the fear I am not facing when I look to other cultures and not my own to work with in my practice. Here I refer to Silvia Federici’s *“Caliban and the witch: women, the body and primitive accumulation”*²³⁹ and consider including an argument that the rise of capitalist systems led to the witch trails in Europe, resulting from an attempt to attack feminine knowledge, power and skill. How do we include different cultural practices without cultural appropriation? According to Post-humanist critiques, like Stefan Herbrechter’s *“Posthumanism, subjectivity, autobiography”*,²⁴⁰ in Western contexts, given the history of modernity, the enlightenment, ideology of self and the liberal humanist subject is orientated toward separateness, self-sufficiency, independency, autonomy, and freedom. When this ideological understanding of the self is merged with the economic, socio-political circumstances of free-market capitalism, we see the rise of the neoliberal self. Therefore, the neoliberal self refers to the self that is driven by economic ends and the individual becomes the interface of the government, as well the self. Foucault refers to this subject as a grid between governmental ideology and the governed, what he also refers to as *“homo economicus”*.²⁴¹ This

²³⁸ Nehring et al., 177.

²³⁹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation.*, Penguin Modern Classics (Dublin: Penguin Books, 2021).

²⁴⁰ Stefan Herbrechter, ‘Posthumanism, Subjectivity, Autobiography’, *Subjectivity* 5, no. 3 (2012): 327–47, <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2012.13>.

²⁴¹ Foucault cited in Andrew Dilts, ‘From “Entrepreneur of the Self” to “Care of the Self”: Neo-Liberal Governmentality and Foucault’s Ethics’, *Foucault Studies*, 12 September 2011, 130.

creates extreme pressure on the neoliberal self, which often results in mental distress and the experience of crisis. However, building on my cross-cultural research on self-complexity and stress for my master's thesis, I argue that self-complexity only leads to a fragmentation of the self when embodied therapeutic practices are culturally appropriated into Western atomised culture.²⁴² When non-Western practices are stolen from their historical and traditional cultural contexts and put to work for other ideological ends such as when meditation is taught in corporate settings to boost worker productivity, as Ronald Purser argues in their book "*McMindfulness*" for example, the underlying value of the cultural conception of self as fundamentally interdependent, is lost.²⁴³

In my project, I seek to use non-Western cultural practices, and their lineage, to try and preserve the conception of self inherent within each cultural practice. I do this with the intention to avoid appropriating practices for neoliberal ideological aims. I seek instead to undo some of the violence of the Western individualised self; specifically in the case of my project, individualised understandings of distress, by applying the practices with group work that invites a focus on shared experience. I argue that the aims of using cultural practices not one's own, determines whether one is avoiding the violence of appropriation or not. Therefore, the aims and objectives for which I use other cultural practices, like meditative movement for example, are the same as when practiced within their cultural specificity. In my research, I intend the practice as a liberatory practice, a practice of freedom, fostering interdependence and a shared sense of collectivity.

3.5 The Globalisation of Mental Health and Embodied Practices.

Having established the problems raised by culturally translating and secularising "non-Western" practices for Western audiences in the introduction²⁴⁴ as well as appropriation above, I can now turn to deal with the translation of Western ideas across the globe, through colonial forms of power. I argue that the commodification of cultural practices of self by a globalising system of neoliberal capitalism, is inherently intertwined with colonialism. We cannot only consider the self in isolation, as the self is never detached from the conditions which it is borne from. Given that the self is always constituted within particular structural conditions, I can suggest that the globalisation of mental health is not only troublesome for personal experience but also for indigenous and other ways of knowing experiences of distress. In this section, I discuss themes of colonialism and consider how indigenous, non-Western and other ways of approaching mental health are

²⁴² Fabienne Formosa, 'A Cross-Cultural Study of Self-Complexity and Stress' (M.Sc, University of Essex, 2013, *Unpublished*).

²⁴³ Ronald E. Purser, *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality* (London, New York: Repeater, Random House, Inc, 2019).

²⁴⁴ See section 1.1.1.

threatened with delegitimation when subjected to global norms and scientific legitimization processes when Western understandings of mental health are globalised.

In the forward to *“Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies”*, Peter Beresford writes that since the Enlightenment medicalised madness, individual models dominating madness and experiences of distress in the Western world have been exported to colonise, subvert and overshadow other cultural, social interpretations, and understandings of these fundamental human experiences.²⁴⁵ The notion of globalising mental health centres around the movement of “scaling up” psychiatric treatments and giving access to psychiatric medication globally, particularly in the global South. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Movement for Global Mental Health (MGMH) are the two main driving forces behind this work.²⁴⁶ However, at the heart of Global Mental Health (GMH) lies a growing rift between critical and transcultural psychiatrists calling for the abolition of psychiatric diagnostic systems, due to an increasing awareness of the harm caused by psychiatric medications and interventions and the call for greater access to psychiatric care.²⁴⁷ These conflicting stances between a call for scaling up access to psychiatric interventions and a call for raising awareness of the harm caused by these same interventions are both made on the grounds of fundamental human rights.²⁴⁸

In his analysis of the globalisation of embodied therapeutic culture, Pagis notes that the key features underlying this process of “secularization”, “adaptation” and “translation”, also depended on “scientific legitimation”.²⁴⁹ Pagis describes “scientific legitimation” as the framing of Eastern spiritual and psychological practices in terms of Western secularized, psychological language. Framing them as “science-based” practices that adhere to the discourses promoted by pop psychology on self-help tools, ameliorating subjective well-being and increasing happiness. In 30 years, Eastern practices that once only appealed to those who deemed themselves as “counter-cultural and new-age”, became mainstream practices promoted in schools, recommended by general practitioners, and even taught in gyms with the stamp of neuroscientific and psychological studies.²⁵⁰ Therefore, having shown how the self and practices of self are inherently linked with colonialism, I can now claim that the globalising system of mental health is not only problematic when potentially misunderstood when non-Western practices are translated to a Western audience and how this may be sometimes detrimental to one’s health, but also in the way Western norms of scientific legitimation dominate and discredit local indigenous and other ways of understanding

²⁴⁵ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, *Mad Matters*; ix-x.

²⁴⁶ Mills, *Decolonizing Global Mental Health*, 2.

²⁴⁷ Mills, 2–3.

²⁴⁸ Mills, 3.

²⁴⁹ Nehring et al., *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures.*, 179.

²⁵⁰ Nehring et al., 179.

distress that do not fit within a Western scientific paradigm. It is these problems and tensions that inform my theoretical framework and why applying embodied research methodologies to my research orientates me to approach embodiment as a decolonial tool.

If we consider global mental health as a phenomenon akin to colonisation, then we can see how globalising mental health pushes an agenda that urges a standardised framework to experiences of distress, irrespective of one's cultural, ethnic, material and situated existence. This often results in a disproportionate number of non-Western people being diagnosed with mental health disorders. Moreover, all non-Western alternative ways of knowing and understanding subjectivity are effectively being delegitimised all around the world. Moreover, a very important and on-going cause of mental distress across the globe arises from the effects of colonialism and racialised hierarchies.²⁵¹ This is problematic, not only for mainstream mental health services where professionals are then ill-equipped to respond to a diversity of people, but also in the violent and arrogant imposition of global mental health, standardised scientific ways of knowing, and a form of “epistemic violence” in non-Western countries.²⁵²

Together with China Mills, I ask the question: are the current forms of global psychiatry and the psy disciplines a colonial tool or a form of colonialism in themselves? Mills refers to The World Health Organisation (WHO) and its agenda to “scale up” mental health provisions employing psy-expertise, psychopharmaceuticals and therapeutic culture with humanitarian responses to the Global South, low-income and middle-income countries, as a double-edged sword that makes global psychiatrisation and the globalisation of therapeutic culture problematic, a culture that is operationalising colonial logic.²⁵³ The globalisation of the psy disciplines involves the imposition of Western approaches to irrationality as “mental illness” in non-Western cultures as a way to “weed out” local, traditional and alternative approaches deemed to be “irrational”, according to the standard approach of the global north.²⁵⁴ For example, this is eloquently manifested in Kader Attia's “*Reason's Oxymorons*” video installation analysing how different cultures conceive and treat “psychiatric disorders”, showing how mental illness can be a lens to analyse the dynamics of African society and the context of his work, whilst also offering a critique of Western psychiatric culture.²⁵⁵ It is therefore vital to both anticolonial and critical mental health or critical psychiatry movements, whilst still retaining their particularities, to also recognize their commonalities in

²⁵¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

²⁵² Estenfanía Peñafiel Loaiza and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Two Works Series Vol. 1*, 1st edition (London: Walther & Franz König, 2021).

²⁵³ Cohen, *Handbook of Critical Mental Health*, 205.

²⁵⁴ Mills, *Decolonizing Global Mental Health*, 3.

²⁵⁵ ‘Kader Attia’, accessed 22 November 2021, <http://kaderattia.de/reasons-oxymorons-by-chad-elias-in-kader-attia-the-hood-museum-of-art-dartmouth-2018/>.

fighting against universal standards and global norms of mental health that threaten to eliminate diverse ways of knowing and being.²⁵⁶

Together with Clement Bayetti and Sumeet Jain in their chapter on “*Problematizing Global Mental Health*”, I argue that we urgently need more “ecological frameworks” to understand “mental ill-health” in terms of “suffering and care”.²⁵⁷ Ecological frameworks of recovery and well-being encompass the situated environment and would expand our understanding of suffering “as something shaped by the wider ecologies in which it occurs”.²⁵⁸ These frameworks would also challenge the universal standard categories of “mental illness”, as advocated by Global Mental Health, to recognize the “global trends” that are shaping “ecologies of suffering” as well as the internal biological influences.²⁵⁹

I end this section by posing the question: how might this context matter for our embodied storytelling? Is it possible to respond to these global complexities from a situated and embodied position to resist the hierarchies of being prevalent in mental health discourse? I now turn to discuss how I frame my project as involving the mobilising of practices of self as practices of freedom, before moving on to the embodied practices themselves. Orientating practices of self in response to this global context – i.e. insisting that it matters that I am situated in these systems and this requires practices of reflection and embodied practices that can attend to stress, fear, pain, exhaustion, excitement and joy that we hold in our bodies and minds unacknowledged. These conditions can often limit capacity for empathy and the kind of work that is needed to understand the world and its potential for wellness, as interconnected and us, as response-able within this.

²⁵⁶ Cohen, 208-209.

²⁵⁷ Cohen, *Handbook of Critical Mental Health*, 224.

²⁵⁸ Cohen, 227.

²⁵⁹ Cohen, 225-228.

3.6 A Practice of Self as Methodology.

I now turn to the rationalist scientism of the 18th century, with its connection to the political right and liberalism, focusing on objectivity, science, rationality, neoliberalism, capitalism, globalisation and how this led to the economic role of psychiatry.²⁶⁰ This can be traced all the way into the global reach of unrestrained capitalism in the 19th century as is reflected in the co-option of the Recovery Narrative as a standard technology mental health professionals use to foster rational thinking, normal existence and a return to labour and economic productivity in clients. I now develop this insistence on the importance of self, autoethnography and situated knowledges that I have been developing in this chapter, and critically analyse how practices of self, such as those used in therapeutic cultures, might function within globalising ideologies of mental health to the problem of the globalisation of embodied therapeutic culture in the West. Therapeutic culture seems to have as many definitions as it does practitioners. I like the definition offered by Rober and Psycha: “It should be a culture where there is respect and emphatic recognition for the stories clients tell.”²⁶¹ I research practices of self and practices of freedom in the group work.

In the first two volumes of the “*History of Sexuality*”,²⁶² Foucault evolves his conception of the self from one that is constituted by techniques of domination and diverse forms of power that discipline bodies and construct subjectivities, to a subjectivity that is also shaped by practices of the care of the self.²⁶³ Foucault’s project establishes how practices of freedom, in response to repressive, oppressive and dominating forms of power, can also be useful when dealing with colonialism, sanism, and heteronormativity. I turn to Foucault’s late work, where he insisted that this resistance came not only through collective forms of political resistance, but also through practices of subjectivity that seek to transform the self in particular ways. However, practices of self are not automatically liberatory, they can equally be appropriated by forms of power such as in the example of neoliberal culture’s appropriation of self-help, and the disciplining of subjects into neoliberal subjects, or what Foucault calls, *homoeconomicus*, as discussed above. GMH and forms of neocolonialism become dominating when they refuse to allow space for alternatives and take over the world stage, or when they keep the world locked into injustices. It is then all the more important to locate spaces to maintain practices of resistance. Thus, with this methodological framework, I navigate how to use practices of self and freedom to respond to hegemonic forms of

²⁶⁰ LeFrançois, Menzies, and Reaume, *Mad Matters*; ix-x.

²⁶¹ Peter Rober and M. A. Psycha, ‘Clinical Theory & Practice International Perspectives on Theory and Practice Fam Proc 37:201-213, 1998 Reflections on Ways to Create a Safe Therapeutic Culture for Children in Family Therapy’, n.d., 2.

²⁶² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality / Vol. 1, The Will to Knowledge.*, Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984. *Histoire de La Sexualité*. English (London: Penguin Books, 1998); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality / Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. (London: Penguin, 1992).

²⁶³ Dilts, ‘From “Entrepreneur of the Self” to “Care of the Self”’, 141–42.

power in global mental health, whilst also trying to ensure that I do not appropriate cultural practices for neoliberal goals without them being practices of freedom.

However, the neoliberal self is defined through practices that suppose freedom can only be achieved by adhering to conventions of neoliberal culture. Dilts argues that neoliberal conceptions of the self fail to realise that if the self is understood as human capital and practices of the self are, as a result, a way of investing in the self to enhance capital, then neoliberal practices of the self are formed by the same relations of power that shaped techniques of domination. Foucault analyses the disciplinary powers informing notions of the self in Ancient Greece, Christian and modern societies and concludes that neoliberal governance maximises the mobilisation of power, through practices of self-care.²⁶⁴

Such an analysis becomes relevant to my project due to the way in which embodied practices of self have been appropriated by neoliberal forms of governance, and to ensure that I too do not appropriate cultural practices to avoid these being used for neoliberal ends in the wellness industry. Therefore, one of the methodologies I also employ is a Foucauldian critique of power relations to ensure that the practices of self, and of healing that I use are practices of freedom. The key to ensuring this lies in cultivating self-reflection and collective processing, to open a space of resistance toward power relations that individualise experiences of distress. Undoubtedly, my use of the different cultural practices I use in my therapeutic work may be considered a form of cultural appropriation, as the different practices have been translated into Western institutions. However, instead of using them with the aim of producing efficiency, increasing productivity and individualised forms of wellbeing, in my project I employ the methodologies I do, to orientate the practice towards critical reflection and collective forms of care, through the group reflective sessions. Therefore, with this methodology, the project is orientated toward exploring how the notion of the autobiographical and appropriated individualised technologies of the self may shift, as I orientate the practice as a practice of freedom, as the artists collectivise their experiences through the practice, and group creative practice.

²⁶⁴ Dilts, 144.

3.7 An Ecological Conception of the Self.

According to Joanna Macy the most important development of our time is the change that is happening to our conception of the self. Macy describes the self as “a metaphoric construct of identity and agency”.²⁶⁵ The construct of the self, Macy observes, is like a mirror, holding what matters to us in terms of our self-interests, self-approval, strategies for survival and self-preservation. In her article entitled “*Greening of the Self: The Most Important Development of Modern Times*”, Macy claims that, together with a widening self-interest, our contemporary notion of the self is evolving to what she terms, “the ecological self or the eco-self”,²⁶⁶ a construct of the self that extends to include all other beings and life on earth, what she also calls “the greening of the self”.²⁶⁷ Together with Western practices that trouble the notion of the individualised self, namely, systems theory, post-structuralism, new materialism, certain feminisms and alternative understandings of self prior to the European Enlightenment, my project aims to reintroduce a collective, and structurally constituted conception of self, fundamentally interdependent with all life, to counter the narcissistic and individualistic self prominent in contemporary Western cultures. I do this practically through incorporating materials about cultural lineage of the techniques in the group weekly debrief sessions when reflecting on shared experiences and interconnectivity with our ancestors.

I now turn to the problem of secularising embodied techniques and the loss of a “subtle” or spiritual self that I suggest also needs to be recovered if we want to honour the heritage of the techniques we are appropriating. In an article entitled “*Subtle transformations: Imagining the body in alternative health practices*”²⁶⁸ Johnston and Barcan offer an analysis of alternative therapies in terms of the body model and the subtle body schema²⁶⁹. The authors point out that although some alternative embodied therapies, like spiritual healing and Reiki, involve the intermesh of the spiritual and physical self to be practiced, others, like yoga or massage, can be practiced with or without a spiritual understanding. The transformational outcome promoted by alternative therapy practitioners can range from a physical outlook to healing that incorporates the mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions.²⁷⁰ However, instead of praising the secularisation of therapeutic practices in the way they were assimilated into the identity work of late modern conceptions of the neoliberal self as self-governing subjects ceaselessly striving toward personal development and production,

²⁶⁵ Joanna Macy, ‘The Greening of the Self: The Most Important Development of Modern Times’, Films For Action, accessed 10 August 2021, <https://www.filmsforaction.org/articles/the-greening-of-the-self/>.

²⁶⁶ Macy.

²⁶⁷ Macy.

²⁶⁸ Jay Johnston and Ruth Barcan, ‘Subtle Transformations: Imagining the Body in Alternative Health Practices’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2006): 25–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877906061163>.

²⁶⁹ Johnston and Barcan, 27.

²⁷⁰ Johnston and Barcan, 26.

in Foucauldian terms,²⁷¹ they demonstrate the pressing need for cultural studies to be open to spirituality and religion as important aspects of the way identity is shaped. This is relevant to the ensuing identity politics and New Age discourses which use and consume notions of self.²⁷²

From the onset, the authors clarify that the purpose of their article is not to repudiate or celebrate alternative therapies as “‘creative’, ‘resistant’ or ‘deviant’”.²⁷³ They instead suggest that cultural analyses based on a particular model of the body as the “subtle body”, as referred to in alternative therapies, may enhance, enliven, and in the authors’ own words, even “radicalise” theorisations on affect, corporeality and intersubjectivity in cultural studies²⁷⁴. Traditionally in Western alternative therapy, the subtle body is called the energy body, and this is understood to be a composite of matter and consciousness or the mind. This conception of the self involves a configuration of the corporeal body encompassing the physical self, and the self believed to dwell in the space between the bodily self, others and the world. Thus transcending the imminent self into an extensive subject interpenetrating others and significantly, the social and political spheres.²⁷⁵ Given that “self” can mean so many different things to different people and traditions, I introduce a proliferation of selves into the project to explore whether multiple understandings of “self” may be generative for the project, so that the question of “the self” remains mobile and in question throughout the thesis and the group work. In this sense, I do not presume to know the self, but rather am asking after what it feels like, looks like and behaves like in different ways. The significance of the subtle bodily self and the radical transformation such a conception of the self may offer to dominant Western models of the self (like the individualist neoliberal position and psychiatrised understandings of distress) in terms of “individual embodiment, worldview and intersubjective relations”,²⁷⁶ is thus lost in the secularised, commodified and culturally translated practices of self-care, as manifested in the embodied therapeutic culture in Western contexts.

After completing my Masters, I volunteered in mental health institutions in Sri Lanka and came back to London determined to do a PhD on the neuroscience of meditation. I tried and tried but failed to get funding. I did research internship after research internship to increase my chances of getting the funds but all I got was rejection. Given that I had invested so much of my life in my academic training, I soon found myself experiencing an identity crisis. I was at cross-roads and found myself struggling with the impact this was having on my mental health. However, instead of seeking support from the same cultural systems I was born into and am myself trained in, I started

²⁷¹ Johnston and Barcan, 27.

²⁷² Johnston and Barcan, 27.

²⁷³ Johnston and Barcan, 27.

²⁷⁴ Johnston and Barcan, 28.

²⁷⁵ Johnston and Barcan, 29.

²⁷⁶ Johnston and Barcan, 29.

exploring embodied practices like the ecstatic trance dance and shaking of the Kalahari Bushmen in the Shamanic tradition of Southern Africa and Kundalini dance in classical Indian dance tradition, the energy healing system of Reiki in the Japanese tradition and the use of psychedelic plant medicines San Pedro and Peyote within the Shamanic traditions of Colombia and Peru. Through exploring these different indigenous practices, I had the opportunity to experience different cultural tools for self-reflection, and when I compared them to my previous encounters with traditional Western approaches to experiences of distress, I noticed that the former nourished me, whilst the latter depleted my mental and emotional resources. What does it mean to bring these alternative world views and their practices to the West? Whose liberation is being sought in the process?



Figure 19. "top of the tepee" Photo.²⁷⁷

- fab

²⁷⁷ I include this photo to show how the practice research was constantly informed by the experiential and to offer the reader a visceral engagement, together with the text.

I learnt that different cultures approach the person experiencing crisis differently. The mental health system in the UK individualises experiences of distress, and often pathologises the person having the experience of crisis. It also discredits psychotherapeutic approaches as being unscientific, and therefore less accredited approaches to dealing with people that have been formally diagnosed with a disorder. Whilst indigenous cultures, such as those pertaining to Shamanic traditions, often have a very different approach to the person experiencing crisis and mental distress where it may be celebrated as an initiatory experience and a mark that the person holds potential to become a Shaman, or medicine person, for the community. In Shamanic cultures, we also see the whole community holding the person going through crisis, honoring them as someone that may then potentially go on to heal other people in the community. There are increasingly similar culturally translated concepts in the UK, like the idea of a “spiritual emergency” and “the dark knight of the soul” holding alternative world views, but the norm in mainstream culture is if a person starts having unusual sensory experiences, they will likely be referred on to the psychiatric system via their general practitioner or a hospital in primary care. Whereas, in Shamanism and some Indian cultures, the boundary between being sane and mad is less fixed, and therefore the experience of madness can be experienced as an unfolding process into becoming rather than a pathology that needs to be cured.²⁷⁸

Of course, that is not to say that there is no goodness to be gained from the mental health systems in place in the UK. It is also a very different experience if the person in distress becomes a risk to themselves or others. Later, when I was doing mental health recovery work, I was involved, and sometimes even had to take the lead, on engaging sectioning processes in crisis recovery services. These decisions were informed by risk to self and others, i.e., if we didn't initiate these sectioning processes, the person could have hurt themselves or others. Certainly, in such situations we must engage with the systems available to us in order to safeguard the person and others around them. However, even though sectioning is sometimes necessary and the only available safe option to give the holding that the person needs, it does not mean that the psychiatric system should be the only valid way to respond to acute experiences of distress. Needless to say that, often, what determines one's access to different healing approaches comes down to one's socioeconomic, educational and cultural ethnic background. Many people don't know that it can be experienced in a different way and go through their lives engaging with a system that is trying to suppress or obliterate their experience using medication and cognitive behavioural therapies.

²⁷⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 2nd ed., Bollingen Series 76 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 20–35.

Madness in the West is perceived as a disorder, something that needs to be treated so the person can be normalised to function and be able to participate in the economic system through labour. The experience of madness in the UK is not traditionally seen as an experience that may lead someone to be more knowing because of their experience. They may be tolerated and supported to carry on living as autonomously as possible, but it is unlikely that a person will be turned to as a healer or seen as wise, solely because of their mad experience. Numerous health care professionals, including mental health nurses and psychotherapists who have lived experience of mental ill-health, trauma or mental distress, work within the mental health sector both through the NHS and privately. Indeed, where it is actively welcome, it can even be a motivator for entering the profession.

However, people with lived experience of distress hold their psy profession *despite* the experience of mental distress. I have never come across anyone in the mental health field who has been given their post because they had the experience of madness. The closest thing we have of this in the UK is the notion of “experts by experience” and peer-led groups within established organisations, which allow people that have used the mental health system to sit on panels and participate in decision-making processes when interviewing new staff, for example. In my view, these roles are a long way away from centering the voices of service users in practice. They are more of a nominal role functioning similarly to tokenism, like when white dominated organisations hire people of colour to diversify their organisation, without making any meaningful structural change. There are also paid peer support worker roles, but these are often entry level and lower paid jobs.

In Shamanism, the Shaman is equal to the psychiatrist and their "qualification", the initiation is the mad experience. Becoming mad is the training. I am curious to imagine what this would look like in practice if it were to be translated in mainstream mental health services in the UK if the psychiatrist was the healthcare assistant and the person with lived experience of madness taking on the role of the psychiatrist. Historical practices where such shifts in relations have been attempted, include *La Borde*, where Jean Oury and Felix Guattari attempted to maintain mobile roles within the institutional space.²⁷⁹ Artist's projects also include James Leadbitter's *MadLove : a designer asylum*.²⁸⁰ The question within these manifestations is always how to enable them to grow within the institutional and systemic conditions. This is one of the tasks of institutional analysis, to analyse the institutional system to enable such transformations to take place. However, strategies like those used in *La Borde* would not work in today's institutional context, and *Madlove* is difficult to scale up, hence the importance of looking for other strategies and practices such as the one I

²⁷⁹ Foundation, 'Notes Toward a New Language'.

²⁸⁰ James Leadbitter, "Madlove: A Designer Asylum," *The Vacuum Cleaner* (blog), accessed April 21, 2021, <http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk/madlove-a-designer-asylum/>.

name here, and the relevance of my project that in a certain sense is suggesting that one way to respond to this need is through shifting our understanding of self, practice and embodiment.

This is not to glorify madness and to undermine any real pain or suffering, limited ability, diminished capacity, or risks to self and others in unshared experiences. However, the elders and medicine people in Shamanic cultures facilitate and guide the person through the experience so that the person can learn to travel in it in the way we do in the dream world. The goal is to gain conscious awareness over it, not to suppress it, so that one can experience madness or altered states of consciousness that may not be shared by others and still be able to retain consciousness while exploring other states. Through these experiences, the person then develops a knowing of how to return to the shared one at will. In other words, the task may be to learn how to master the complexity of own's consciousness. Madness may be a marker to indicate that the person has the potential to become a medicine person if they learn how to journey into the other realms of their consciousness, making a practice out of meeting the edges of mind and coming back.²⁸¹

That is the teaching. That is why when the person masters their consciousness, they are then in a position to hold the experience for others having the same experience. One becomes a healer *because* of madness, not despite of it. According to the Shamanic culture, a psychiatrist without lived experience of madness would not be qualified for the job. The question for this chapter is how to achieve this. Hence why I cite the historical occurrences where this has been attempted before, for example, La Borde and Madlove, to learn from their lived experiences of both madness and this kind of radical intervention. My project does something different by bringing in eco-somatic movement practices so it can be understood in relation to them.

In my practice, I draw from these techniques that I have learnt and practiced myself and offer them as alternative ways to unearth and tell embodied and situated stories of the entanglements of distress with others. I want to learn from these other perspectives but I see how, when they enter Western culture, they enter neoliberal norms and are often commodified as part of the wellbeing industry. Embodied therapeutic culture involves the cultural translation of practices that have roots in spiritual traditions, like yoga, tai chi, qigong, meditation and shiatsu for their key concept of approaching embodiment as a way to achieve the goals of neoliberal ideology, like enhancing well-being, aiding personal growth and happiness.²⁸² Examples of how cultural embodied practices like yoga and mindfulness are being put to work for neoliberal ends include the commodification of

²⁸¹ This is my analysis based on information I gathered from Carlos Castaneda (Author of the Teachings of Don Juan), *The Art of Dreaming*, First Edition (Element Books, 1994).; Eliade, *Shamanism.*, direct observations and oral conversations with Rafa Semilla at the plant medicine ceremony I attended in 2014 which I write about in the opening vignette of the thesis in 1.1.2, working with the Wixárika lineage and the indigenous people of Mexico.

²⁸² Michal Pagis cited in Nehring et al., *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures*, 177.

meditation in the form of apps, books and retreats for capital. As a creative practitioner and researcher based in London, having received my education and training within neoliberal forms of mental health, I am now performing my research within a neoliberal institution in the UK. Whilst I also draw inspiration from non-Western cultural practices in my applied practice with others in the wellness industry. I employ these practices and other ways of thinking to trouble, undo and unlearn the violence of the neoliberalisation of mental distress.

I do this practically through guided imagery, working with non-human animals and the elements and inviting participants to become the imagery and move as if they are the image. Through collectivising the space to focus on shared experiences with human others but also to rethink our relationality with the environment through the research. I briefly introduce my methods here to indicate how they address my methodological response to the problems posed above. I return to these and elaborate further together with detailing my ethical considerations in the process of choosing my methods in the methods chapter.

Further, I reflect on the added tension and complexity of establishing the practice professionally while working on the PhD. An added complexity raised through the circumstances I was plunged into due to the pandemic. I explore the ethics of doing business as a creative practitioner and being myself situated within the neoliberal environment I am critiquing in order to make a living within the structures available to me during and after the PhD. Even though there is a clear orientation towards neoliberal goals in the wellbeing industry, this does not mean that all work done within the wellbeing industry is solely orientated towards neoliberal ends, for it is in the gaps in the practice where things actually happen and where healing, understanding and creativity can and do emerge. It is the potential in these gaps that my project turns towards.

3.8 Embodied Practices.

An Ode to her

The first time I delved deep in the waters of my core,
An image of the Virgin Mary flashed before my eyes.
As I stepped into womanness,
I found that as pleasure swells inside of me,
all the Christian stories I was fed as a girl ooze out, uninvited.
Shaking and sweating,
Breathing deeply into my centre,
Surface.
The shame and guilt that were once woven into my skin.
Bit by bit, this dance eats me up and swallows me whole.
Teasingly, playfully I fall into her, God.
And as I hold her and me, I taste sacredness in my flesh.
As it is, human and raw.
Dissolving in movement and sounds emanating from my core:
hungry, ecstatic, wild, unleashed,
I surrender to her primal call.
This feels so good.
It feels really, really good.
It's delicious.

-fab

3.8.1 Embodiment as a Decolonial Tool.



Figure 20. [Priiya Prethora "Tracing Faces" Audio.](#)

Embodiment matters for the methodological theories I discuss in this chapter. Given that the methods I use arise in different situated contexts, embodiment means different things to them. By embodiment, I understand the act of embodying and the conscious state of awareness of the bodymind as an integrated unit i.e the state of being embodied. In Western heritage there is the body mind split, there is patriarchy and capitalism an insistence on dualism, therefore embodiment comes to be centred as a means to resist an internalised culture. In Eastern and many indigenous cultures, dualistic thought is less internalised. That we are embodied is assumed, yet still there are the globalising forces of capitalism and other forms of neocolonialism and culturally specific versions of hierarchies of being (e.g. caste system). Thus, my research seeks to cultivate a practice of embodied ecologies to undo the inherited dualism that is still present in dominant contemporary approaches to mental health, to show how bodyminds are always embedded. A split that persists in a shared culture despite various turns in philosophy, science, feminism, and postcolonial theory.

In this section, I state how the moving body can be used as a decolonial tool in the way the project understands decolonial work. Traditionally, the term decolonisation is understood as the process of a nation or indigenous people withdrawing from a former colony with the aim of reattaining sovereignty over their culture, land, economic and political systems.²⁸³ In my project, I am deliberately introducing an alternative worldview that recentres interdependency, through employing practices and an understanding of indigeneity that centre this. This could be said to be decolonial because it disrupts the universalising neo-colonial ideology of GMH that oppresses

²⁸³ 'What Is Decolonization?', *Interdependence: Global Solidarity and Local Actions* (blog), accessed 24 March 2022, <https://globalsolidaritylocalaction.sites.haverford.edu/what-is-decolonization-why-is-it-important/>.

many and separates self from the ecologies of life. It is thus that I understand embodiment to hold the potential to serve as a decolonial tool, which may undo the colonisation of other ways of experiencing mind, its health and experiences of madness, such as the notion of “good grief”, as discussed in the literature review section 2.2.1 for example, and the globalisation of legitimate, predominantly scientific reductions of mind. I conceive the moving body as a tool with which to unlearn and hence decolonise internalised dominant notions of mental health, offering up space for us to achieve situated agency over our own bodyminds.

Further, in “*Blue Sky Body*”, Ben Spatz claims “*There is no avoiding the need for us all to become indigenous*”²⁸⁴. The “*need*” for us all to “*become indigenous*” is, according to Spatz, a doing that we as a collective must do, a form of remembering that we are immersed in a context, that the neoliberal individualised self is an illusion, that we are always part of a whole, that whether we care about our relations with animate and inanimate others we are embodied and we are entangled. Whilst this is another argument for situated knowledge, in this incarnation it reminds us of colonialism and migration. It is in this sense that I frame this project as embodied research, and respond to this call to decolonise mental health. Whilst I acknowledge the lineage of each embodied technique I use in my practice, I do not approach the body as a decolonial tool to promote indigenous peoples pertaining to particular tribes or nations, but rather to approach embodied practice in mental health as political, one that acknowledges that we cannot understand mental health as detached from relations of care with the land, human and more-than-human others, in a particular space and time.²⁸⁵

As Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in “*Braiding Sweetgrass*” “It was through her actions of reciprocity, the give and take with the land, that the original immigrant became indigenous. For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it.”²⁸⁶ Kimmerer here is speaking of a particular immigrant, Skywoman, who is a part of the origin myth of the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, or North America. Storytelling is important to Kimmerer’s methodology, it is also important to my project. Our cultural myths matter for our understanding and practices of embodiment, and therefore indigeneity matters. I refer here to Aurora Levins Morales’ account of Raicism (rootedness), as a form of radical genealogy to combat racism and to account for the self.²⁸⁷ Thus responding to Spatz call “*for us all to become indigenous*” by focusing on the stories that moving bodies can tell about entanglements and “relations of care”.

²⁸⁴ Ben Spatz, *Blue Sky Body*, xv, Spatz’s italics.

²⁸⁵ Spatz, xv.

²⁸⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, First edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 9.

²⁸⁷ Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals* (Duke University Press, 2019), 99–103.

We can never be completely objective and detached, we are also always immersed too.²⁸⁸ Spatz referencing Audre Lorde asks:

“Does the idea of embodiment have decolonial potential today? Can it be distinguished from the biomedical and objectified body with sufficient precision to make it a decolonial tool? Is embodiment just another one of the “master’s tools”, which will never dismantle the master’s house, or can embodiment be counted among the techniques that might dismantle the house of “the body”?²⁸⁹

I use the notion of decolonisation to shift power within, in our own embodiment, thus responding to governmentality, power structures and the neoliberal self. I have designed the project with this intention to offer different ways into reclaiming agency over the bodymind as interdependent with land, human and non-human others, to undo the violence of the neoliberal self as separate and the internalised notion of healthy mind enmeshed with economic production. In this sense, the practice is shaped by this intent to offer space, a doing, an opening, a way in and a way we can explore with no determined outcome of what may or may not be explored. Consequently, such a practice may be framed as a practice of freedom, as in the process of decolonising, the person may experience some form of liberation from neoliberal and (neo)colonial demands and the way they inform normative understandings of mental health. Not because the practice seeks to liberate but because it may undo some of this violence in our personal daily intimate lives. For example, through listening to the body and sensing the stress, a person may choose to have more rest. I would consider this outcome as potentially being political, liberatory and in this sense having therapeutic or healing value.

It is this understanding of embodiment as a decolonial tool that frames moving bodies as a potentially different way to approach one’s self, entanglements and relationality. This is how embodied research methodology orientates the project to produce knowledge that may suggest how applying an embodied research methodology may respond to the problems of reductivism and identity politics within the mental health field and the mad project respectively. With this theoretical framework, the embodied practice addresses the research question: How can moving bodies tell alternative stories about the material and situated entanglements of distress? As Spatz states, “when we develop alternatives to the Western biomedical body, we open possibilities for new conceptions and implementations of health”.²⁹⁰ In this sense, the material that emerges from this research may offer materially situated embodied knowledges about the self and distress. This is

²⁸⁸ Spatz, *Blue Sky Body*, xv.

²⁸⁹ Spatz, 252.

²⁹⁰ Spatz, 254.

how I understand both the theoretical and practical methodologies of this project to be responding to Spatz' call for indigeneity.



Figure 21. [Still from “Severed Roots” Brixton, London, UK, Audio-Video.](#)

Landing, processing, integrating.
Voicing, the only thing they knew.

Everywhere they went.

Rotting wounds,
Twisting, everything up.

Experiencing,
A surge, a flow.

Being.

Spouting truths.
Ancient, sacred, Maltese temple truths.

The voices of their ancestors.
Fading,
As they walked away.

Turned backs,
Chords cut,
Severed, they survived.

Home.

Remember where you come from!

Blood bound ties rot,
Unknotting smothering knots.

Captive,
Boundaries blurred.
Kept in bondage and shunned.

Swirling, spiralling out of control.
Growing deeper and deeper still,
Freezing, a deafening chill,
Calling out, alienated.

Drenched in shame,
As they ought,
In honour of their roots.²⁹¹

- fab

²⁹¹ I created this piece after being given a bursary to attend “Roots and Culture” workshop with dancingTao, 5Rhythms and movement medicine community that I danced with for many years. My thanks to Christian de Souza, Mark Michael Gayle and Nikki Ashley for co-facilitating the movement and the extended dancingTao team for collaboratively creating the event.



Figure 22. Collaborative artwork, dancingTao "Roots and Culture" workshop, 2017.

3.8.2 Embodied Research.

I now turn to discuss how I apply an embodied methodological theoretical framework to my project. In the paper "*Embodied Research: A Methodology*": Ben Spatz articulates their working definition of embodied practice research as the research of the application of particular techniques to particular bodies in a particular space and time in order to produce knowledge that responds to a set of research questions.²⁹² Spatz argues that practice is the repetition of technique and

²⁹² Ben Spatz, 'Embodied Research: A Methodology', *Liminalities* 13, no. 2 (2017): 1.

“technique is knowledge that structures practice”.²⁹³ According to this understanding of practice research as the application of technique to particular bodies in a specific context, embodied research is the research of the application of technique. In their article “*Embodied Research: A Methodology*”, Spatz claims “embodied practice derives its structure and meaning primarily from lineages of technique”.²⁹⁴ Therefore, if we define practice as the repeated application of technique located in a specific time and place, enacted by a specific group of people, then technique is the knowledge that links one practice with another across different contexts, times and peoples. Spatz claims that it is because technique is repeatable across space, time and bodies, that embodied research may be defined as the research of lineages of techniques in practice²⁹⁵. They state:

“Perhaps the most important aspect of your work is your ability to share and document an area of knowledge that preexists you by hundreds of years. Research need not be wildly innovative to be important; it can also be a form of service to a line or lineage of practice. In leaving traces of your practice, you honor those who came before you and have made your research possible.”²⁹⁶

As outlined in the introduction (Section 1.2.2) I apply a definition of praxis to my practice research and have developed a novel creative practice through the confluence of the theoretical and practical embodied-autoethnographic research. Therefore, considering the interdisciplinary and political orientation of the project, I am not researching the application of one technique here, but rather how the praxis responds to the research questions and the conditions of precarity, madness and the web of ecological crises the project is entangled with. Nevertheless, one of the aims of the project is to offer other embodied practitioners, and artists working in health or crisis related contexts, a way of generating material that responds to the situated environment they are working in. Hence, it is also relevant to map how the different techniques and methods I encountered through my embodied practice informed the methods I used to create site-specific themed audio scores used in this research project. I do this mapping in the methods chapter to both contextualise my experience encountering the different lineages of somatic and movement techniques and to model how the methodology I developed through this research can be used by other practitioners in other contexts.

In the context of my project, I am therefore taking from Spatz a generalised notion of technique as a way of carrying something out that can be repeated over time in different contexts. This notion of

²⁹³ Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.

²⁹⁴ Spatz, ‘Embodied Research’, 13.

²⁹⁵ Spatz, 7.

²⁹⁶ Spatz, 25.

technique allows me to connect certain patterns and ways of doing that connect over time and place, drawing in different lineages. This is different to the understanding of technique as a skill within a particular discipline. Moreover, this understanding also indicates that the spontaneity of improvising and the experience of surrendering to the body moving in unknown and unexpected ways requires discipline. I have found that it is through (for example the technique of shaking) and the repetition of this technique that leads me to generate improvised movement material. It is also how I have learnt to release the grasp of the mind over the body, to experience being in the moment, moving in unfamiliar ways, responding to what is, paying attention to and revelling in not knowing. I understand embodied storytelling practice as a way of allowing the body to speak and to witness the unravelling of unconscious feelings, memories and thoughts materialising through gesture and movement.



Figure 23. "shedding" doodle, Photo.

- fab

Taking the above-described understanding of practice and technique serves to contextualise my experience within dance and movement improvisation, as well as how others might use movement improvisation methods to generate embodied and creative material outside of formal dance

education practices. For example, the miso technique in movement medicine²⁹⁷ is another practice whereby the mover is invited to intuitively find a movement gesture that feels good, regardless of how it looks. Then the repetition of that gesture induces an improvising state where the body starts to generate improvised material and the mover is witnessing the movement unfolding. It is these states that I was referring to as offering insight into unconscious process, the dream body and altered states of consciousness/trance like states or a meditative state, a heightened state of awareness conducive to the process of becoming. These states, similar to some experiences of madness and psychedelic experiences, hold the potential of accessing the dream body/ the unconscious mind by allowing the body to speak through gesture, movement and or mark-making.

One exercise I enjoy doing with clients in wellbeing contexts is guiding them through a movement journey guided imagery to facilitate relaxation of the bodymind, to access a dream-like state and then invite them to connect with a sensation or an emotion that is present for them in the moment and to articulate it through gesture. Then I allow some time to explore the gesture through variation, sometimes it develops into a sequence and then we search for words to describe the movement sequence. In the case of one client who was struggling with anxiety, he developed a movement sequence that he then practiced everyday which helped him to regulate his emotional states. Another client started with spontaneous movement which led them to share a story that they wanted to tell. Without my little box of techniques (tools) I wouldn't know where to start. I probably also would not have a practice. I choose Spatz's paradigm and offer an adaptation through the notion of praxis I introduce in 1.2.2 because it holds my experience and because it helped me to think the development of the practice through. It also led me to recognise the importance of contextualising the evolution of my practice by naming the cultural lineage of each of the techniques I use in my practice.

In the methods chapter,²⁹⁸ I discuss some of the indigenous movement practices I used in my embodied practice to generate the guided audios, like the shaking of the Kalahari Bushmen, and how shaking may offer a way into embodied practice. I argue that this is a form of decolonial work because such embodied practices offer us another way of experiencing and listening to our bodyminds which troubles the globalisation of Western approaches to mental health. Further, I argue that doing embodied research with this methodological orientation is a form of political work. Traditionally the shaking of the Kalahari Bushmen is practiced in the desert around fire, barefoot. I learnt this by going to a drumming jam in London which was led and facilitated by indigenous people in the woods, around fire. This technique offers another way of experiencing embodiment in

²⁹⁷ 'School Of Movement Medicine | Dare To Dream, Dare To Dance', accessed 29 December 2023, <https://www.schoolofmovementmedicine.com/>.

²⁹⁸ See section 4.3.2.

community with the elements of the earth and fire in nature, through trance and altered states of consciousness. In my practice I use the techniques to access an enhanced state of embodiment necessary to generate improvised somatic movement material that actively decentres the human to cultivate a practice exploring relationality with the more-than-human.

Here, I am led by the questions: Can the moving body serve as a way to foster indigeneity with the land and decolonise the neoliberal self? May an eco-somatic practice offer a way into it? Given that we find dance and movement as both a healing and a community practice across cultures, can we learn from indigenous practices that are not formalised in any way? Practices that are shared through community, are not regulated and do not require formal training to be practiced. Where the focus is on trance states, altered states of consciousness, moving that may offer healing as well as another way of experiencing what may be perceived as madness, and crucially performing these in community. Here I am thinking of *"Trance and Dance in Bali"*²⁹⁹, for example. In this sense, I would consider such practices potentially liberatory. I understand this literature to be relevant to how the moving body can tell stories and undermine hierarchies of being. There is no expert running these practices, but because they are usually a community endeavour and even if there is a Shaman, elder or priest present, the experiencing/healing happens from within the self, in the community. These practices show how the threads of personal, healing, political and community may be interwoven.

I argue that imbuing somatic movement with an indigenous dance community philosophy may offer a way into an embodied storytelling practice. Given that in capitalist contexts the tendency is toward alienation, sensing into the body may be an act of resistance. This is how I understand rest, forging intimacies and collaborative meaning-making as an act of resistance at a time when we are pushed further apart. Therefore, research which thinks with the body and poses the question: "what can bodies do?" is an important question for this kind of work. It is with this philosophy that the project engages embodied research methodologies to give epistemic value to the body and to consider it as central to the knowledge production process. In applying this embodied theoretical framework, I can contextualise the cultural practices that informed the development of my praxis.³⁰⁰ I close this section with a vignette from the group work in week three of the guided movement practice, where we discussed the guided imagery of snakes and used the reflection around rest as a counter-cultural practice in a neoliberal context, focused on productivity.

²⁹⁹ 'Trance and Dance in Bali', image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed 22 April 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mbrs02425201/>.

³⁰⁰ See Methods chapter, sections 4.1.1, 4.3.2 and 4.3.7.

I have often thought about hibernation and sort of joked that I'd like to do it but just making that connection because we are animals - we are humans, but we are also animals - and thinking about the different vulnerabilities that animals face in order to survive. I suppose a snake has to eventually shed its skin or a bear has to hibernate and I'm like "do we honour those vulnerable transitions?" Do humans actually honour the transitions we have to make as animals?

- Heidi

Sometimes I feel we are not really allowed that time. Maybe we would to some extent hibernate or shed our skins every so often if we could, but we still have to go on, survive, pay those bills. If only we could say "well, I am shedding my skin now I just need a moment or I am blind right now so I literally cannot do anything."

- fab

3.9 Post-humanism & Technology.

A third and emergent direction of the research was shaped by the coronavirus pandemic and the restrictions posed by social distancing. The circumstances I found myself plunged into, as a researcher and facilitator developing the work in 2020, led me to orientate the practice as an online project using digital environments, to conduct the research, as well as using audio-visual tech for documentation. Hence, technology evolved to be another theoretical and practical methodology, intertwined with embodiment. This component of the project partly developed as a necessary and practical response to the circumstances I was developing the methodology of the project in, but also went beyond it, as it was informed by the affordances technology offered us, as embodied practitioners and researchers, sought to find other ways of working while technologies of governance limited our movements during the lockdowns. Here, technology serves both as a theoretical (practices of self, posthumanist framework) and a practical methodology (digital environments and audio-visual tech). By approaching technology as both a framework with which to orientate the research and a practical tool to produce the material, the project thus addresses the third research question: How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress, given the ecology of our time?

With the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, we found ourselves in an unprecedented global crisis. The responses to this crisis by governments around the world were equally unprecedented. We saw national economies working to guarantee the jobs and wages of workers. Yet with so many having to depend on precarious working contracts to make ends meet and the repeated work

closures due to national police-enforced lockdowns, many were left without a secure source of income and were bound to fall through the cracks. We saw people push their way through border closures, trying to make their way home for support, while many others who had no home to return to were left having to depend on families near or far, social support networks, local communities, mutual aid groups and foodbanks to get through these troubling times. We saw people become the key source of childcare in their households overnight, while still having to work from home, burning out and living in constant overwhelm. We witnessed people considered vulnerable, “high risk”, disabled, or chronically ill suffering continuously, not only from the fear of contracting the virus but also from the isolation and the loneliness shielding for their lives brought. People who experienced cuts to welfare benefits, redundancies, lost their homes, grief-stricken, as well as political divisions.

Whilst previously, we could deny the personal, material and structural inequalities experienced by marginalised identities and those that were already disproportionately experiencing iniquitous socio-economic conditions and their affects on mental health, the pandemic exacerbated them and made them undeniable. We saw the rise of Black Lives Matter movement following the killing of George Floyd, and the rise of the scientific narrative linking the pandemic with ecological collapse, alongside climate crisis activism.³⁰¹ The project aims to address the impact that the environment is having on what was already widely characterised as a “mental health crisis” in the UK within an emerging context of a global pandemic. Even though everyone shares crisis in a different way, mental distress is now, more than ever, a shared experience, as we move through the collective trauma post Covid-19. It is therefore crucial to be addressing these urgent set of concerns in order to change how we respond to experiences of distress in collective ways.

For these contextual reasons, the project was designed to be online, even out of lockdown, to reach more deeply into the participants’ personal and contextual situatedness. The pandemic revealed this rich material when we were confronted with our situatedness. However, the project was designed to be online not only to expose material inequalities but also to make the project safe and accessible to those that may have underlying health conditions. More importantly, the pandemic exacerbated what was already there - we were already living atomised lives in these neoliberal times. The project seeks to explore how we may try to form solidarities and a sense of community as we are pushed further apart, through the use of technology and digital environments as our platforms.

³⁰¹ Lauren Aratani, ‘George Floyd Killing: What Sparked the Protests – and What Has Been the Response?’, *The Guardian*, 29 May 2020, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/29/george-floyd-killing-protests-police-brutality>.

I conceive of technology, as *techne* (art craft), as practice and technique, as ritual, and I approach embodied methodology³⁰² as a technology in-itself, to explore how the embodied practice can meet and entangle with the audio-visual tech. In this sense, my response to the restrictions posed by social distancing to evolve the practice as site-specific, using digital environments and thereby pushing technology to the foreground, offered me the advantage, as a researcher, to go beyond the restrictions from which it emerged, to reach more deeply into participants' personal and situated entanglements than inviting artists into a shared space of my choice (as I originally conceived it) would have allowed. Further, I approach embodied practice as a technology with which to meet the entanglements of embodied storytelling and the limitations of the material and digital space to negotiate with the stories and to create space within which to foreground different dimensions of embodiment, and through moving between the self, others and the nonhuman as expressed in the different "I"s, selves or subjects; to invite in internal and external narratives as they play out through the act of storytelling. I invited participants to negotiate these entanglements within their own embodiment and to play with embodying both the material and digital space differently. It is in meeting, embodying and inviting in entanglements that I understand embodied practice and the audio-visual tech as methodologies and technologies with which to shape diversity in current and future understandings of embodiment and future worldings.

In this way, posthumanism is another theoretical methodology orientating the research. The very logic of the *posthuman* assumes a certain understanding of humanity as whole, liberal and humanist that post-humanist thought critiques and dispenses with, hence the term "post". Posthumanism is therefore a post-Western-concept-of-the-liberal-humanist-subject, as this definition of humanity is not one that all cultures possess. As I am working in Europe and the project is attempting to respond to this legacy in response to mental distress, it is relevant to use this theoretical methodology. However, in engaging with a decolonial methodology, it is crucial not assume this way of thinking applies to all who may engage with my practice research. For example, some of the participants in my project may have different cultural backgrounds and various understandings of humanity and its relationality. It is therefore vital that I also incorporate other practices of thinking about humans' relationships to their others, such as indigenous practices of science and technology, which stem from different world views, like Kimmerer's "*Braiding Sweetgrass*",³⁰³ who merges science, myth and embodied knowledges in a form of

³⁰² Michel Foucault et al., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

³⁰³ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

storytelling. Similarly, Haraway who rejects the posthuman in favour of com-post that fertilises cross species story-telling.³⁰⁴

Nevertheless, this theoretical framework is important to illustrate how the practical and applied technological methodology, both in the project's use of digital environments for weekly group debrief sessions, and crucially, as the framework with which I invite practitioners to think with when choosing which material they choose to share with the group. It is also the framework I apply to the meaning-making and analysis phase of the project. As I review in the next few paragraphs, the posthuman conception of the self has the potential to disrupt linear, neoliberal conceptions of selves as economic, productive selves, racist, ableist and other hierarchies of being, that also transcribe in the stories we tell about our bodyminds, distress and recovery from distress.

When I approach the research as a facilitator, I am informed by posthumanist conceptions of the self and technology, but also when I am collaborating with other artists on the material we share and in choosing how to present the material. This framework supports me in inviting in entanglements with the land/environment, human and non-human others in the embodied storytelling practices that may offer participating artists the grounds upon which to undo the privileging of reason and oppression of mad behaviours, which may have become internalised within, as a result of the discourse and power-knowledge nexus informing understandings of mental health today. Even though I am choosing to carry out this research outside of mental health institutions, if the disciplinary power is imprinted in our bodyminds, we may still see manifestations of dominant narratives seeping through our embodied storytelling practices, and how they are wielded across multiple spaces of governance.

Through this work, I seek to explore how we can inform some of the different ways in which we can think about how our bodies are entangled in the environment/culture in our current times, and how we might respond to these as humans, artists, academics, and scientists. The outcomes of the practice research may help to articulate complexity and shared experiences of distress and may respond to some of the dominant (individualizing) discourses prevalent in mental health today. I suggest that they may also contribute to scholarly research in the fields of Mad Studies, Autoethnographic and Embodied Research and have the potential to inform the public about mental distress in the wider population, people not necessarily using the mental health system, and finding ways of articulating experiences outside the language of pathology through movement and storytelling.

³⁰⁴ Donna Haraway, 'It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories', *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 34, no. 3 (2 September 2019): 565–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2019.1664163>.

4. Chapter Four: Methods Chapter.

4.1 Introduction.

4.1.1 An Opening to my Practice.

I will now turn to introduce the movement approaches that inform my choice of methods for my fieldwork, the specific elements and imagery like folk tales, symbolism, and natural elements that I integrate into the scores I created for this research project. A core and recurring theme of my practice is the link between movement and visualisation. My movement philosophy is informed by my embodied experience encountering somatic movement education and techniques, such as the Feldenkrais method®,³⁰⁵ Body-Mind Centering®,³⁰⁶ Skinner Releasing Technique™,³⁰⁷ and somatic releasing³⁰⁸. Firstly, it is important to stress that the Feldenkrais method®³⁰⁹ Body-Mind Centering®³¹⁰ and the Skinner Releasing Technique™³¹¹ are registered trademarked products that function within a certain economy of the wellbeing industry. I am not a certified practitioner of these techniques, and I do not teach these techniques in any aspect of my work. What I found interesting in my experience learning these somatic movement education practices compared to 5Rhythms®³¹² and ecstatic dance practices, for example, is the focus on releasing tension in the body, enhancing sensitivity through micro, subtle and slow movements and the expansion in perception, as well as the heightened awareness they cultivate.³¹³ This is how the movement philosophy I have developed in my creative practice has been informed by my embodied experience encountering these somatic techniques.

³⁰⁵ 'Feldenkrais Method', accessed 2 December 2022, <https://feldenkrais.com/>. The application of physics, human development education and biomechanics to enhance flexibility, comfort, and efficiency in movement, thus increasing overall perception and awareness.

³⁰⁶ 'Body-Mind Centering®', accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/>. The application of anatomical, physiological, psychophysical, and developmental principles through movement, touch, voice, and mind for an integrated embodied approach to awareness of the bodymind.

³⁰⁷ 'About SRT', *Skinner Releasing Network* (blog), accessed 19 September 2022, <https://skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/welcome-to-srn/about-srt/>. A somatic movement, creative and dance practice technique developed by Joan Skinner that involves a focus on releasing tension, habitual patterns, and blocked energy in the body through imagery and hands on tactile practices to elicit a deeper kinaesthetic experience, ease and freedom in movement.

³⁰⁸ Small gentle movements directed toward the release of tension and pain held in the body to relax the bodymind.

³⁰⁹ 'Feldenkrais Method'.

³¹⁰ 'Body-Mind Centering®', accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/>.

³¹¹ 'About SRT', *Skinner Releasing Network* (blog), accessed 19 September 2022, <https://skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/welcome-to-srn/about-srt/>.

³¹² '5Rhythms', *5Rhythms* (blog), accessed 14 September 2023, <https://www.5rhythms.com/>. The application of Flowing Staccato Chaos Lyrical Stillness® musical rhythms as a movement map into different states of consciousness.

³¹³ 'Feldenkrais Method'.

In observing the affects these somatic movement education techniques had on my bodymind and the novel movement possibilities they offered in my body, I started looking for small and gentle ways to enhance embodied awareness. It is also important to emphasise that my practice is interdisciplinary and is therefore informed by different disciplines and movement philosophies. Further, the model proposed by scholar, somatics educator, activist and healer adrienne maree brown - whose work is informed by 25 years of social and environmental justice facilitation primarily supporting Black liberation, teaching somatics, a love of Octavia E Butler and visionary fiction, and her work as a doula on radical activism-³¹⁴ informs the justice work orientation in my approach to somatic movement in my practice. Therefore, my application of somatics, like maree brown's, significantly differs from the aims of somatic movement education within a wellbeing context based on a neoliberal model.

The development of the themed guided journey that I construct as audio scores for the movement journey I use for the research is informed by my experience as a student attending weekly morning classes at Siobhan Davies Studios.³¹⁵ The morning classes form part of the MFA Creative Practice: Dance Professional, a programme led by Independent Dance and run in partnership with Trinity Laban and Siobhan Davies Studios, focusing on somatics, dance and interdisciplinary practice research. The classes are open to experienced movement practitioners and registered students on the course. Siobhan Davies' open source and accessible pedagogy to members of the public and those wanting to develop their professional creative practice, together with Trinity Laban students, enabled me to encounter different somatic, dance and movement practices through the varied interdisciplinary artistic practices of internationally renowned dance artists teaching there.

During the morning classes at Siobhan Davies Studios,³¹⁶ I also encountered Antonija Livingstone's³¹⁷ practice, their political use of slow-somatic movement and what they refer to as "slow somatic subversions". It is with this orientation toward politicising embodied stories by pulling in ecological entanglements with personal stories and undermining hierarchies of being within the self, relationally with human and more-than-human others, that I employ slow-somatic movement as a method in my creative practice. Hence, my philosophy is informed by my experience learning somatic movement education, but the principles I work with I created from a unique configuration of the different disciplines I have researched through my own embodied practice. In this sense, the practice is both part of my methodology, as it is shaped by it and may also offer a novel pathway to

³¹⁴ 'About – Adrienne Maree Brown', accessed 20 January 2024, <https://adriennemareebrown.net/about/>. Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good (Emergent Strategy): 1*, Illustrated edition (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019).

³¹⁵ 'About', *Siobhan Davies Studios* (blog), accessed 30 June 2023, <https://www.siobhandavies.com/about/>.

³¹⁶ 'About'.

³¹⁷ Studio, 'Antonija Livingstone'.

engaging environments in experiences of crisis through a novel autoethnographic somatic movement research process and practice.

4.1.2 An Overview of the Research Design.

The research consisted of developing a creative practice from my solo movement practice and the praxis methodology of this doctoral research. A component of the practice entailed establishing a group to engage with a themed guided journey over approximately nine weeks. The group work involved six weeks of themed solo movement practice and a weekly group reflective practice over nine weeks. During this time, I sent the artists weekly audio recordings of six themed guided somatic movement scores linked to the research questions, which I include in section 4.3.7, “The Weekly Guided Audios” below. The artists were invited to document their movement improvisation and creative outcomes using the multimodal media methodology introduced in section 1.2.3 which included video, audio, and paper materials for visual, oral and written responses.

The 1-hour online weekly group debrief sessions offered a space for reflection on personal and shared experiences with a focus on collectivising, as well as accounting for personal elements and experiences in relation to our material and situated environments. The collective aspect of the group work also focused on how the practice may offer a way to forge intimacies through both non-verbal and verbal forms of communication, given the neoliberal pressures of the capitalist contexts in which we were predominantly situated. The back and forth from the solo to the group work was vital in exploring some of the tensions that may lie between personalised and collective experiences of distress.

4.1.3 Introduction to Chapter Contents.

In this chapter, I outline the practical steps, varied experiences, and diverse perspectives that inform the assemblage of my project. I intersperse some of the materials provided by participating artists and co-researchers in the form of vignettes and mark-making within the text. I introduce this chapter by tracing my learning experiences, encountering somatic practices and movement improvisation techniques that informed the development of my creative practice in order to contextualise my relationship to somatics and movement improvisation as mainly informed by direct observation of lived experience and embodied effects, following on from sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 in “My Story” on embodied research and the felt sense that I open this thesis with.

I then start with a discussion on my approach to the body as a medium and the practice of somatic movement as a doing, guided by an intent to cultivate an experience of the felt sense, movement

expression, mark-making, healing and research. From this discussion, I move on to elaborate on the project's research design I introduced above. I provide an overview of the group work and the ethical considerations that shaped the project's design. The ethical considerations and how I recruited the artists were vital in enacting the methodologies informing the practice as praxis and a "doing". The sections on ethics also detail how I am positioning myself and the artists in the research.

Subsequently, I describe my method of dreaming combined with the methodology of "not knowing" to craft the themed guided journey. I then delve into a detailed account of the guided audios, contextualising the tasks and imagery within each score and how they relate to the research questions. I also discuss the rationale for using technologies and digital environments for this project. These elements facilitated the engagement of artists from overseas, fostering an evolving creative practice that extends beyond the confines of the research itself, operating on the principles of reciprocity and serving as an alternative world-building project. In this section, I also offer insights into the structure of the weekly group debrief calls and the online exercises I employed. Lastly, I conclude the chapter by briefly introducing the rationale for the meaning-making and analysis of this research in chapter five.

4.2 The Moving Body as an Ecologically Entangled Medium.

I start from the premise that the body can be approached as a medium for self-exploration and self-knowledge, aligning with the embodied therapeutic culture prevalent in the Global North.³¹⁸ However, the differentiation between body and self inadvertently creates a duality. I understand the self to be mobile across cultures, politics, and ideologies. As well as being connected and interdependent, the self is *also* individual, separate, and particular. Thus, my working definition of self is paradoxical, one that allows being to be simultaneously open and closed, individual and collective.³¹⁹ Further, I conceive the body as the site of knowing and experience as (valid) knowledge, as we are constantly becoming.³²⁰

With these understandings, I contend that bodily processes such as breathing and sensations on the skin unlock unconscious desires, feelings and memories stored in the body. I cultivate a

³¹⁸ The practice seeks to challenge how we come to self-knowledge, proposing the body as a medium to gain an enhanced understanding of the self. Thus, this orientation of the practice serves to trouble dominant practices in Western therapeutic modalities and their focus on verbal processing, to follow the proposition of embodied therapeutic practices to focus on the non-verbal to produce self-knowledge. With this understanding of the body as a medium of self-knowledge, the practice responds to the question of hierarchies of being and how this relates to the legitimacy of knowledges within global mental health.

³¹⁹ See Methodology Chapter, section 3.2.

³²⁰ Allegranti, *Embodied Performances*, 12–48.

practice of verbalising or expressing somatic experiences through visual form as a method of self-knowledge, holding therapeutic potential³²¹ for healing,³²² well-being³²³ and bodymind health.³²⁴ In Yoga, students are taught to divert their attention to the rhythmic synchronisation of movement, the breath, and the stretching of the muscles through poses. Similarly, in Tai Chi and Qigong, students are asked to focus on the centre of the body as the peripheral parts are in motion.³²⁵ I also understand bodily processes such as the breath and sensations on the skin to access unconscious knowledge about the self through my guided movement practice. It is thus with this understanding of bodily sensations as ways into bodily and unconscious³²⁶ knowledge about the situated self that I may then go on to suggest that the use of non-Western techniques for Western audiences has the potential to offer insights into conditions that exacerbated a mental health crisis, like the global coronavirus pandemic and systemic injustices.

Embodied therapeutic techniques, like the discursive techniques of self-verbalisation in Western therapeutic practices, also call for a turn inward toward hidden parts of the self.³²⁷ Awareness in embodied techniques is achieved by paying attention to hidden parts of the embodied self by noticing the breath, sensations on the skin, muscle tension, movement, bodily rhythms, and other processes usually in the background in everyday life.³²⁸ The shift in attention to the body and unconscious physical processes can be facilitated directly by the practitioner through touch, such as in practices like Reiki and Shiatsu, or groups through techniques like the body scan and attention to breathing in yoga and meditation.³²⁹

I am informed by somatic techniques in my embodied movement practice for their practical and accessible approach to integrating the body and the mind as one unit and cultivating awareness of embodiment: this may be overlooked through learning other meditation practices when dealing with Western audiences. Practically, I teach listening to the inner self, experiencing the internal emotional landscape as it manifests in the body, and the non-verbal articulation of sensations through gesture using guided imagery and other visualisation techniques. I then close each practice with mark-making or writing exercises as a visual storytelling or verbalising practice. It is through the use of such practices that I may then go on to suggest that the body as a medium may be a way to unearth embodied stories embedded in particular environments, in a particular space

³²¹ May produce positive effects on the mind and body and/or alleviate negative symptoms.

³²² To restore bodymind health and equanimity.

³²³ The state of feeling comfortable or content.

³²⁴ Nehring et al., *Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures*, 177.

³²⁵ Nehring et al., 178.

³²⁶ By the term unconscious I am referring to pre-reflective knowledge about the self here.

³²⁷ By the word "hidden" I am referring to unconscious embodied experiences that lie outside direct awareness and may not be accessible through introspection alone.

³²⁸ Pagis cited in Nehring et al., 177.

³²⁹ Nehring et al., 177.

and time, capturing embodied storytelling through the visual or written material that emerges from the movement and tracing unconscious bodily movements as a practice.



Figure 24. [Still from "greening of the self, Queens Wood, UK" Video.](#)

- fab

Further, together with Joanna Macy and the evolving notion she calls “the greening of the self”³³⁰ I use guided imagery; and rather than inviting artists to imagine moving with the image of the elements or non-human animals, I instead invite them to become the image, the element or non-human animal through movement in my practice. This concept of becoming in my movement philosophy is informed by my experience as a student and researcher encountering Butoh – a Japanese dance theatre form as part of the morning classes through Sung Im Her’s³³¹ artistic practice also at Siobhan Davies Studios. I do not presume to be teaching Butoh as a dance form, but it is important to acknowledge where my concept of inviting participants to become the image rather than imitating it came from.

In applying the concept of becoming to my practice, I intend to facilitate a process of what Macy refers to as a shift in identification of the self. By inviting participants to become the element of water or a serpent, I hope the prompts help artists extend their experience to encompass other beings and the environment to go beyond the physical self. Like the analysis of the “subtle body” offered by Johnston and Barcan, to transcend³³² and to include other beings and life on earth³³³ in our conception of embodiment. In applying guided imagery to the moving body and finding ways for artists to unearth their embodied stories and allowing their bodies to speak, I am thus offering ways for the moving bodies of participants to speak not as artists on behalf of their environments but to become the elements, non-human animals, and the earth which they are being invited to embody and thus become; for the bodymind to be experienced as part of environments and to speak from the subjects of movement rather than separate from them.³³⁴ In this sense, the conception of the self that I apply in the practice research is one that, like “the subtle self”, extends to include the space in-between the skin encapsulating self and others³³⁵ to generate “a sense of profound interconnectedness with all life”.³³⁶ Thus, it is through applying this method of becoming to my movement philosophy that my practice may serve as a way to undermine hierarchies of being.

³³⁰ Macy, ‘The Greening of the Self’.

³³¹ ‘Sung Im Her 허성임’, Sung Im Her 허성임, accessed 26 September 2023, <https://www.sungimher.com>.

³³² Johnston and Barcan, ‘Subtle Transformations’, 29.

³³³ Macy, ‘The Greening of the Self’.

³³⁴ Macy.

³³⁵ Johnston and Barcan, ‘Subtle Transformations’, 29.

³³⁶ Macy.

4.3 Research Design.

In order to address my research question: How can moving bodies tell alternative stories about the material and situated entanglements of distress? I invited the participating artists to engage with a themed guided journey in the form of scores using digital environments (see section 4.4). The guided movement scores, which I further unpack below, emerged from my embodied practice exploring the research questions. Each week invited a range of entanglements to which the practice could respond. Some of the themes included soil, growth, non-human animals, gender, objects, webs, and other elements, which invited different ways in for each participant's embodied storytelling practice. I offer a detailed discussion illustrating the link between the movement and the symbolism of the imagery, folktales, objects, and elements I integrate into my scores in section 4.3.7, "The Weekly Guided Audios", below. The scores offered themed prompts unpicking layers of personal, political and material ecological entanglements in lived experience. In this way, the project sought to explore how dance and movement improvisation may serve as an alternative way to start articulating the connection between the environmental and the personal in experiences of distress.

Through the practice, I also sought to research the potential embodied research practices hold in performing entangled storytelling to resist or undermine hierarchies of being. I sought to do this by making power relations visible and, within collective space, seeing how embodied differences matter. Given the historical context within which I carried out my research, that is, during a time of global health pandemic, climate emergency and cost of living crisis, the project evolved to use digital environments to perform the research. The pandemic exacerbated the systemic inequalities and injustices many of us were already oppressed by and further exposed the material and situated inequalities that affect daily life, for example, access to tech and suitable space to engage with practice according to individual socioeconomic status.

4.3.1 Ethical Considerations.

In order to approach the research with the artists in a careful and responsible manner, ethical concerns relating to well-being, confidentiality, access and fair contribution were thoroughly considered when deciding on the design for this research project. I now turn to detail these ethical considerations that also played a significant part in informing, and therefore shaping, the group work element of this practice research. The methods revealed in the ethics form relate back to the

notion of situated, imperfect, messy and entangled responsibility as response-ability, which Haraway insists on.³³⁷

Recruitment.

In order to recruit the artists, I used various social media channels via dance movement artist and activist networks that I am part of to offer collaboration on the project using a call-out. This informed potential participating artists in detail what engaging with the project would involve. After gaining the interested participants' informed consent, I guided participants through some screening questions to assess suitability for participation and to determine the needs (if any) for each artist to participate.³³⁸

The screening questions were designed to help both the artists and myself determine if the project structure and aims met the artists' expectations and vice versa. The questions asked the artists about their personal mental health history, which they felt was relevant to disclose as part of their participation in the project, their dance movement improvisation experience, and their expectations from the research.

I assessed suitability for participation by asking about the health support interested participants had in place if they disclosed mental health and/or physical ill health issues that may impact their engagement with the project. I also ensured that each person understood that the practice was not designed as therapy or a clinical intervention. Access to space, resources, and tech, as well as availability to commit to the full duration of the project, were also considered. Given the time limitation of the project, I only included artists with previous experience of embodied and movement practice to participate in the research.

The informed consent form also gave information about the design of the project, involving both solo work and group work. It also explained the importance of the group work both in terms of reflecting on shared experiences and the significance of the collective material and how this may inform the analysis and meaning-making of the thesis.

³³⁷ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.

³³⁸ See Appendix section B.

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation.

During the recruitment phase of the project, the artists were informed that non-anonymised data would be used for the project, and informed consent of this was sought in writing before any data was collected from the artists. My decision to use non-anonymised data was informed by my decision to research experiences of distress in the wider public. In positioning the project outside of mental health institutions, I sought to trouble identity politics in mad studies and the history of mad scholarship, focusing on the experiences of people directly oppressed by psychiatric systems.³³⁹

Participants were offered the possibility to choose to use pseudonyms, which could have been agreed upon either before the artist chose to participate in the research or at a later stage by contacting me directly. Artists were invited to participate in the research on a voluntary basis. The project was framed as a collective project that respects differences and the ethics of authorship over one's own project, where artists could produce their own individual outcomes as well as collective ones.

It was explicitly detailed during the recruitment phase that there would not be any financial remuneration for the artists' contributions; however, it was contracted that they would retain full authorship over any artistic material they created and that they would also be credited with authorship in the collective work. In the informed consent form and during the screening process, I invited the artists to reflect on the power imbalance involved as a researcher working with other practitioners. I emphasised that should they decide to participate in the project we would have multiple relationships to navigate through the work together. I clearly stated that I am myself both an artist and a researcher, and I raised issues related to how the type of relationship we would be enacting could lead to different power dynamics. However, I also clearly explained that I would retain full authorship over the research and analysis derived from the collaborative work for the doctoral thesis.

The Logic of Reciprocity.

Designed in this way, the project thus sought to collectivise the methodologies I outline in the methodology, chapter three, in order to build into the group work what Kimmerer beautifully illustrates in their book *"Braiding Sweetgrass"*, the importance of reciprocity.³⁴⁰ Each artist received from, as well as gifted into, a pool of creative artwork, and through the reflective practice, to foster a sense of collectivity. This was important to disrupt the power imbalance between the artists and

³³⁹ See Literature Review chapter, section 2.2.1.

³⁴⁰ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

myself, and to address the third question on shared complexity as a collective experience in our times. However, this element of reciprocity was also important to ensure that even though the artists were not receiving financial remuneration for their contributions, there was a give and take through the holding of the guided movement practice and weekly group debriefs. This logic of reciprocity was important to safeguard against exploiting the artists and not only doing the work for the accumulation of my cultural capital in the form of the PhD.

I.T Systems.

I consulted with the college's IT Department to find out what digital environments and cloud-based systems they recommended using as secure environments for storing and transferring sensitive data. Participant personal data was stored in a password-encrypted document in the college's cloud through One Drive and will be kept for a maximum of 5 years from the publication of the thesis, after which it will be deleted. Participants were advised to send their material video files as web links to streaming video hosted on sites such as Vimeo or as video files transmitted directly via sites like WeTransfer. Written and audio-visual material was advised to be shared via sites like Google Drive and Slack.³⁴¹ Group debrief discussions were recorded via Microsoft Teams video conferencing.

Adverse Consequences.

Before starting the group work, it was important to recognise how facilitating a practice of writing from the body or telling embodied stories may be uncomfortable for some. I had initial meetings with all interested in participating in the project first to assess the degree of discomfort or distress each person was likely to experience, and then I advised them accordingly. The practice in itself was not likely to cause distress, but the embodied memories that may emerge may be distressing according to the types of experiences the person has had in their embodiment. It may be more distressing for those who have experienced trauma, and this was discussed prior to engagement with the project to make sure that each person could safely engage with the practice and had the right support in place in case of triggering experiences.

I included grounding techniques such as mindful breathing, body scans, shaking and short guided meditation to aid relaxation during the group debrief sessions and offered optional one-to-one sessions. I also provided additional resources, including emotional and psychological support helplines, upon request. This is also linked to ethical concerns when facilitating creative work that

³⁴¹ Slack, 'Slack Is Your Digital HQ', Slack, accessed 2 December 2022, <https://slack.com/intl/en-gb>.

may elicit affective responses. In the informed consent form, it was also clearly stated that they could withdraw from the research anytime, and during the group debrief chats, the option to opt out and not engage with any invitation, prompt or guidance was discussed at length numerous times.

I aimed to create a “brave space” where all participating artists could explore their bodymind experiences and share personal distressing experiences, reflections, questions and creative content produced through engaging with the practice research.³⁴² As Haraway invites us, to “stay with the trouble” rather than fear and turning away from difficulty and suffering.³⁴³ It was also important to give permission to those who engaged with the practice but felt reluctant to share. I navigated the participants’ different ways of engagement by welcoming a multiplicity of responses and affirming the silences, the pauses, and the non-doings as equally valid to the verbal utterances. In this way, I invited everyone to be respectful and considerate of others’ feelings and experiences. I first came across the term brave space through “Other Ways to Care” (OWTC) a collective that emerged around the will to imagine care alternatives drawn out of activist and collective practices that confront, discuss and move beyond the neoliberal project”.³⁴⁴ The term was first heard as an alternative to the more traditional use of Allison Joseph’s term safe spaces at Mad Studies Birmingham.³⁴⁵ OWTC is a collective working within the Visual Cultures department, where I conducted my doctoral research and is, therefore, part of the ecology of the project.

I suggested my interpretation of the term “brave space” to my research group. I applied it as an active term, encouraging each of the participants to take responsibility for their experience. I also used the term brave, and not safe space, to acknowledge that even though I carefully considered the ethical implications of the research and am committed to enacting and cultivating a sensibility toward others’ experiences, it is important to acknowledge that a space can never be completely safe for others. This was important to name so I could aim to respond to conflict within group work to the best of my ability.

I now turn to describe the process I used while creating the themed guided journey for the research and how I applied the rationale of dreaming to my process. In doing so, I am not proposing a set formula for how to conduct embodied research. I seek to contextualise my experiential and intuitive approach to the creative process to demystify it. Some elements of the design were intended by me, others were inspired by my mentors, teachers, and artists I have worked with. Mostly,

³⁴² See Brain Arao and Kristi Clemens chapter “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” in Lisa M. Landreman, *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators* (Stylus Publishing, LLC., 2013), 135-150.

³⁴³ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

³⁴⁴ “OTHER WAYS TO CARE,” OTHER WAYS TO CARE, accessed March 9, 2021, <http://www.otherwaystocare.org/>.

³⁴⁵ “Mad Studies,” Pinskythinking, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.pinskythinking.com/mad-studies>.

however, the design of the project was a co-creation between myself and the conditions I was working in while I developed the creative material. My intention here is to offer others encountering my project an understanding of the tools I used and to invite them into an intuitive space, creating with the conditions that are right for them and their project with the resources available to them. I trust that in creating this detailed narrative about the principles and tools I used, and how the project emerged as a co-creation with the conditions of the time I was performing the research in, it may offer others a way to use the methods I used for the research in a manner that may be generative.

Given that I am writing about this process retrospectively I may unintentionally give the impression that I knew what I was doing all along. This is not the case. Using the methodology of not knowing was fraught with moments of uncertainty, indecision, doubt, and angst, as well as moments of inspiration, playfulness, and insight. The key was to continue to choose to trust even when it was unclear what the next step would be, to be curious, to be with, and to keep moving until something would emerge. Choosing this intuitive way of creating the research material also responded to the project's overarching theme of exploring how embodied research may offer a way to undermine hierarchies of being by centring embodied knowledge. Hence, as a researcher, I also embodied this intent in performing this methodology of not knowing and letting the creative content emerge through this intuitive process of dreaming and moving with the research questions. I now turn to describe the method of dreaming I employed in my embodied approach to moving with the research questions before elaborating on the imagery used in the scores themselves, what motivated them and what each brought to the project.

4.3.2 The Method of Dreaming.

I walk. I walk to dream and birth what I have not yet seen. As I walk, I wish upon stars for my dreams to come true. Today, as I pause and notice the ones that have, the ones that have come true, I realise, that my life is hundreds of wishes come true.

*What a gift, this gift of dreaming.*³⁴⁶



Figure 25. "dreaming", Camden Lock Regent's Canal, London, photo.

- fab

I created the scores during a coronavirus lockdown and used my home space to move with the research questions. I would typically start with a body scan, a process of bringing my awareness to different parts of my body by way of 'checking-in' with my felt sense. This practice would be followed by a movement meditation involving actively directing my attention to my moving body,

³⁴⁶ Walking, particularly slow walking, is practiced as a form of meditation in various Buddhist traditions, and I argue, may also be a form of somatic movement enhancing an awareness of the felt sense.

followed by a movement meditation and slow somatic movement. For this method, I use a practice of deep listening developed by Pauline Oliveros,³⁴⁷ paying attention to the sounds in my environment, synchronising my breathing with my movement, and being aware of sensations on my skin following movement impulses as they arise. I sometimes use music to accompany my movement journey, and other times, I interrupt the sound accompaniment with intervals of silence. I synchronise my breathing together with slow movement and deep listening to cultivate an environment of presence and being with what I am experiencing internally and externally from moment to moment.

Depending on my surroundings and the tension held in my body, I sometimes use a practice of prolonged shaking, inspired by the shaking practice of the Kalahari Bushmen,³⁴⁸ to release tension and to activate my body. This technique helps me to drop my awareness into my body. I usually use percussion as a sound accompaniment when performing this shaking practice. When I feel in an attuned state, I then bring in my object of meditation, in this case, my research questions, to move with and be with. This is a practice that I have used over many years of moving and dancing as a way to respond to a problem or a situation in an embodied way. Sometime after moving in this way, I enter a trance-like state of consciousness, which I refer to as dreaming, whereby I start visioning or seeing images appear in my mind's eye that respond to my object of meditation. In the case of this research project, I saw all the guided imagery I used for the themed journey in this intuitive way of dreaming. I saw the prompts and imagery appear and then wrote a description of the images that were conjured in this dreaming movement state over a period of moving with and being with the research questions over approximately 4 weeks.

³⁴⁷ 'PAULINE OLIVEROS - Welcome', accessed 2 December 2022, <https://paulineoliveros.us/>.

³⁴⁸ Bradford P. Keeney, *Bushman Shaman: Awakening the Spirit Through Ecstatic Dance*, Original ed. edition (Rochester, Vt: Destiny Books, U.S., 2005).

4.3.3 Site-specific.



Figure 26. "searching" Sliema, Malta, Photo.

- fab

In order to address my research question: Can embodied research practices perform entangled storytelling to resist or undermine hierarchies of being? The project sought to engage with the decolonial work proposed in the methodology chapter³⁴⁹ by inviting embodied practitioners to engage in a process of embodied practice that sought to respond to experiences of distress in a situated manner. Applying these somatic and embodied methods to particular and situated environments, the project thus sought to research how we might recognise and unlearn dominant views concerning hierarchies of being within, relationally and with the-more-than-human. I suggest that my practice offers a way of undermining intrinsic and relational hierarchies of being in terms of legitimacy of knowledges by disrupting dominant narratives about the self in relationship with the more-than-human.

³⁴⁹ See section 3.8.1.

Thus, taking a site-specific approach to the research. Participants were invited to find a physical space for the movement practice of their choice. They chose to engage with the guided audios³⁵⁰ in their own homes, studios, and outdoor spaces. It was entirely up to the artist where they chose to move. In this way, the project was immersed in the artists' personal lives for the material generated to reveal insights into their situated and material entanglements. It was in applying the practical embodied methodology in this way, that the practice attempted to produce material that may suggest how embodied research practices may perform entangled storytelling that resists or undermines hierarchies of being.

4.3.4 Guided Audios as Method.

I sent participating artists an audio recording of each score to facilitate their participation in the project and to guide them in generating movement material related to the themes the project investigates. The practice research took place over approximately 9 weeks: 6 weeks for the movement practice and 3 weeks for reflection on the collective piece. I sent the artists a weekly audio recording via the platform Soundcloud³⁵¹ for each weekly somatic movement score on Slack. Each score formed part of a themed guided journey linked to the research questions over a period of 6 weeks. Each score offered 3 basic steps to the weekly embodied practice, starting with set-up instructions if the artists chose to engage with the practice indoors, as shown in the example below.

³⁵⁰ See section 4.3.7.

³⁵¹ 'Discover the Top Streamed Music and Songs Online on Soundcloud'.

Set-up Instructions

Start by creating a safe space where you can do your practice. Clear any objects in the way and create enough space for you to move in. Perhaps stretch both arms out in a 90-degree angle to see if there is enough space for you to move in. You may want to clear any objects from your chosen space or furniture that might interrupt your movements. You may also choose to keep objects or furniture that you may want to interact with/have contact with or surfaces that you may want to use to support your practice. When you've settled on a space that you feel safe and comfortable in, close the door if there are people around and you do not want to be witnessed, set the camera if you want to record yourself, leave a voice recorder at hand if you only want to record your voice, prepare sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials and leave them sitting on the edges of the space that you've created for yourself. I suggest also preparing a blanket or a jumper next to the writing or drawing material in case you feel cold after the practice. I suggest doing this barefoot if it feels comfortable for you; if not, just make sure the socks or shoes you wear have a grip so your contact with the floor can provide you with enough tension and friction to move freely around and enable you to play with shifting your body weight. Wear comfortable clothing to move in. You may want to keep your eyes open for this practice or gently soften your gaze or close your eyes completely from time to time so you can sense your internal reality and body sensations, your movement, and the space around you. Before you start make sure the space is cleared from any tripping hazards. Know that you can stop this exercise at any point, and all the guidelines offered are mere invitations, and you may or may not choose to do all and leave some of them out to follow your own intuitions and sensations as they come to you. When you have set up the space, start by finding a comfortable position.

4.3.5 Guided Movement Practice.

Drawing from somatic and dance movement improvisation techniques, I turned to the body to find an alternative way of unearthing autobiographical stories through the felt sense and movement.³⁵² The practice offered a method of feeling into bodily sensations and finding ways of expressing them non-verbally. This method is powerful and liberating when working with distress, which is often difficult to express verbally. Although my practice may hold therapeutic value, and the participating artists reported this benefit through their engagement with the research, I did not offer to design it to serve as a therapeutic process or a clinical intervention. The reason for this was twofold: firstly, to allow the artistic process to unfold creatively and, secondly, to prioritise the focus on the research themes over personal process. Therefore, the resulting healing and therapeutic outcomes reported by some of the artists were a side-effect and not an intended outcome of this research that can be attributed to the applied value of the methodology developed through this project.

³⁵² Hélène Cixous cited in Allegranti, *Embodied Performances*, 77.

Every so often, I feel met - really met. As in, deep down, in corners of my soul, I didn't even know I had - met. Desire emerges. Carelessly, imagination toys with perception, and narrative unfolds.



Figure 27. "fire" drumming circle, Hackney Marshes, London, Photo.

- fab

4.3.6 Themed Guided Journey.

As discussed above- in 4.3.2, I used a dreaming rationale to create the content I used for the research and a methodology of not knowing and letting it emerge. I, therefore, did not take an analytical approach to generating the scores. Instead, I started with the research questions and reflected on how I could create a themed guided journey that would, in turn, direct a process for the artists to create material that would be relevant to the research. I first intuitively generated the content and then later reflected on how the content that emerged spoke to the aims and research questions of the project. In fact, the links between the themed journey and the themes of the

research became clear to me while I listened to the experiences of the artists during the debrief sessions³⁵³ and the material they generated retrospectively.

I now turn to elaborate on how the weekly guided scores related to the questions posed by the project. Each score offered prompts for guiding the body of participating artists into movement using guided imagery and visualisation techniques. Following the guided imagery, artists were invited to spend some time discovering improvised movement by following impulses and sensations emerging in the body and moving from them as a way of allowing the body to speak (non-verbally) by articulating sensations through gestures, poses and movement. As is held in “Embodied Therapeutic Cultures”³⁵⁴ in the West, I considered how the body may be holding knowledge that may be brought into conscious awareness through engagement with the themed guided journey and the articulation of sensations through gestures and movement. Following the somatic movement improvisation, artists were invited to spend some time mark-making by articulating lingering sensations in the body and any prominent feelings, thoughts or mental images present after the movement through writing or drawing on paper or telling their embodied storytelling using an audio recorder.

4.3.7 The Weekly Guided Audios.³⁵⁵

Week 1: Body Memories.

You can listen to the guided audio as sent to the artists in week one via the Soundcloud link below:

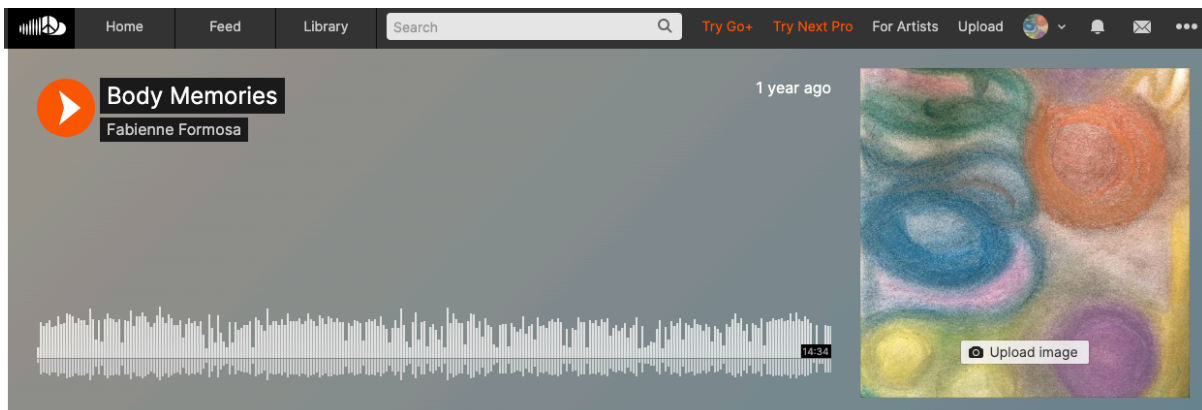
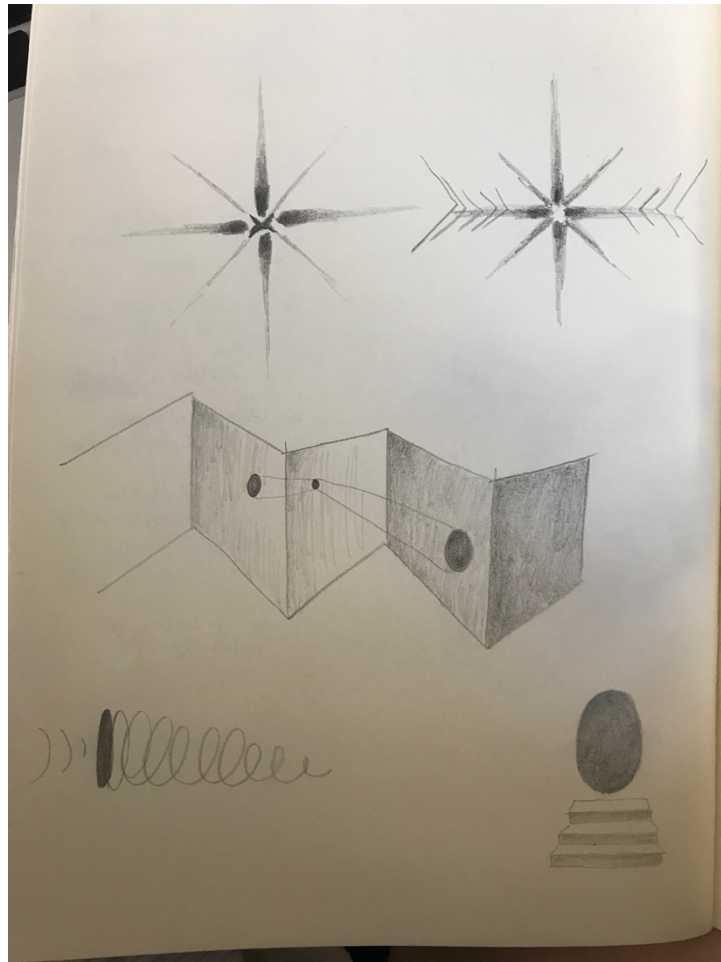


Figure 28. ["Body Memories" Guided Audio.](#)

³⁵³ See section 4.4.2.

³⁵⁴ See chapter 13 “Embodied Therapeutic Culture” by Michal Pagis in Nehring et al., *International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures*, 177–83.

³⁵⁵ See written versions of the scores in the Appendix, section A.



Drawings from first practice with the wall; sounds creating portals through corners which are infinitely unfolding into space. I feel very much pushed into a corner in my life at the minute (as I'm going through an eviction) and trying to move within the limitations given, to find freedom and space where there are walls. Using the walls as drums, as resonating bodies, felt freeing and inspired me to do some drawings. The sound creates new shapes in the room, spheres arise, create portals, inversions. A closing is an opening, obstacles are instruments.

- Amanda

The first week focused on the theme of materiality. It was informed by my embodied experience encountering contact improvisation jams in London and as part of festivals in the UK. Traditionally, contact improvisation is a dance form that involves communication through physical contact between two or more moving bodies by the physical laws that govern the motion of the bodies involved like gravity, inertia and momentum.³⁵⁶ I was curious about the possibilities of using this

³⁵⁶ 'Contact Improvisation UK', Contact Improvisation UK, accessed 26 September 2023, <http://www.contactimprovisation.co.uk/>.

contact principle to both activate the body by making contact with the architecture of one's physical environment and to allow the encounter to be led by impulses and sensations in the body as they unfold through the improvised contact-based somatic movement. Informed by my own embodied explorations of applying contact to my movement practice with my physical environment at the time, I developed the first score to invite the artists to make contact with a wall, the ground or a surface of their choosing as a way to commence unearthing stories held in the body. The contact with the material and immediate physical space also aimed to orientate the practice to weave in the immediate environment as part of the embodied storytelling practice.

The score included a body scan and a colour visualisation as a way into the body, drawing from the teachings of the Feldenkrais method,³⁵⁷ Body-Mind Centering®³⁵⁸ Skinner Releasing Technique™³⁵⁹ and somatic releasing. I used guided imagery of cats and snakes to both activate the spine while making contact with the wall or ground and to release any tension held in the body through the contact. This practice gradually guided the artists to improvise movement by following sensations on the skin and impulses as they were arising moment to moment, thus also incorporating the philosophy of "*Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*" by adrienne maree brown.

I engage pleasure activism as a method for its anti-racist and anti-capitalist work orientation to somatic practice and embodiment to resist neoliberal governmentality and colonial mentality. As I discuss in the methodology chapter, section 3.4, the problem with the neoliberalisation of the wellness industry by corporate businesses is the focus on achieving capitalist ends like boosting performance and increasing productivity, as Ronald Purser argues in their book "*McMindfulness*".³⁶⁰ Therefore, brown's framework for somatic practice enables me to respond to the question of how embodied practices may offer an alternative way of articulating experiences of distress and the activist scholarship of mad studies, but also how such activist practices may then serve to trouble internalised neoliberal forms of governance when practicing self-care. Thus, undermining hierarchies of being within and without through collective practices of freedom. Engaging the politics of pleasure activism in this way enables my practice work to disrupt the neoliberal ideology that is common in the commodification of health and wellbeing practices.

³⁵⁷ 'Feldenkrais Method'.

³⁵⁸ 'Body-Mind Centering®', accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/>.

³⁵⁹ 'About SRT', *Skinner Releasing Network* (blog), accessed 19 September 2022, <https://skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/welcome-to-srn/about-srt/>.

³⁶⁰ Purser, *McMindfulness*.

Week 2: Changing Waters.

You can listen to the guided audio as sent to the artists in week two via the Soundcloud link below:



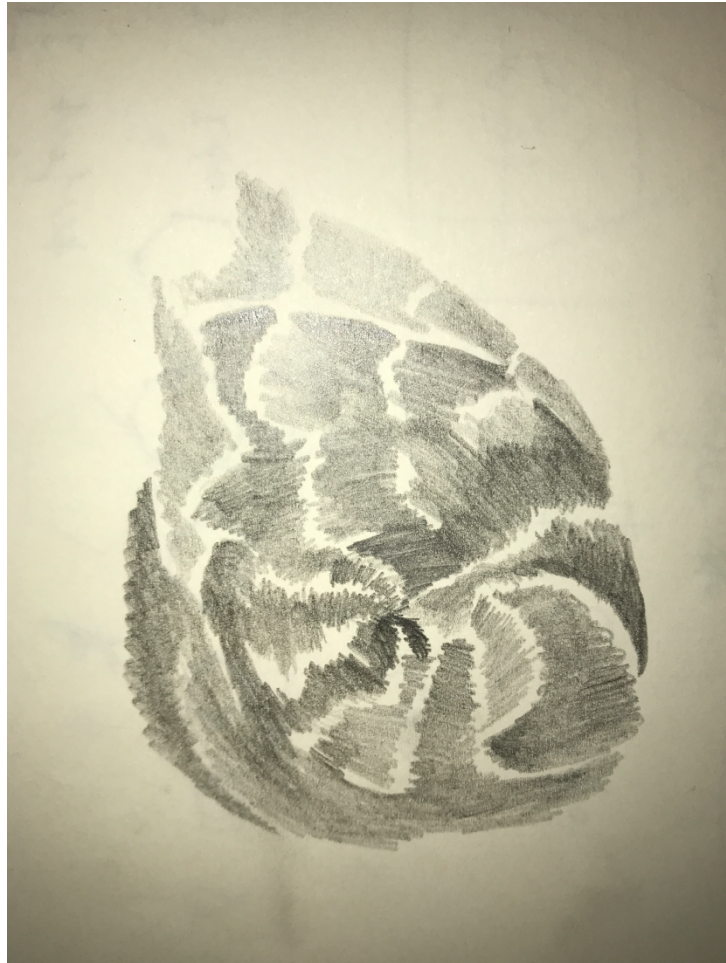
Figure 29. ["Changing Waters" Guided Audio.](#)

The water so freeing – I hate my job and when I work, I avoid moving. When I have to go into work, I am holding so much tension in my body and moving with the theme of water helped me to release the tension. I had been suffering from headaches all week. I am from Greece, and I have a special connection with water. My head was like a rock, and moving with water helped me open up.

- Valia

Feelings of light shining into a cave and little liberations and breakthroughs felt as tension was experienced in ways that were opening and closing. Little ripples from the inside to the outside. Wave movements from the core to the limbs. I made a little drawing and filmed this reflection on a wall a while back and thought of it again.

- Amanda



Whilst doing the practice I was very present with the many different emotions I carry within me at this moment. My belongings are all packed up waiting to be picked up to go into storage. I feel silence heaviness, and emptiness. This state then quickly changed again into ripples and electricity, morphing, and changing my internal state into anger and again calming into surrender. I am ready to let go now I feel. I can see I have the choice of perspective. I went outside and saw this.

- Amanda



Figure 30. [Still from "Amanda Changing Waters" Video.](#)

- Amanda

The second week of the guided journey worked with the theme of water. This score is informed by my embodied experience encountering Vipassana Meditation³⁶¹ and the body scan method I describe in detail in the introduction section 1.1.1. The invitations and offerings here also drew from the same somatic practices described above for week one. This score fused a more elaborate visualisation and applied the concept of becoming I learnt from my encounter of a Butoh workshop³⁶² to guide the artists into both becoming and moving as a body of water.

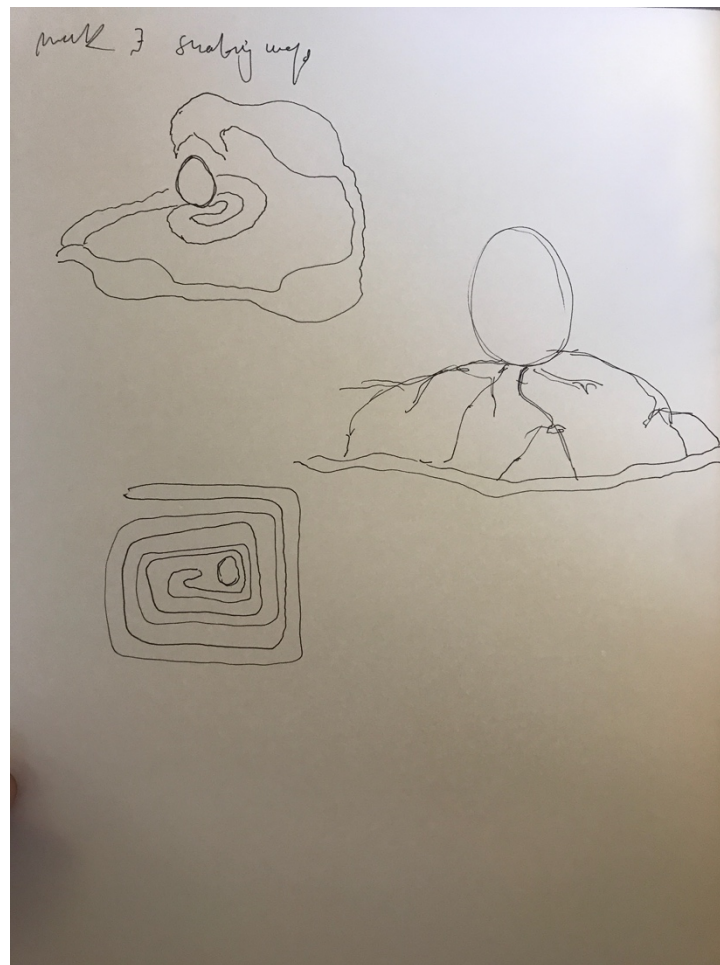
Thus, through embodying the element of water the artists were invited to explore the qualities of flow and liquidity in their moving bodies. In the context of this project, the guided imagery offered journeying with different bodies and qualities of water to actively explore the central research themes of entanglements and moving with the trouble. This was inspired by the "be like water" protest tactics in Hong Kong in 2019.³⁶³ The element of water aligns with the overarching aim of

³⁶¹ 'Vipassana Meditation', accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.dhamma.org>.

³⁶² For a description of my encounter of Butoh and how the concept of becoming is informed by my embodied experience of this encounter see above section 4.2.

³⁶³ Ilaria Maria Sala, 'Hong Kong's "be Water" Protests Leave China Casting about for an Enemy', *The Guardian*, 30 August 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/30/hong-kongs-be-water-protests-leaves-china-casting-about-for-an-enemy>.

the project to invite fluidity when thinking about health or ill health and troubling the dichotomy that ensues from identity politics within mad studies³⁶⁴ to resist individualised understandings of mental health.



A sketch yesterday's practice: snake devouring eggs, egg making roots, which become rivers, which feed into a stream which is a snake. The snake rolling up ready to eat the egg, falls asleep, creating a labyrinth. Yesterday's practice felt expansive and contained both at the same time. I felt like being inside someone's intestine or belly slithering around with no sense of direction or something being in my body moving and me just moving along. Boundaries between inside and outside blurred.

- Amanda

³⁶⁴ See section 2.2.1.

Week 3: Snaking Ways.

You can listen to the guided audio as sent to the artists in week three via the Soundcloud link below:



Figure 31. ["Snaking Ways" Audio Guide.](#)

The third week invited the artists to work with the theme of snaking ways. Again, for this score, I was informed by my embodied experience encountering somatic movement and Butoh dance improvisation practices. The score sought to awaken the animal body and explore themes of vulnerability, power relations and undermining hierarchies of being by guiding the artists to move without limbs. Prompts also included experiencing the space from different angles and focusing on the felt sense of this. This exercise offered ways to explore undermining hierarchies of being in embodiment and between species. The imagery invoked by the snake body heightens the sensuous body, again here alluding to the pleasure principle and how moving with this imagery could be a way to connect with the primal or the animal body in a playful way.

Week 4: Blossoming Bulbs.

You can listen to the guided audio as sent to the artists in week four via the Soundcloud link below:



Figure 32. ["blossoming bulbs" Guided Audio.](#)



Figure 33. "sprouting bulbs", Photo. ³⁶⁵

Plants that grow from bulbs are considered magical plants because they have the ability to return from the dead. Whilst plants that grow from seeds are dependent on the soil for survival, bulb plants are connected to the soil through small bulbs. Bulbs can store all the water and nutrients the plant needs for survival so when the temperature drops or the soil conditions are poor, the part of the plant that is above the ground will wither and die but the life force of the plant takes refuge in the bulb underground. The plant will seem to be dead overground but will be lying dormant in the bulb underground and when the conditions overground are good enough for the plant, it returns to life.

³⁶⁵ 'How to Plant Sprouted Bulbs', Home Guides | SF Gate, accessed 20 January 2021, <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/plant-sprouted-bulbs-64021.html>.



Figure 34. "blossoming bulb", Photo.

- fab

The above excerpt is taken from week four of the guided journey. Here, the artists were invited to work with bulb imagery. This score is informed by both somatic practices and the concept of becoming informed by my experience encountering Butoh, as described above. The artists were guided to visualise becoming a bulb by “taking the shape of the bulb underground [...] starting with a foetal position”, for example. In this way, the score encouraged the artists to actively explore the theme of ecological entanglements in the project.

As the body of the bulbs, the artists were invited to explore the felt sense experience of spiralling downward and “taking refuge in the bulb underground when the conditions overground are poor” and “bursting into life, reaching for the sun and the light when the conditions are friendly”. In this way, the imagery invited the artists to move and think in an embodied way about the relationship each one of us has with our environment and how this shapes our experiences and the entangled stories we may tell.



Figure 35. [Still from "Priya Heavy Balloons", Video.](#)

Week 5: Heavy Balloons.

You can listen to the guided audio as sent to the artists in week five via the Soundcloud link below:

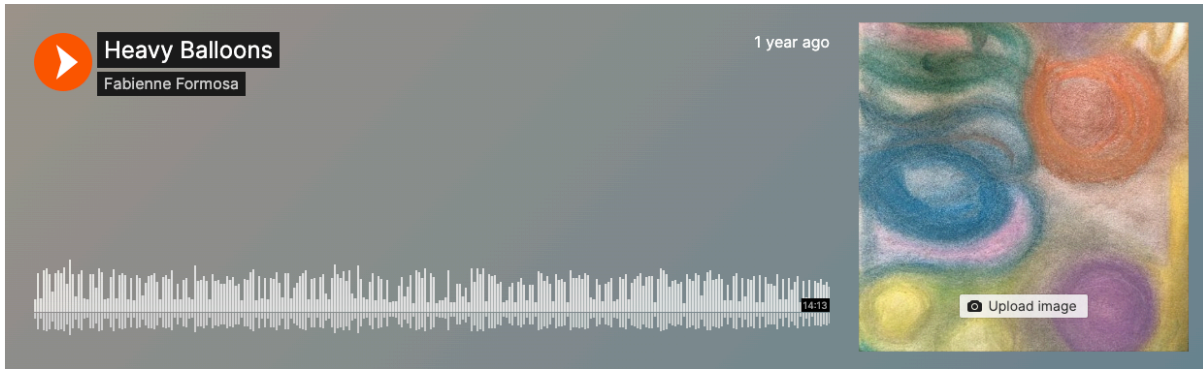


Figure 36. ["Heavy Balloons" Guided Audio.](#)



Figure 37. "heavy balloons" doodle, photo.

- fab

Week five offered a task-based improvisation working with a light object as a prop. The guidance focused on balloons as an object, but the artists were encouraged to find alternatives to this from objects they might already have available to them, like a scarf, a feather, a leaf, a piece of paper or any other object that has the property of lightness. The score was titled “Heavy Balloons” and was informed by my experience as a student encountering Feldenkrais method³⁶⁶, Body-Mind Centering®,³⁶⁷ Skinner Releasing Technique™³⁶⁸ somatic and movement improvisation practices.

The score offered an active exploration of improvised movement in relation to objects and how objects, in turn, may move the body or how the improvisation changes upon encountering an object in space. In this way, this score focused on the embodied experience of being in relationship and shifting anthropocentric perspectives that centre the individual self to relationality and interdependence. Thus allowing for the emergence of a third as a hybrid or a composite between the encounter of the two bodies. This score speaks to the project’s environmental theme but may also serve as a way to explore troubling the atomised self and dominant narratives, hence also speaking to the theme of undermining hierarchies of being in the project with its focus on relationality. Again, here we have the theme of moving with rather than against as another way of resisting.

³⁶⁶ ‘Feldenkrais Method’.

³⁶⁷ ‘Body-Mind Centering®’, accessed 2 December 2022, <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/>.

³⁶⁸ ‘About SRT’, *Skinner Releasing Network* (blog), accessed 19 September 2022, <https://skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/welcome-to-srn/about-srt/>.



Figure 38. Heidi "Heavy Balloons" Drawing, Photo.

- Heidi

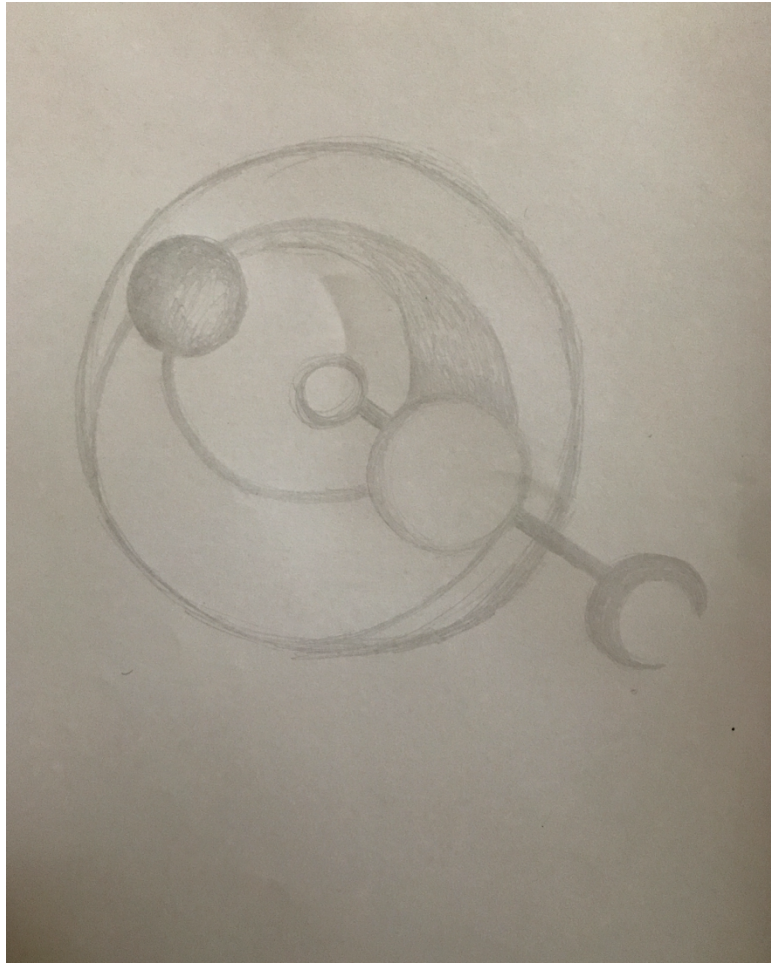


Figure 39. Amanda "Heavy Balloons" Drawing, Photo.

The balloon session reminded me of a clock... like a form of yin and yang symbol that is constantly turning, like a clock... dark season light season... spring equinox! planets rotating, the music of the spheres and a sound score that doesn't tick! I drew this; it kind of looks Islamic... also today is Ismaili New Year.

- Amanda

Week 6: Spider Dance.



Figure 40. "Spider" Onslow Gardens, Muswell Hill, London, UK, Photo.

- fab

You can listen to the guided audio as sent to the artists in week five via the Soundcloud link below:



Figure 41. ["Spider Dance" Guided Audio.](#)

Spider Week made me weave webs of words I have meaning to hear more than say.

you are back.

I like staying with you

writing about you while staying with you

you take away time from my lungs

and give it to me

your complaints, your breathlessness

your blurry stares at the remaining

your sincere projections, my proven futile

seven pushes out, your no pull-ins.

It takes me a cigarette to stabilise what you do.

A cigarette, a fogged street and a few cold bones.

cut to

an x-ray machine

the machine that turns everything into black and white

the white succumbing to the black disappearing

reminds me of the television screen

cut to

its blue indigo Asthalin neon light genetic predisposition

an environment high sound

reasons for feeling your breath

why?

I have visions, they are yours

no mountains, no grains

I squatting inside a watermelon

you pulling at the flush
cutting across my cheek
saying that's how it rains
You?
A self-obstruct button that I pressed
when?
to blast off on a mission to a planet where something is free
to play with my memories
and there are no thought thieves.

- Priiya

Week six drew inspiration from the traditional Italian dance form “pizzica” or “bitten”. It first invited the artists to listen to a short story about the myth of the spider women who, as the folktale goes, would dance frantically for days after being bitten by a spider. The score offered a link to optional traditional tarantella music by Ludovico Einaudi³⁶⁹ as an accompaniment, as is traditional of the dance form. It also prompted the artists to use a blindfold during the improvised movement practice.

The score first started with circular torso movements to activate the spine and the base of the body. It then invited the artists to move in response to the imagined movements of a spider weaving its web around the body by jumping from one point of the body to another and leaving a thread behind. The guidance then progresses to allow some time for undirected, expressive, and chaotic improvised movement, like the delirious poisoned woman would dance as if possessed by the spider’s venom.

The web imagery used in the score speaks to the theme of entanglements in the project. The folktale of the poisoned women dancing frantically and chaotically also speaks to the notion of hysteria in the history of women’s madness in “*The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience*”³⁷⁰ by psychologist and Foucauldian Jane Ussher. My narrative interpretation of this chaotic, delirious dance is evocative of the ways women, irrationality and feminine knowledge have been repressed over time and how meeting this within the self through the dance form may be liberating.

³⁶⁹ Ludovico Einaudi, ‘[La notte della Taranta 2010](#)’,

³⁷⁰ Jane M. Ussher, *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience*, Women and Psychology. (Routledge Ltd, 2011).

The focus on finding freedom within the self by integrating the emotional and the irrational bodymind with the rational mind links to the theme of practices of self as practices of freedom.³⁷¹ Whilst the term women's madness here denotes a binary gender, I want to extend Ussher's use of the term woman here to feminised bodies and feminine knowledge oppressed by dominant and normative narratives within mental health discourses to continue to question and explore categories and hierarchies of being. However, for Foucault, there is no separation between the inner and outer self. Therefore, practices of freedom of the self hold the social and political entanglements as well as the interpersonal dimension as we are always in relations of power. This play between the inner and the outer is central to the project as a practice of freedom.

4.3.8 Movement Improvisation.

I understood the embodied storytelling practice to feature elements of non-verbal movement expression in the form of a visual language, and to capture this material, artists were invited to record their movement practice. The scores included prompts such as the example below to guide the artists to unearth their embodied stories through movement.

Now, as a way of closing this exercise, I invite you to listen to an emotion or a sensation that is present with you right now and to express that in a gesture. It can be anything. When you've clearly articulated a gesture go ahead and repeat it, perhaps at different rhythms or exploring different variations.

Some of the scores also invited the artists to notice the pose and gestures they ended their improvised movement with and to describe this as a way of verbally articulating what the body was trying to communicate through the journey and to record this or write about this as a way to commence the voice capturing or mark-making exercise at the end. Ending the practice with either audio recording of emerging thoughts and feelings following the movement, creative writing, or mark-making exercises.

³⁷¹ Foucault et al., *Technologies of the Self*.

4.3.9 Voicing and Mark-Making.

When you are ready, start to gently open your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and slowly make your way to the edges of your space either sitting on the floor or by finding any other comfortable space to sit in, perhaps wrapping yourself in the blanket if it feels cool. When you find a position that feels good, take a moment to notice if there are any lingering sensations present with you right now. Are any thoughts or mental images inviting your attention? Now pick up your pen, pencil, voice recorder or art materials that you feel drawn to and start pouring any words, thoughts, sensations that capture your attention in this moment, drawing any forms taking shape, or making movements as your pen, pencil makes contact with your sheet of paper in any direction that feels good for you. If your body could speak right now, what would it say? If your hands, feet, toes had a voice what tale would they tell? Do any stories of times long passed surface? Any experiences that your body once saturated come to you in this moment? What yearnings is your body calling to? Allow here some time for your body to speak. The words may or may not keep spilling, they may form sentences and they may not, they may make sense and they may make no sense at all. The shapes you may be drawing may morph into other shapes, maybe it all comes together in a form you recognise, and it may not. All words, shapes are welcome. Blank pages are welcome too.



Figure 42. "vulva" automatic drawing.

- fab

This time, during the meditation, I felt very sort of tired. I had been sneezing a lot. It was nice that it was floaty and light. The movement that you were evoking worked well for me, too. I was in my body, but I was just uhm, I was drawing. And I was listening to you while I was drawing and I really got into it on a physical level, but in in such a different way. Like sort of, um, in my mind, I suppose, like a very direct quiet channel and it was interesting because while you were talking and I was just drawing, I was having all these images coming into my mind and at that point where you said “just let it be” an image came, and it was changing. That was OK and at that point I was I was drawing. My little creature, hanging from the balloon. And I couldn't tell which way up they were, because at first it was like they wanted to have their head hung upside down, so I was like, trying to draw the head upside down with, like, hair falling uhm but then it became very uncertain like what the actual perspective was, and I started to get a bit panicky. It wasn't turning out how I had envisaged that it was meant to turn out in the moment before, but then, when I just kept going, I let myself keep going. I found that uh, it turned into this little insect person and then from there, just uhm, I just really got absorbed, and that was nice because when I was a child. Uh. The way that I would tell stories was that I would just tell them I couldn't read or write, so I'd just make them up and tell them. But the thing that I would have a pen and paper for was drawing, and I think there were like two parts to the whole because the talking was like movement. I would often be moving while I was telling stories, moving while I was talking, and then when I was drawing, I'd just be quiet and really focused and just like a pen on paper sort of thing, but equally going into the zone, going into the flow. Uh, so it was nice to be doing that and it's been like it's a habit that I've lost quite a bit as an adult, but I felt so peaceful while you're talking. It was nice to have your presence there. And I just remembered that usually drawing was a very social activity. I could be with my brothers, or my friends and we just spend ages being in each other's company but drawing our own things uhm yes, it was a really nice experience when I was feeling very tired and a little bit unwell and just to be able to be still with my gross motor movements, but really focused and peaceful and floaty and yeah with the rest of myself.

- Heidi “On automatic drawing”.

4.4 Digital Methods.

4.4.1 Documentation.

Participants were invited to document their solo engagement with the themed guided movement journey using technologies of their choice. Each weekly practice closed with an embodied storytelling exercise of writing from the body, following the somatic movement task. Suggestions for recording outputs included a camera, blank pages for mark-making, drawing, creative or poetic writing and an audio recorder. The artists were then invited to share excerpts from the material they produced with the group. It was up to each artist to choose how they wanted to record the material they generated throughout the journey and which of that material they wanted to share. In

this way, the practical embodied methodology served to research how the moving body may be used as a medium to unearth situated and embodied collective knowledge during a time of crisis.

Even though the project emerged from the Covid-19 lockdowns and social distancing conditions, the praxis as a finding is not restricted to them. The project design evolved as a response to learning from the pandemic and experiences of distress resulting from collective, shared and, therefore, political issues. Thus, the proposed practice research methods for depersonalising and politicising distress through collective and embodied storytelling as a practice of freedom has the potential to go beyond reflections on the systemic injustices exacerbated by the Covid-19 conditions, to offer a methodology that can be applied to other social, political and ecological causes. Further, the project was not restricted to people's homes even though artists were invited to engage with the work individually, so it is adaptable to the context within which it is practiced. Hence, the material produced could offer viewpoints from a multiplicity of contexts, entanglements and how embodiment may shift the way entanglements are embodied and experienced and how they might also change according to shifts that may come along.

4.4.2 Debrief Sessions.

The weekly group debriefs were held online hence a good internet connection, one device for this, and any optional one-to-one debrief sessions that took place online via Microsoft Teams were needed. Participants were encouraged to reach out if, at any point during the research, they found themselves unable to fully access the online space, guided scores, or experience of the research so we could discuss their specific needs and find other ways to support them to participate.

The weekly debrief sessions responded to the third research question of the project: How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress, given the ecology of our time? Therefore, the debrief sessions served as a reflective practice for artists to have the opportunity to reflect on personal and shared experiences with other participating artists. Each session was recorded to capture participants' reflections, which I then transcribed and used together with all the other material generated through the practice to inform the analysis of the thesis. The weekly reflective practice was crucial for my analysis collectivising the embodied storytelling practice to research the ecological entanglements in shared experiences of distress.

4.4.3 Debrief Calls.

Each session followed a loose structure, starting with a body scan and then opening the space for sharing reflections and discussions before taking turns to close with one word that resonated, inspired, or we felt grateful for to carry us into the next week in popcorn style. This style is used in reflective sessions where no one moderates the session. Participants “pop up” or randomly expressed their takeaway points in no particular order. The purpose of this method is to break up the hierarchy between facilitator and participants to foster self-governance and deep listening in the group. The intention of the reflective practice was to offer the artists a space to reflect on the themes and material emerging from their individual engagement with the research, to explore shared elements of past and current experiences and anything else that was present for the artists.

In order to try and integrate the embodied practice with the reflective practice, I opened each session with gentle warm-up exercises like stretching, body scans, giving ourselves a face massage and wobbling the head, shaking and gibberish or nonsensical sound making as a way to invite the artists to drop their awareness into their bodies. An example of a guided opening exercise is illustrated below.

Find a comfortable position, allowing the weight of your body to sink into contact with the chair or ground you are sitting on. Maybe putting one hand on your chest and another hand on your belly. Starting to deepen the breath, breathing in, allowing the breath to come all the way down into your belly. Allowing the muscles in your belly to relax and exhale, perhaps allowing a gentle sigh on the exhale. Releasing anything that you may be carrying with you today, yesterday, the past week, month, letting it go for this hour or so that we have together. Taking another deep breath in. Allowing the breath to come down into your centre or maybe even down to your legs, into the ground and releasing on the exhale. Take a moment to notice if there are any strong sensations in your body. Not trying to change anything, just noticing them, and meeting them with your presence for a moment. Noticing if there is any numbness anywhere or any sensations of discomfort or pain and simply bringing your presence to these parts of your body. When this feels complete, start bringing some gentle movement to your body, maybe stretching, or tensing your muscles. Maybe give yourself a gentle face massage. Releasing some of the tension we hold in our jaw. Sound is welcome, gibberish is also welcome. Yawning... release any tension you may be carrying with you today.

I was curious to see how we could reflect and share conversations in an embodied way. I also invited the artists to articulate their inner landscape during the debrief sessions, so we could continue working with the embodied and inner realm as well as shared experiences.

If your internal landscape was a climate, what would that be?

-fab

If my body were a climate today? I would say I was sunny. With a few white fluffy clouds passing by, and it's crispy, it's cold, and so there's a little bit of a bite, but I'm warm, it's warm.

- Nevena

If my body were a climate today, it is a very, very specific image that comes to mind; it is very strange. It is like a rainforest so like I see it from above. There is like a little forest fire going on because, I'm having a flare up and my eyes are like burning but then it's raining because it's like it's been a good day and like I have today to rest like I've had a busy week last week and then today I had the whole day to rest, and it was nice. It's kind of like nourishing like little droplets of rain; it's still burning a bit, but it's okay, it is bearable. It's soothing like the rain is soothing taking like a moment to just walk around or move around in the space where we are in, in the rooms that were in.

- Tammy

In order to weave our situated and material entanglements into our reflective practice, I also invited the artists to connect with each of their environments during the sessions. For example, I invited them to make physical contact with the material space and then to bring an object to the screen to share a story about the relationship with the object (as described below) so stories about the environment were woven in with the embodied stories of engaging with the practice and reflections about the inner realm throughout the sessions.

Take a moment to attune with the room and the space you are in. Then find an object in the space and come back to the screen to share a story about your object and the environment you are in with the group. The story doesn't have to be present; it can also be of times long passed. About the environment you are in now, have been in the past or speculative about the future. Maybe start by taking a moment to touch the wall, saying hello to the ground as a way to attune, before sensing into the object that speaks to you in this moment.

4.5 Reflections on the Collaborative Group Work: Meaning-making.

The project sought to foster connections between personal and shared experiences by collectivising the digital space and exploring the possibilities for evolving the work as a collective embodied storytelling practice. Initially, I designed the project to perform the analysis based on the collaborative work we would do as a collective to co-create an audio-visual piece from the material produced through the solo somatic movement practice. This was intended to be a key element of the project to research, together with the artists, evolving the autoethnographic personal storytelling practice into a collective artmaking practice as was detailed on the call for recruitment.³⁷²

As a group, we had 3 debrief sessions as well as e-mail correspondence to discuss the collaborative art-making work. Upon attempting to use Adobe Cloud and Premier Pro software to start this collective editing of the audio-visual content, we encountered multiple obstacles due to the license goldsmiths allowed access to. For example, we did not have permissions for multiple user access. Even though I turned the double security verifications off, it still wouldn't allow the artists access without acquiring verification through me. In order to achieve the intended outcome of conducting collaborative work on a collective artwork, we would have needed to extend the timeline of the project. Since we were working together based on a logic of reciprocity - as detailed in the "Ethical Considerations" section 4.3.1, it was not financially feasible for the artists (or myself) to extend the timeline. As a result, we agreed, as a group, for the responsibility of the editing process to rest with me as researcher, as is evidenced by the "long but important e-mail".³⁷³

When the video editing responsibility was entrusted to me, which was originally designed to inform the meaning-making derived from the collaborative process of the art-making, I started by revisiting the group debrief sessions to let this inform the editing. As I transcribed 9 hours of conversations with the artists and sifted through the creative content that was shared by the artists on Slack,³⁷⁴ I applied the methodology of not knowing, as I describe in section 4.3.2 of the methods chapter, together with a continued commitment to the principle of taking a non-hierarchical approach to the research.

As I performed a thematic analysis of the group debrief conversations, I allowed for the meaning-making to emerge from the verbal conversations, as well as individual creative and reflective content, thus adhering to the intention to allow the analysis to surface through the collaborative

³⁷² See Appendix section B.

³⁷³ See Appendix section C.

³⁷⁴ Slack, 'Slack Is Your Digital HQ'.

work with the artists. Through this process of letting the meaning emerge and reading through the transcripts to inform my decisions on editing, I was guided by the meaning-making that had already emerged through the reflective practice, to shift my focus from creating meaning through a collective artwork to the collective reflective practice instead. In this way, whilst I, as researcher made the decisions to select which aspects of the conversations and creative material to include and how to present it in the thesis, the collaborative practice research outcomes I include to evidence how the methods were received through practical engagement and to inform the meaning-making of the project, remains largely unedited and intact.³⁷⁵ In this sense, I enact here a role akin to that of the curator when carefully selecting, presenting and extracting meaning from the outputs of this research.

Furthermore, my later decision to intersperse the practice research outcomes as fragments with the main text of the thesis in unedited form reflects the influence of the dance and movement artists within the genre of minimalist art as an emerging visual language for the practice that I open this thesis with.³⁷⁶ In this way, the visual storytelling of the project focuses on capturing transient moments in ordinary everyday, living environments, the sensuous body and the gestural as a non-verbal, visual language. As dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham said:

“It occurred to me that the dancers could do the gestures they did ordinarily. These were accepted as movement in daily life, why not on stage?”³⁷⁷

In the case of my project, *why not as part of a doctoral thesis on polycrisis through embodied storytelling practice research?* Consequently, the presentation of the unedited video content seeks to cultivate relationality with the viewer by focusing on the processual aspects of the movement work rather than editing it into a polished product or performance. This links to the discussion on one of the limitations of this study predominantly focusing the thematic analysis on the verbal content and the non-verbal content, together with the visual narrative, running alongside the text but not fully integrated into, as one of the considerations for future research in section 6.12.

³⁷⁵ See chapter five for a full analysis of the project.

³⁷⁶ See section 1.1.5.

³⁷⁷ Tate, 'The Black Mountain College, John Cage & Merce Cunningham', Tate, accessed 23 January 2024, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/black-mountain-college/black-mountain-college-john-cage-merce-cunningham>.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter opens with an overview of the somatic practices that inform and contextualise the development of my creative practice and the research design of this project. I then offer an in-depth account of the research design for this project, incorporating the group work, ethical considerations and the methods I used to generate the guided audios and the thematic journey for this research. I include the various elements I use to compose the somatic movement scores, the guided imagery and my experience of the embodied practices each of the scores is informed by. I also discuss the design of the weekly group reflective practice and the function this served in reflecting on collective experiences and the meaning-making of the project. Finally, I end this chapter with reflections on the collaborative component of this research that shaped the meaning-making curated in the next chapter.

5. Chapter Five: Thematic Analysis.

5.1. Context for the Project.



Figure 43. “Juliana Da Silva Queiroz Murilo”, Muswell Hill Road, London, UK, Photo.

The prospect of war and the wind, everything is so upsetting.

Seven days prior to the Ukrainian invasion and only four days before the scheduled building works at my house were set to begin, I awoke to an overwhelming sense of dread and disorientation. The winds had howled throughout the night, their strength and power still palpable. On that day, I was embarking on my lengthiest catsit to date, spanning an entire month. This was how I planned to cope with not having access to a kitchen in the house where I lived, the house I liked to call my

home. The urgency of a red alert for Storm Eunice and severe weather warnings had prompted advisories for people to remain indoors unless necessary.³⁷⁸

Queens Wood Cabin³⁷⁹ advised cancelling the appointment due to the dangerous weather conditions. Thankfully, the client agreed to meet online, which was not ideal, but a safer alternative.

Following the online session, I packed my bags and set off to begin the catsit in a swish and swanky flat in Battersea. My feline companion, Milo, was a British Shorthair. I anticipated a relaxing weekend to settle in and planned to have the first debrief call with the participating artists on Monday, just three days away. I was filled with excitement.

As I approached Onslow Gardens, a police officer informed me that the road was closed. "Where are you headed?" the officer inquired, puzzled. "Do you realize that the government has advised people to stay indoors today? Are you going on a vacation?"

"I have to get to Battersea," I replied. "I'm starting a catsitting job today."

"A what?"

If I walk to Muswell Hill and take the bus to Finsbury Park, I can take the Victoria line to Victoria, and then I can take another bus from there.

I said, half to myself, trying to make sense of my own words.

I thanked him for the information and continued on my way, feeling somewhat frustrated that I couldn't take the direct route but grateful that I could still reach my place of refuge for the next month.

During my underground journey, I scrolled through the Onslow Gardens WhatsApp chat, a group that had been set up during the Covid-19 pandemic. As I read through the messages, I learned about a tragic incident that had occurred earlier that evening. Juliana Da Silva Queiroz Murilo, a 37-year-old woman, had lost her life when an ancient tree from Highgate Wood fell onto their silver

³⁷⁸ Jamie Grierson, 'Storm Eunice: Cobra Meeting Called as UK Braces for "Worst Storm in Decades"', *The Guardian*, 18 February 2022, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/18/storm-eunice-london-added-to-red-weather-warning-amid-danger-to-life>.

³⁷⁹ 'Queens Wood Art & Therapy Cabin', woodlandarttherapy, accessed 30 May 2021, <https://www.therapycabin.co.uk>.

Honda.³⁸⁰ She was in the car with her husband, Carlos, who was driving them home. The incident happened on Muswell Hill Road. Despite the woods being closed, the tree had somehow fallen over the gate and onto the street as they drove past.

"I feel safe in the heart of Victoria because there are no trees around that can kill us", I murmured to a random stranger, as I frantically searched for the bus stop that would take me to Battersea. Trees, my companions in healing, can also kill when it is windy.

Overnight, my perception of trees was turned upside down.

The ultra-modern flat had underfloor heating and sleek green glass windows that sealed shut, creating a stark contrast to the natural surroundings I was accustomed to in Muswell Hill. The familiar trees of Highgate and Queen's woods that provided me with solace and nourishment seemed distant and alien now.

Just hours before my first debrief call, I received feedback from one of my supervisors. In between the lines of their message, they emphasised a pressing need to delve deeper into decolonial theory. Their comments emphasised the importance of connecting with my roots, urging me to confront my own identity and history.

Unable to go out and play, Milo, the cat, became increasingly restless and couldn't stop meowing. "They're very special, British Shorthairs," I remembered being told, "they're especially vocal."

Gasping for air, I tried to calm myself down after the first debrief call failed. The artists couldn't join the call as they needed special permission to access it. It felt like everything was rising inside me, climbing up to my chest, my throat, my pounding head.

This is what theory feels like in my body. I am doing embodied research, and I can't feel my body. My project is going up, up away when I want to go down, down, deep into the ground.

During a debrief supervision meeting to explain how theory feels in my body, how the first debrief call never happened, and how the artists couldn't even access the call, one of my supervisors shared her constant urge to cry when that same morning, the invasion of Ukraine began.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ John Dunne Davis Barney, 'Husband's Heartbreak as Wife Killed by Tree in Storm Eunice', Evening Standard, 22 February 2022, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/muswell-hill-storm-eunice-picture-woman-killed-london-b983689.html>.

³⁸¹ Beaumont and Jones, 'Russia Has Invaded Ukraine'.

“I don’t know why I can’t breathe or feel my body this week,” I said. The body in crisis feels strange. Everything seems oddly the same, even though it is completely different.

I feel nauseous now as I write it all down and see it all on paper. Like I did then but I didn’t know why then. I thought I was just having a bad day, week, year, I now realise this is life as we collectively navigate “living and dying on a damaged planet”.³⁸² As the world as we know it, crumbles at our feet.

I didn’t know then that a few months of planned building works would be the beginning of yet another housing crisis. The end of Covid-19, the beginning of a cost-of-living crisis, the war in Ukraine, an energy crisis, the unsettling severe weather, a manifestation of the climate crisis. All I knew at the time was that I couldn’t feel my body and that I couldn’t breathe.

We thought it was the end of it, with the “end” of Covid-19. We didn’t think we wouldn’t be able to leave our homes again because trees might blow over and kill us or that war was on our doorstep. We didn’t know then about the cost and energy living crisis looming around the corner, leaving hundreds of thousands of people across the UK and Europe scared to turn the heating on in their homes the following winter.³⁸³ That the “end” of Covid-19 was just the beginning.

These were the conditions in which I carried out the group work for my practice research. These are some of the ecological entanglements of living in London between 2022 and 2023. “Bring it all into the project” my supervisor said, “this is your research”.

- fab

³⁸² Anna Lowerhaupt Tsing cited in Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble.*, 136.

³⁸³ ‘Millions Risk Getting Ill Because They Are “too Scared to Put Heating on” When It’s Cold, Survey Finds’, Sky News, accessed 10 November 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/millions-risk-getting-ill-because-they-are-too-scared-to-put-heating-on-when-its-cold-survey-finds-12944925>.

I open this chapter with a vignette that encapsulates the multifaceted aspects of my experience during the time of Storm Eunice, the Ukraine invasion, the housing crisis, and various technological setbacks. These events served as a backdrop for my personal journey, highlighting the interconnected themes of ecological entanglements in the face of a climate emergency, the impact of war, housing insecurities, the role of digital environments, and embodiment in my practice research.

My initial foray into this project revealed a fascinating paradox: contrary to my expectations, dance did not automatically facilitate a sense of embodied presence. During that period, my kitchen, a place I considered the heart of my home, was under construction, and the familiar trees I communed with daily had been uprooted. My identity and story of becoming clashed with dominant narratives in decolonial discourses.

The crux of my research was meant to be grounded in practice, yet theory and abstraction persistently encroached upon and occasionally overshadowed my practical work. I turned to dance to ground myself however, much to my surprise at this time, dancing alone was insufficient to help me regulate my emotions. I came to understand that dance doesn't always provide the expected emotional shift or relief desired. It became evident that facing the inner turmoil as it is, rather than how we wish it to be, is an integral aspect of dance practice.

Sometimes, in ecstatic dance practices, dance is approached with the misconception that it must always yield a desired affect or bring about a particular state of being, perpetuating the influence of neoliberal ideals on the realms of dance and wellness. I realised that attempting to move when feeling numb is an invitation to fully experience and acknowledge that numbness rather than attempting to change it. There is no superior or inferior emotional state; there is simply what exists. Movement serves as a gateway into embodiment and genuine feeling, even when what we feel is a sense of disembodiment. Numbness itself is a valid sensation within this spectrum of human experience.

5.2 Introduction.

In my analysis of this research project, I apply an understanding of the self as fluid, one that is both interconnected and interdependent, yet also individual, separate, and particular (see methodology chapter section 3.2). Therefore, my working definition of self is paradoxical, one that allows being simultaneously open and closed, individual and collective. This conceptual framework forms the foundation for my exploration of the project's findings and the intricate interplay between individual and collective elements within it.

In this chapter, I mobilise my definition of self in the way I approach the analysis and how I apply this conception to the multiplicity of roles I enact in the project and the different voices I consider the material from. I also hold an intention to undermine hierarchies of being and to trouble the power relations that uphold them, by shape-shifting between multiple personas as activist, facilitator, researcher and artist.

I adopt distinct approaches to analysis. Some themes involve a meticulous analysis of individual autobiographical material, while others revolve around the scrutiny of group discussions. In instances where I apply an autoethnographic analysis to individual embodied stories, I assume the role of researcher to infer the meaning-making of the research. Conversely, in sections where the meaning-making process stems from group reflective practice, I take on the role of a curator.³⁸⁴ In this role, my objective is to arrange and present the collective insights and perspectives, recognising the significance of these shared experiences as research outcomes in themselves.

I employ the definition of praxis outlined in the introduction (Section 1.2.2) as a continuous feedback loop between my thinking (theory) and embodied practice throughout my practice research thematic analysis. In sections where theoretical research shapes and informs the embodied practice, I explicitly detail how the theory was applied in practice. I also demonstrate how the practice research outcomes and the meaning derived from the practice align with the theoretical framework that guided the research.

However, in certain themes, such as those covered in sections 5.6 – 5.8, where I include a montage of vignettes and creative content resulting from the practice research, I assert that the raw content itself constitutes a practice research outcome. This content serves as a unique form of research in its own right. It captures the essence of the research process and provides valuable insights that contribute to the broader understanding of the project's goals and objectives.

As an activist researcher committed to troubling conventional hierarchies, I aimed to disrupt the traditional relations of power between myself and the artists who participated in my research. I refer to the artists as co-researchers to emphasise their active roles in the research process. In this context, I seek here to yield my power, allowing the knowledge generated through the collaborative practice group work to enact the critical approach informed by the Foucauldian scholarship that underpins the non-hierarchical approach I take in my work. By applying Foucauldian theory, I seek

³⁸⁴ The etymology of the word curator comes from the Latin root *curare*, meaning to take care of. I use the term curator here to refer to my responsibility as researcher to care for the embodied and autobiographical knowledge the artists shared during this project.

to place an emphasis on both acknowledging power and yielding it through my analysis of the collaborative meaning-making.

The findings derived from my practice research are multiple. Some findings speak to the theoretical scholarship that my project builds on, while others represent standalone discoveries. Not all practice research outcomes need to be subjected to extensive theoretical analysis to be considered valid research findings. Ultimately, the essence of my research lies in the practice research itself, where the lived experiences and insights of the co-researchers, embodied and creative outcomes, are considered as legitimate knowledges and research outputs in their own right.

Considering my application of praxis to my practice research, I can now elaborate on the rationale of the parameters of my research project, which encompassed all the relevant events occurring during its course. This framework was shaped by one of my supervisors and their colleague's conception of ecological practice research as "everything that happens within the research is part of the research".³⁸⁵ This practice research philosophy served as a foundational principle for the project and the thematic analysis that ensued.

Additionally, the central theme of the research, focusing on autoethnographic and embodied research of ecological, situated, and material entanglements, further reinforced the idea that external factors interwoven with the practice research were relevant to the research outcomes. Thus, the external influences and forces that became entangled with the practice research were integral to understanding and interpreting the research's findings. Therefore, showing how the ecology of my thinking for the practice, including my conversations with my supervisors who advised me on my project, as well as their collaborators' thinking, also informed my approach to my practice research.

Having reiterated the orientation of the ecology of thinking for my practice research, I now turn to the task of mapping the various materials that I consider for the purpose of meaning-making within the context of my doctoral research. This mapping process will help to illustrate the diverse elements that contribute to the research's overall narrative and understanding.

³⁸⁵ Supervision meeting "Fabienne, Marina, Alice", 24th February, 2022.

5.2.1 The Materials I Consider for the Analysis.

I organise the construction of this chapter around the various themes that surfaced during the meaning-making phase of my project. My analysis delves into the materials generated from a blend of solo movement practices, embodied storytelling pieces, and group research work, which consisted of online reflective discussions. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding, I've curated all the pertinent communication with the collaborating artists in the form of vignettes. These vignettes encompass various forms of interaction, such as weekly group debrief conversations presented here as images of coloured text to differentiate the oral knowledge from the written text in the form of email exchanges, and creative content shared on the digital communication platform Slack.³⁸⁶ This approach allows me to explore and dissect the rich tapestry of information and insights that emerged from the collective reflective discussions and embodied storytelling.

In crafting this chapter, I weave the creative material that the collaborating artists and I generated during the practice research together with the academic text. This material takes the form of oral and written vignettes, audio-visual content and mark-making. This interplay between written analysis and creative content serves to both enhance and occasionally disrupt the narrative, offering a multimodal³⁸⁷ reading of the research.

I analyse material that provides evidence of efforts to establish non-hierarchical relationality throughout the project. This is evident in various aspects of the movement practices as well as the group debrief conversations. For instance, I explore how power relations between different roles, such as artist-researcher and participant-collaborators, were disrupted, emphasising the need to challenge traditional hierarchies.

Furthermore, I consider the materiality of the human and the more-than-human by incorporating practices of eco-somatics, involving movement outdoors, and inviting non-human animals as companion species into the embodied storytelling process. These sections, such as 5.5.1, 5.7.1 and 5.7.2, reveal the project's commitment to examining the interdependence between the human and the more-than-human, aligning with the overarching goal of undermining hierarchies of being.

In this way, the analysis responds to the research question of how the practice can forge intimacies and foster interdependence in a neoliberal and capitalist context. Additionally, the practice's capacity to subvert hierarchies of being speaks to the broader issue of the globalisation of mental

³⁸⁶ Slack, 'Slack Is Your Digital HQ'.

³⁸⁷ Characterised by different written, oral, movement and creative practice research outputs.

health, particularly through neo-colonial expressions of power and the impact on indigenous and embodied forms of knowledge. The research demonstrates how the practice can challenge dominant paradigms and offer alternative ways of understanding embodiment, highlighting the limitations of conventional knowledge production methods concerning health and illness in section 5.5.2.

In essence, the analysis provides valuable insights into the ways in which the practice fosters intimacy, disrupts hierarchies, and challenges established norms in the context of mental health and beyond. These findings shed light on the potential for embodied transformative justice practices to reshape our understanding of self, society, and the world at large.

As discussed in the introduction of the Methods chapter section 4.1.1, my creative practice engaging somatic and dance movement improvisation methods is informed by my embodied experience encountering postmodern dance at Siobhan Davies Dance Studios,³⁸⁸ where I attend the weekly morning classes. This experience served as a foundation for framing movement as a practice of freedom, aligning with the research objectives of exploring embodiment, collectivising experiences of distress, unravelling the interplay of ecological entanglements with bodies and minds and undermining hierarchies of being both within and without.

I position my choice of dance improvisation and somatic methods within the post-dance and postmodern dance genres. This positioning allows me to activate the notion that all forms of movement, including everyday gestures, can be considered a form of dance within my movement philosophy.³⁸⁹

I frame my dance practice within this genre to start from the premise that everyone with a breathing body – even if that body is unable to move – is a dancer. This philosophy becomes evident in my analysis of Heidi's experience with grief and her chronic illness, as explored in the section titled "Radical Inclusion" in 5.6.5. Furthermore, I hold that even in stillness, there is movement. This concept is discussed in my analysis of an autoethnographic vignette on micromovements during a period of physical illness in 5.5.2.

³⁸⁸ 'About'.

³⁸⁹ See sections 4.2, 4.3.8 and 4.5.

5.2.2 The Themed Guided Journey.

I now offer a brief recap of the themed guided journey I discuss in detail in sections 4.3.6 and 4.3.7 to support the reading of the analysis below. The weekly movement scores were designed to guide the artists to research material environments, their interplay with bodyminds and inner landscapes. Each week, participants engaged with a guided movement score composed of somatic and contemporary dance principles around a particular themed task.

In the first week, participants received instructions that revolved around the materiality of the environment, emphasising contact improvisation with architectural surfaces. The second week introduced guided imagery that encouraged individuals to move their bodies as if they were water, inviting participants to move with, rather than for, or against. The third week delved into snaking ways of moving, encouraging participants to explore undulating motions. In the fourth week, the focus shifted to themes of emergence and the more-than-human, using the sprouting bulb as guiding imagery.

Week five centred on an exploration of balance and counter-balance, engaging participants in task-based improvisation that involved interaction with an object. Finally, in week six, the movement journey culminated with the guided imagery of a spider weaving its web, inviting participants to move with feminised knowledges and the concept of entanglements. Each week's task and imagery offered a unique lens through which participants could engage with their environments and their own bodies, creating a rich tapestry of movement exploration.³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ See Methods chapter, sections 4.3.7 and 4.3.8.

5.2.3 Moving in a Post Covid World.

In this section I include some vignettes from the group debrief chats about our embodied experiences of moving in a post-Covid world. I do this to show how environments or in this case, circumstances, shape our experience.

I have been trying to go back to dance classes with no expectation to find the joy again, but it is not so easy.

- Nevena

Covid has helped me realise how much I need community and a safe space to move and dance in. Since covid I started doing online classes which have now remained. I now feel more comfortable on zoom than going to a class with people in a room. Before this started, I felt so strange on zoom but now it has become so much easier. It has become my comfort space and I feel almost threatened leaving it and going into another space.

- Valia

It has changed the way I move, not being loud, not having space— I don't move in the same way I used to move before – I don't take up space in the way I did before. Like I somehow lost my essence of moving and it is something I want to reclaim again, to use space again. I used to be someone that moves a lot, moves between different countries between houses and this eviction has been such a drama. It is so weird because I used to be such a nomad, it feels opposite, pushed out of my space. It is strange.

- Amanda



Figure 44. [Still from "finding flow in Queens Wood Cabin" Video.](#)

Before covid I would dance in community spaces 3 times a week – I had this relationship with the ground – wherever I was I would find the ground, and then covid happened and it has been quite the journey to relearn to surrender. I used to find it easy to get into the flow and allowing my body to guide the dance, once I stepped out of it, it was hard to get back there.

- fab

As seen in some of the excerpts above, we collectively shared difficulties in finding an ease in movement despite a returned access to studio and movement spaces post-Covid. In some ways, moving in other, perhaps restricted spaces and digital environments, changed how we experience our bodies in movement. Of course, some of our embodied experiences were also altered by ill-health, but these shared experiences also offer us a glimpse into how the environments we inhabit shape our embodied experience.

5.2.4 Absence.

I have tried all combinations of connectivity (including sitting under a certain beautiful fir tree) and it appears that I won't be able to join our calls neither this Monday nor the next. I will be back in human civilisation after that. Sending spring bee buzzing to make up for my absence.

- Priiya

In writing this chapter, I found myself trying to create a narrative, a coherent story from the connections and missed connections that we made through the group work. However, it would be misleading to overlook the absences, the fragmented communication and the alienation that was present throughout the research with the artists. I have considered performing the silences, the felt distance and the separateness that we had to work with and was never fully named, or resolved, but felt throughout. We shared moments of intimacy, moments of connection, of coming together through shared, resonant and dissonant experiences. All were transient, elusive and fleeting. In no way can I suggest from how I observed the project unfold that it achieved its aspiration to substantially counter the alienating forces of neoliberalism and precarity that we, as artists and practitioners, must contend with every day, despite our geographical differences. In the end, I chose to stick to a traditional form of writing out of compassion for you, the reader, to make it as accessible and digestible as I possibly can, to hold on to you.

I will now introduce the artists I worked with and how I understood each of the artists to have co-created the outcomes of the practice research through absence, as well as presence. Valia who was working in theatre at the time of the project and couldn't make most of the Monday night debrief calls. Tammy who was also working irregular hours in theatre, but as it later unravelled, also had to help her parents flee Hong Kong and relocate in the UK during the project. Heidi who was living on the other side of the equator in New Zealand, on not only diametrically opposed time zones, but also seasons, while living with chronic illness and grieving for the loss of a close loved one who had unexpectedly passed away before we started our practice together. Amanda, who was going through a housing crisis after being evicted from her home and trying to find a new place while staying temporarily with her partner and having all her belongings in storage throughout our work together. Nevena, who was juggling multiple jobs and shift work in the beginning of the collaboration, later took on the role of a movement director, and had to prioritise her new responsibilities halfway through the project. Priiya, who at one point was in rural Germany working on a farm with no internet connection, at another point travelling in India, and in the times in-between, had more tales of joy than of distress to share. This brought an added labour for them in offering a reorientation to the project through their embodied storytelling of joy, playfulness and

wonder in a project that sought to research experiences of distress. Even when they did have an internet connection, they expressed preferring to spend time in studio spaces, over a zoom call with us, as the Covid-19 restrictions lifted, and we could meet in the flesh again.

It feels important to name these unspoken experiences of absences, to name the scope of the project. For a group of us to forge intimacy through the digital realm, as we were being pushed further apart, was not an easy task. In many ways it involved a practice of death and dying, as I juggled my roles of researcher, facilitator and collaborating artist. Despite my intention as researcher to apply the methodology of letting it emerge,³⁹¹ as the orientation of the project shifted from the one I had perhaps unconsciously wanted it to be to the one it was becoming, the hidden (from my conscious awareness) expectations were exposed and my researcher ego was initiated into a process of dying to allow the project to take shape through the participation of the artists, independent of what I hoped for it to be. By the end of the nine-week journey, it didn't evolve into a collective as I had hoped it would. Rather, we came together for some time and then dispersed; we shared moments of connection and moments of missed connections.

I have committed to carefully hold both the presences and the absences, as I extract the wealth of insights generously offered by the artists in this analysis. As a guardian of this knowledge that emerged through this particular configuration of bodies and minds coming together at this particular point in time, I attempt an analysis that holds both the moving toward and away from; the being with and the resistance; the utterances and the silences, as a dance. I offer my own reflective narrative along the storytelling that emerges through the conversations with the artists to reflect on the ecological entanglements of our times. I acknowledge my named and unnamed limitations, the resources I have available to me, my own pressures, experience of loss during the research and my own "privilege of partial perspective".³⁹²

³⁹¹ See Methodology chapter, section 4.3.2.

³⁹² Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', 575.

5.3 Time and Neoliberalism.

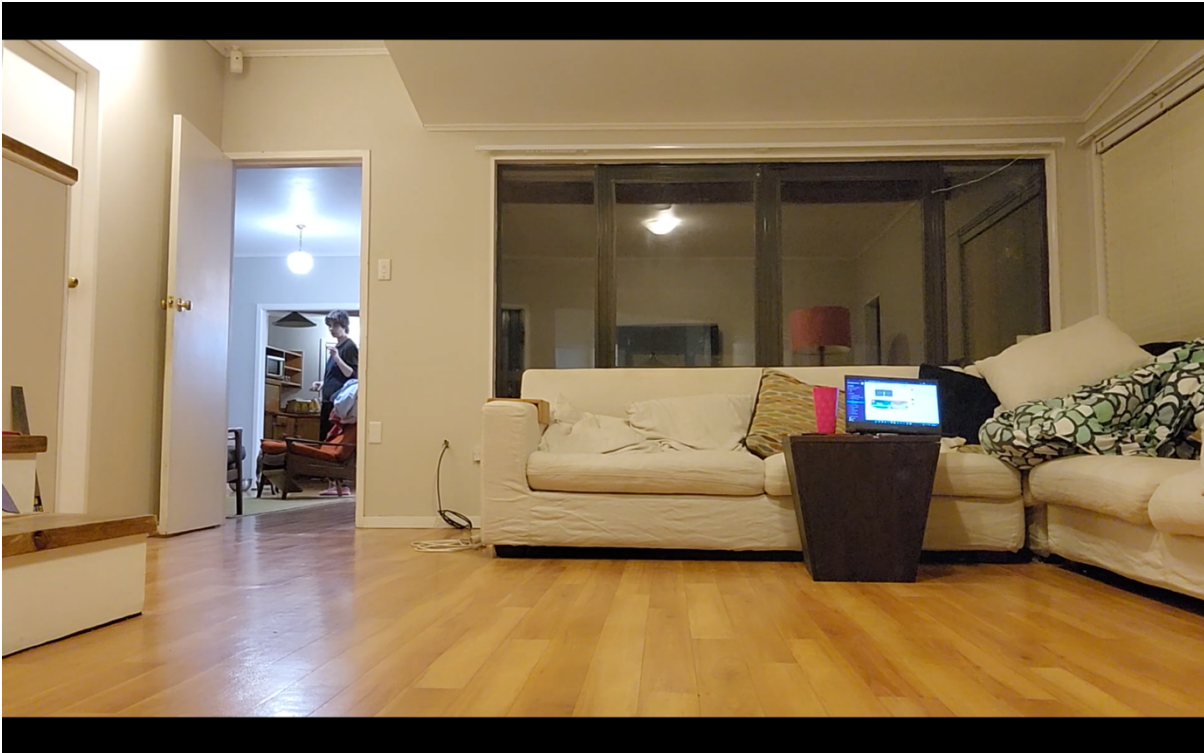


Figure 45. [Still from "Heidi on time and neoliberalism" Video.](#)

The project sought to explore the theme of time and neoliberalism in response to the research question: How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress, given the ecology of our time? Thus, the practice researched the possibilities of opening up pockets of resistance through collectivising embodied practice and countering the pressures of neoliberalism and capitalism in the daily lives of the artists by cultivating a practice of listening to the body and allowing the body to speak and letting the outcomes emerge with no clear set agenda as the embodied storytelling practice. In the following, I will examine some of the material generated around this theme. As Nevena put it, from the first call, the “struggle to carve out time” came up again and again:

I relate to not wanting to move and finding the theme of water freeing. When I am at work and on days off recently, I have been struggling to move. It has been a long time since I have carved out time to move freely. I practice yoga and exercise, but it has been a long time since I moved without the motive to exercise. It has been really important to carve out the time. I used to do it a lot when I was practicing freestyle. I would practice all the time and get lost in my own world and be able to focus on music, concepts and ideas and it felt good to give myself the permission to do that again, the permission, the space and time. I still think that I have built up a lot of barriers since I haven't been moving regularly for myself. There were a few moments this week and last week where I felt emotion bubbling but I very quickly pushed it down or moved into following the guided script not because I felt like I had to but because I didn't want to face the emotion. It will be interesting to see if I will be able to surrender to it as I keep practicing.

- Nevena

It's not only the moving but also moving the furniture and moving things out of the way or closing the doors so the cat doesn't come disturb me. I always start off making the task easier to avoid the hassle of moving things out of the way. I decide, OK, today I feel like I wanna move gently and it's going to be minimal and that's OK and that always evolves into something else anyway, so I think to me it's like starting easy and just leaving the time for it.

-Tammy

From these reflections, it is possible to recognise the embodied effects of busy, precarious lives under neoliberalism. Nevena articulates how hard it is to move and to carve out the time. Further, she suggests that what movement is possible is often tethered to the “motive” of exercise. This reference to motive reminds us of Foucault’s analysis of technologies of self as orientated towards norms or “games of truth” or towards uncertainty as practices of freedom.³⁹³

In Nevena’s comment, one can clearly note how movement in our neoliberal culture is normalised as exercise. We might say that exercise is a particular technology of self that is orientated not towards “freedom” but towards neoliberal forms of wellness or body image that are easily commodified.

Throughout our conversations, we collectively related to one another in struggling to make time to move in our daily lives. The feeling that there was never enough time was shared. In this way, our commitment to the practice and making time to move, even if short and minimal, served as a self-care practice of freedom, thus resisting, even if momentarily, the pressures of neoliberalism.

³⁹³ Foucault et al., *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault, *Ethics*.

Further, the practice did not have a specific goal or desired end. In this sense, it offered an undefined space for the artists to move for the sake of moving, resulting in a very different form and relationship to movement from movement bound to specific creative or wellness outcomes. The practice offered an undefined space as a practice of self that was not expected to conform to societal norms, thus offering more freedom from these.

5.4 Technology.

the gift and the curse.

- Nevena

The project employs a methodology of not knowing, letting it emerge and co-creating with the conditions (ecology) we are immersed in.³⁹⁴ Therefore, the choice of methods for this research shifted as the ecology of the project changed during the coronavirus pandemic, social distancing and lockdown measures. The decision to use digital environments as a method was both informed and revealed by the ecological conditions shaped by the pandemic.

Framing the digital environments and technological infrastructure in this way enabled the practice to respond to the third research question: How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress, given the ecology of our time? Using a digital space enabled us to meet across different locations, countries and different time zones. Participating artists' locations spanned from India, New Zealand, Leeds, Germany and Switzerland to London. This particular practice research project would not have been possible if we hadn't used this particular design. Although working with digital environments had some advantages, it also came with restrictions. Broadly, tech as a method impacted the project in the following three ways:

5.4.1 Community Engagement.

I advertised the open call to artists within the dance world, activist networks and Goldsmiths PhD students.³⁹⁵ However, despite the interest the project received from other practice researchers at Goldsmiths, only artists from outside of the University committed to engaging with the research. Given that one of the college's main marketing strategies is real-world research in the industry, I assumed the technological infrastructure would also reflect this. However, Goldsmiths' license

³⁹⁴ See Methodology chapter, section 4.2.

³⁹⁵ See Methods chapter, section 4.3.1.

choices, from Microsoft Teams to Adobe, are all exclusive to Goldsmiths staff and students. This posed challenges and frustrations for the artists when they could not join the first debrief call since they did not have a Goldsmiths account. Further, following the six-week solo practice, the collaborative audio-visual piece was also hindered by the Adobe license exclusively allowing either multiple Goldsmiths users or single access for external users.

Therefore, tech and the licenses available also shaped the way the research evolved, namely the hierarchy between myself and the artists and subsequent power relations that ensued. An important aim of the research was to explore the possibilities of undoing hierarchies of being and troubling power relations between myself and the participants. For the research to be collaborative, I needed the infrastructure to support me, to offer power up rather than act as a deterrent. As a self-funding student working with volunteer artists, my resources and, therefore, my choices and access to tech licenses were limited. Consequently, the research aims of the project were affected by access to tech licenses too.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the neoliberal university is caught within a certain global tech economy. This problem is not reserved to Goldsmiths or particular universities and speaks to wider systemic issues neoliberal institutions are embedded in. Our experience clearly shows how, when working within such an environment, one is forced to compromise on research design and to look for strategies to do work despite the challenges and barriers posed by the infrastructure.

5.4.2 Exacerbated Experiences of Distress Caused by World Events.

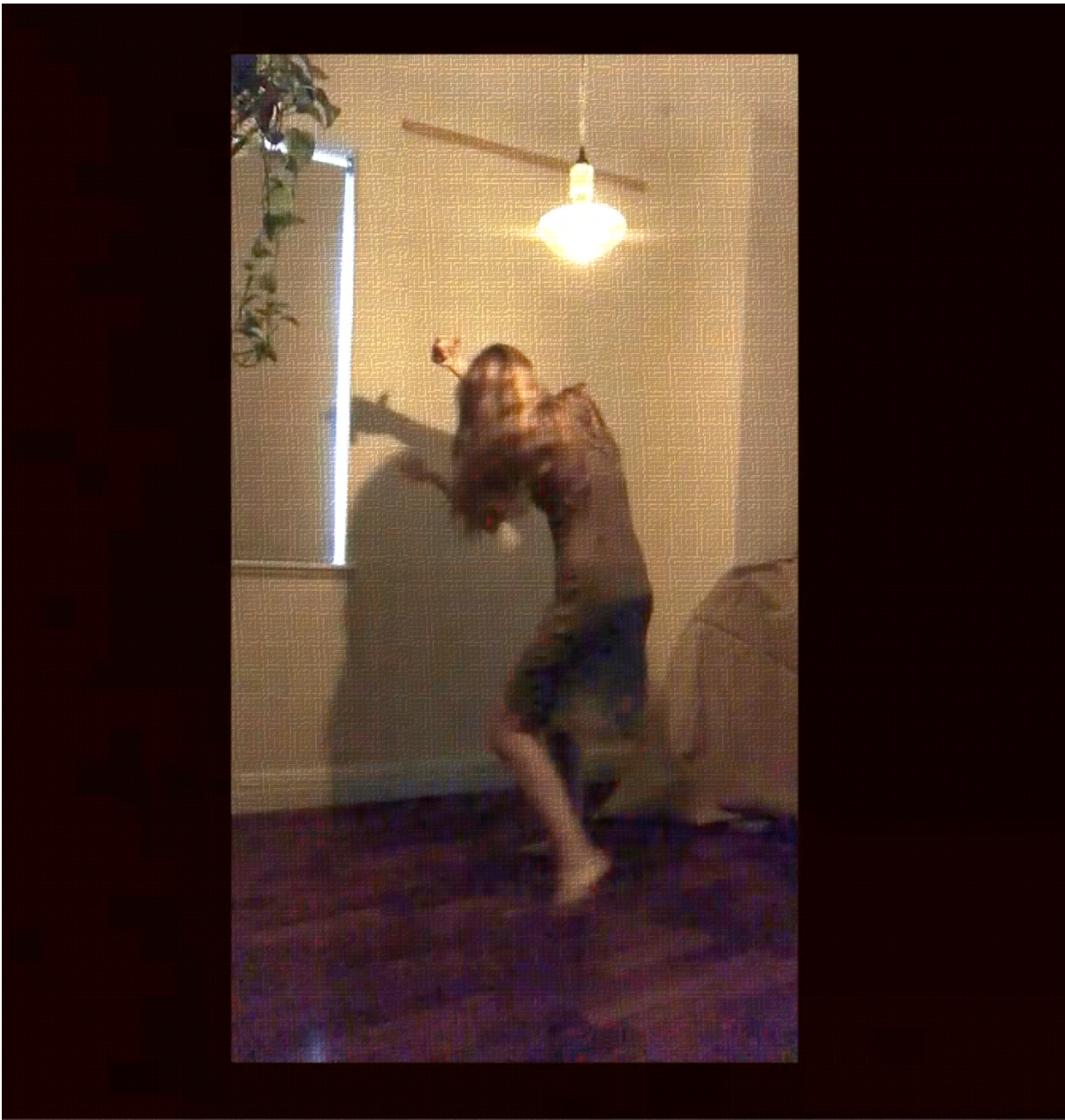


Figure 46. [Still from "Amanda Technologies of the Self" Video.](#)

The distortions in the digital space materialised as one of the tentacles of the sociopolitical and ecological entanglements interplaying with our bodyminds. In other words, the tech amplified the embodied noise created by distressing events in the world. It took much time and effort to determine how people without a Goldsmith's account could access the Microsoft Teams debrief call. In the end, Heidi, one of the participating artists and I managed to figure out that they could join via the link rather than trying to join the scheduled call directly through the automated link everyone was sent when I set up the call.

The process involved a number of e-mails, as well as an in-person meeting with the tech team at Goldsmiths before Heidi and I learnt about an alternative way for the artists to join the call. It involved a failed first call, a flurry of e-mails and two people dropping out. The obstacles the tech posed to access, along with the stress of other world events happening at the time, i.e., the invasion of Ukraine,³⁹⁶ the storms in London³⁹⁷ as we were all making our very first tentative steps into a post-Covid world, while battling the alienating forces of neoliberalism, hindered the project in offering the nourishing debriefing bubble it promised it would for the artists. Hence, the distortion in the digital space acted as a deterrent in forging the intimacies that the project sought to foster.

5.4.3 Acted as a Conduit for Personal Frustrations.

One way this manifested is in the excerpt below, which illustrates Heidi's frustration with downloading sound cloud. Heidi's expression of frustration with the tech is interesting because it didn't seem to be separate from her resistance toward engaging with the movement practice.³⁹⁸

The first audio that I started just didn't work and I got really angry. Yeah, but then I started to listen to you and there was a moment where I sound with my voice, and I felt this crumbliness, like this real fear and I was like, oh, gosh, I didn't realize that was there, I thought I was just angry, but there was this real sad, scared, nervous feeling that was interesting. And then bloody SoundCloud wouldn't keep playing because I hadn't downloaded it, so it interrupted by stopping and saying "if you want this to play in the background then download SoundCloud" so then I downloaded SoundCloud and then it put you back to the beginning and then I couldn't move it back to where it was so I was just saying, no, I'm not doing it.

- Heidi

On one level we can of course hear the disappointment with the software and the frustration of this. Whilst on another, perhaps deeper level, another element to our relationship with the tech is exposed, where the ongoings of our inner landscape may be projected onto the failings of the tech. Especially when rely on the functionality of the tech when everything else is failing. As Heidi articulates below:

³⁹⁶ Beaumont and Jones, 'Russia Has Invaded Ukraine: What We Know so Far'.

³⁹⁷ Grierson, 'Storm Eunice'.

³⁹⁸ See Analysis chapter, section 5.4.3.

it's a very particular feeling when tech stops working, isn't it?

- Heidi

5.4.4 Missed Connections.



Figure 47. [Still from "Amanda Missed Connections" Video.](#)

Whilst using digital environments enabled us to make connections across different countries, it also created problems. For instance, differences in time zones between London and Berlin, London and New Zealand (NZ) and misunderstandings when we changed from Winter to Summertime and the other way around for NZ.

5.4.5 Exacerbated Material Inequalities.

Devices malfunctioning were also an issue, as were broken wifi connections. For example, the audio on my new laptop stopped working two weeks into the debrief calls and I had to wait a month for the parts to arrive due to delays because of the war in Ukraine. Priya not being able to connect while she was on a farm in Germany and Amanda's distorted connection while staying with her

partner after being evicted--all reflect the material inequalities of the digital environment. The argument that tech is egalitarian unravels as material inequities are reflected in the access and quality to which tech people have access. In practice, inequalities are often reinforced in digital environments.

5.5 Eco-Somatics:

5.5.1 The More-than-human as a Partner in Movement Practice.³⁹⁹

At the beginning of the project, Priiya chose to remain on the farm and to move there rather than searching for a studio space to engage with the themed journey.

In the first check in I said, oh, "I'm so excited to see a dance floor after so many months." And then they all felt like, oh no, you haven't seen a dance floor. And then I was like, yeah, because I was on the farms. I was like, yeah, it's nobody's fault that I didn't see a dance floor. I myself make these decisions, which throw me completely away from anything to do with, you know, studio space or rehearsal spaces and I end up in the middle of horses, so yeah.



Figure 48. [Still from "Priiya Moving Outdoors Video".](#)

³⁹⁹ The term and concept of encountering the uneven ground as a partner in my dance was offered to me by Narelle Carter-Quin in a personal online meeting on the 28th of January, 2022. For a further discussion acknowledging the influence of this concept in my practice see Analysis chapter, section 5.5.2.

In the above excerpt and audio-visual material, we witness Priiya's embodied and performative expression of eco-somatics and their deliberate decision not to limit their movement practice to indoor and studio spaces. As they articulate, Priiya chooses to move on farms and amongst horses. This research evolved into the field of eco-somatics by inviting participating artists to research their felt sense experiences through movement in everyday living spaces. In this way the project sought to research the interplay between the material and situated environments (eco), and the embodied experience (somatics) of this during a time of multiple ecological crises. This is how I understood tracing sensations on the skin and moving from sensory impulses, an embodied ecological storytelling practice.

One of the gifts of the social lockdowns during Covid-19 was that it pushed us to move outdoors. When the studios closed for the first time, I went into panic. My well-being depended on dancing and moving in community and studio spaces. I couldn't stop moving so I started searching for other places to move in.⁴⁰⁰ During the first lockdown, I had a small room and no shared living room, so I accepted a housesit for a friend in Brixton, while they stayed with their parents. During this time, I turned their flat into my studio, the architecture of the space, walls and other surfaces into my contact improvisation partners. I also started moving in Brockwell Park, my local park at the time.

I was used to dancing around the fire at drumming jams and festivals so moving outdoors wasn't completely new for me. However, moving solo in public spaces was new. Together with the dog walkers, musicians, joggers, opera singers and other embodied artists, I started practicing in public spaces because I couldn't stop moving and I had nowhere else to go. This is the story of how the park, the outdoors and public spaces became part of my practice. Then when the time came to move house, I chose a spacious room, one that I could move in. A house close to Queens, Highgate woods and a walking distance from the bathing ponds on Hampstead Heath.

⁴⁰⁰ As I narrate in the opening vignette for section 1.1.2.



Figure 49. [Still from "The womb of the wood: Queens Wood Clearing", London, UK, Video.](#)

- fab

Soon, the above clearing in Queens Wood became my studio space, and my relationship with the ancient woodland, one of the most profound in my life. Not that it lived up to the idealised and romanticised version of what I dreamt moving in the woods to be like, but because upon encountering the woods, my movement practice, and hence my embodied experience, changed. The architecture of the woods, as well as the gaze of the dog walkers, challenged me to move differently from the way I had become accustomed to move. Through dancing with the land there, I embarked on a journey to receive the woods, and later, myself. A journey that, at the time of this writing, is not yet complete. This shift was significant for my practice evolving into an eco-somatic practice.

The transformation began like other alchemical happenings in my movement practice - with frustration and resistance. In this case, the resistance was toward the uneven ground I encountered in the woods. I had grown accustomed to dancing on the rooftop floor at Siobhan Davies Studios⁴⁰¹ and other dance floors that both allowed and supported me to move in the way I desired. The ground in the woods wasn't flat; it lacked the bounce of a sprung floor and was not as smooth as I was used to.

⁴⁰¹ Siobhan Davies Studios (website), accessed 30 June 2023, <https://www.siobhandavies.com/about/>.

Paradoxically, the uneven ground seemed to imbue the woods with personhood. Initially, I found it challenging to reconcile the beauty of the natural environment with my struggle. I was annoyed at first because it was all so beautiful, and yet I was finding it hard to fully inhabit my body and access the flow of movement I was accustomed to. The ground in the woods introduced me to an unfamiliar movement vocabulary. Much like any relationship, it was no longer solely about me and my desires. A third element, previously unknown to me, emerged through the dance of relationality.

Like a creature, I was both bewildered and deeply curious about this unfamiliar terrain and the movement language that was emerging, particular to my body moving in the clearing at that moment in time. This embodied experience consisted of movement language and storytelling that would change with the seasons and the times, reflecting the fluid nature of the relationship between the body and its natural surroundings.

During this time, I had the pleasure of having a conversation with the movement artist Narelle Carter-Quinlan, whose practice I draw a lot of inspiration from.⁴⁰² We spoke about moving with the more-than-human, the exhilaration, but also the discomfort of it, and how to create safety when there are curious humans and non-humans around.

During our conversation, I expressed my frustrations about the uneven ground and the difficulty I encountered in accessing the flow state and movement language I was accustomed to. In response Narelle exclaimed:

But that is the whole point! You don't move outdoors with nature because it is comfortable, or you want to move in ways you are used to. When you move outdoors you allow the ground to become your partner in your dance, for your body to be moved in unfamiliar ways as it encounters the uneven ground.

This is the story of how my practice evolved into an eco-somatic practice. Partly by the conditions imposed by the lockdowns, as I sought out clearings as spaces to move in. Partly driven by a deep yearning for the woods and surrendering to encountering the more-than-human with a sense of personhood. As I shared this movement practice with the group and learning about Priiya's practice of freedom to move outdoors even when they had access to studio space, affirmed this eco-somatic thread to the work. This was also later reflected in Amanda's outdoor audio-visual pieces in figures 46 and 47.

⁴⁰² 'Embodied Terrain', Embodied Terrain, accessed 30 June 2023, <http://www.embodiedterrain.com>.

This principle of moving with the land and letting the movement interaction offer other ways of knowing, and perhaps novel ways of becoming, is one of the ways I understand embodiment to have the potential to serve as a decolonial tool. Since this movement practice offers an embodied way of undermining hierarchies of being between the self and the environment. In this sense, this dance of relationality with the environment shows how we may become indigenous to a land by holding the old and opening to the new.

For the analysis of this eco-somatics theme, I apply an autoethnographic embodied lens to the autobiographical material above to analyse how, in this case, Priiya's and my eco-somatic practice of moving outdoors may be construed as a practice of care for the self.⁴⁰³ Following Foucault's later work, I argue that this autoethnography shows how resistance comes not only through collective forms of political resistance but also through practices of subjectivity, in this case moving outdoors. Further, how this may serve as a practice of freedom in response to repressive, oppressive, and dominating forms of power, such as colonialism, sanism and heteronormativity.

⁴⁰³ Dilts, 'From "Entrepreneur of the Self" to "Care of the Self"', 141–42.



Figure 50. [Still from "a meditation on the wind, Lunow-Stolzenhagen, Germany", Video.](#)

From this embodied story and the reflection that followed, we can see how a post-humanist, new materialist and eco-feminist methodology may orientate⁴⁰⁴ a movement practice toward a felt sense experience of the earth body as an extension of one's own body.⁴⁰⁵ Thus, approaching embodiment as a decolonial tool that may foster a process of "*becoming indigenous*".⁴⁰⁶

In this way, my practice research responds to Spatz's and Kimmerer's philosophy of "*becoming indigenous*" by cultivating relationality with the land in the way I apply this thinking to my practice research - through somatically encountering and receiving the ground as an active partner in movement practice. Further, in offering an eco-somatic orientation to embodied practice and applying a post-humanist and new materialist framework to the body, I could explore the material

⁴⁰⁴ I encountered this application of the concept of orientation in creative practice in one of the morning classes facilitated by Abby Crain and her reading of Sarah Ahmed's work during the first week of P.O.R.C.H "the unknown creatures and plants", Ponderosa, Stolzenhagen, Germany between the 7th and the 14th of July, 2023.

⁴⁰⁵ Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 9–15.

⁴⁰⁶ Ben Spatz, *Blue Sky Body*, xv, Spatz's Italics.

possibilities of my body through movement as a hybrid between the human and the more-than-human. Responding to the question I posed in the beginning of this research: Can embodied research practices perform entangled storytelling to undermine hierarchies of being?

Firstly, the eco-somatic movement offered a direct way to undermine the hierarchies between the human and the more-than-human. Secondly, in allowing a new movement vocabulary to emerge from this practice of moving with the more-than-human, I activated the ecological conception of the self I proposed in the project to my somatic body, what Joanna Macy describes as “a metaphoric construct of identity and agency”.⁴⁰⁷

In this case, by metaphoric construct of identity and agency, I was able to identify a different relation to movement in this environment, which enabled a different kind of agency between the body and the land. This shows how practicing eco-somatic movement outdoors may offer an embodied way of decentring anthropocentrism, thus undermining the hierarchy between my human animal body and the body of the woods. In this way, it is possible to see how moving with the architecture of the woods, can be a practice of moving into a non-hierarchical relation with the earth body. Receiving the land as a partner in dance, as shown in the movement practice above, makes way for a hybridity between the self and the land. Thus allowing for a third to emerge between the human and the more-than-human. Through this eco-somatic practice here, we can see how it is possible to activate a space,⁴⁰⁸ where what Macy refers to as the “eco-self” may be explored.⁴⁰⁹

Hence, this practice shows how, through tracing the felt sense in movement outdoors, i.e., eco-somatic movement, it is possible to research the potential inherent in understandings of selfhood as interdependent that can arise in many guises. From the analysis of subjectivity following Foucault’s later work, as a practice of freedom, in relation to the question of undermining hierarchies of being, it is possible to conclude how such a practice may serve as a practice of freedom to undermine the hierarchy between the body and the land. Thus showing how a practice of subjectivity can also be a form of political resistance.

In mobilising the theory in this way, I am troubling the notion of the individualised self to incorporate the post-structuralist, new materialist and eco-feminist framework to embodiment as “fundamentally interdependent with all life”.⁴¹⁰ In this element of the practice, I also apply the

⁴⁰⁷ Macy, ‘The Greening of the Self’.

⁴⁰⁸ My thanks to Amanda who introduced me to her philosophy of *activating* instead of holding a space as a facilitator.

⁴⁰⁹ Macy, ‘The Greening of the Self’.

⁴¹⁰ Macy, ‘The Greening of the Self’.

embodied methodology to my experience of distress at the time and invited participants engaging with the practice to consider exploring their movement in outdoor spaces. In this way, I also sought to undermine the hierarchy between myself and the artists by immersing myself as researcher and including my own autobiographical material together with the group work.

The practice mobilises the post-structuralist, posthumanist, new materialist, ecofeminist and embodied methodology I opened the project with to activate the body as a decolonial tool and as contested by indigenous and majority world activist communities, to trouble the notion that mad studies, as a critical social theory, can only be understood in relation to “identity politics”. This is fitting with indigenous cosmologies such as Kimmerer’s account of becoming indigenous and how it links to origin myths that centre reciprocity rather than identity.⁴¹¹

Kimmerer also invites us to think a becoming indigenous, but insists that this is very difficult work for non-indigenous/settlers to do in an ethical way.⁴¹² Thus, I acknowledge that my eco-somatic practice as described above, may also be problematic in the way it invites this non-hierarchical relation and a becoming indigenous to the land through somatic movement given that I am white European, working in the UK and most of my commissions often come from white populated spaces.

Hence, the practice research enacts the complication of knowledge production the project proposed to provoke. Therefore, the practice offers an embodied way to resist the globalisation of dominant Western narratives and to trouble legitimacy of knowledges based on established hierarchies of being to incorporate an indigenous and situated approach to moving with experiences of distress.

⁴¹¹ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 9.

⁴¹² Kimmerer, 9–10.

5.5.2 Illness: On Environments and the Porousness of the Body.

It is partly due to the air I am breathing in New Zealand. It flares my allergies, which causes inflammation in my body and results in chronic illness and fatigue.

- Heidi



Figure 51. [Still from "Forest Bathing, Highgate Wood, London, UK" Video.](#)

- fab

I first started experiencing brain fog and fatigue, which my GP attributed to post-viral fatigue. Soon after, I developed recurring cystitis, which persisted for several months. After 2 rounds of antibiotics, I explored herbal remedies and came across "The secret sting of cystitis."⁴¹³ In the midst of this time of ill-health, I was diagnosed with dyslexia. Then, just five days after receiving my second Covid vaccine, I went into septic shock, a life-threatening condition resulting from blood poisoning. The infection had migrated from my bladder to my kidneys and into my blood, causing the organs to start shutting down.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ 'The Secret Sting of Cystitis', Wellcome Collection, accessed 20 April 2021, https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/YHgU_xAAACsAst7J.

⁴¹⁴ 'Sepsis Survivors', *Sepsis Alliance* (blog), accessed 30 June 2023, <https://www.sepsis.org/education/patients-family/sepsis-survivors/>.

During the sepsis episode, a consultant noted my familiarity with my own body and health. Another consultant, who had examined my blood count and confirmed the absence of a blood clot, left antibiotics with me as an option, if I changed my mind. This marked the beginning of my exploration into women's health issues, particularly chronic cystitis, which I realised was a collective struggle.⁴¹⁵ I delved deeper into the world of candida and candidiasis, uncovering the threats posed by deadly fungal infections today.⁴¹⁶

A year and a half later, countless relapse scares and medical appointments with the “Infectious and Tropical Diseases” (HTD) centre,⁴¹⁷ the inflammation in my gut healed after I eliminated gluten from my diet and moved house. Shortly thereafter, the candida infection also cleared. “Is it possible that they are all connected?” I asked my GP. “You are not just a vagina”, she responded.

This research project stemmed from a resistance toward individualised understandings of mental illness that overlook the ecological entanglements that may play a part in experiences of distress. Consequently, the project built on the mad activist scholarship that, amongst many things, seeks to expose systemic and structural issues as well as environmental causes, to include social and political considerations together with biological dispositions in mental health.

However, despite the initial scope of this practice research to contest depoliticised, reductivist and dominant understandings of mental illness, as soon as the global coronavirus pandemic took the world by storm, I, as an embodied researcher and subsequently, my practice research was confronted with serious physical illness. Even though I never intended to focus on physical illness and its impact on mental health, it became a central and unavoidable focus with Covid.

The project held participants who had to drop out due to Covid, illness that Covid triggered, enhanced, or difficult distressing experiences caused by the circumstances Covid exacerbated. However imperfectly, seven of us continued to show up to pour our embodied storytelling into this research. In Heidi's own poetic words on this matter:

⁴¹⁵ 'The Secret Sting of Cystitis'.

⁴¹⁶ Reuters, 'Candida Auris: Deadly Fungal Infections Spreading across US at "Worrisome" Rate', *The Guardian*, 21 March 2023, sec. Society, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/mar/21/candida-auris-symptoms-fungal-infection-skin>.

⁴¹⁷ 'Infectious and Tropical Diseases', University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, accessed 30 June 2023, <https://www.uclh.nhs.uk/our-services/find-service/tropical-and-infectious-diseases>.

To show up and be imperfectly present. Regardless of illness and everything else that is going on. Not hiding away, even if I can't be everything I think I should be for everyone.

- Heidi



Figure 52. [Still from "movement in stillness, Highgate Wood, London, UK" Video.](#)

- fab

I have been revisiting our conversation about resistance and movement. This has taken me back to times when I encountered stillness in my moving body. The first time I experienced this was around four years ago, during a period of grieving for my grandmother, who had just passed away, while I was dealing with a housing crisis in London. I remember the feeling of heaviness in my body when I attempted to dance during this time. The only moment I felt light in movement was when I went swimming in the ponds on Hampstead Heath in London.⁴¹⁸

Somehow, the weight of the body of water in the pond and the effort or resistance required for swimming provided me with a renewed sense of lightness in my water body as I swam. This was when I first became aware of the sense of movement within my body as I floated - an experience I describe as "moving still". Even as I sit still in my chair now, composing these words, I am conscious of the countless micro-movements within my body. The rise and fall of my chest and

⁴¹⁸ 'THE PONDS', KLPA (blog), 18 March 2019, <https://www.klpa.uk/the-ponds-2/>.

belly with each breath, the flow of my blood through my veins propelled by my heartbeat, the fluttering of my eyelids – every movement, every action, is a form of movement.

I experienced this sense of moving stillness again last year during my recovery from sepsis. At the time, my breathing turned into wheezing, and my womb and core ached as I healed. My default in dance had always been to initiate movement material from my core. However, during this period, my core was injured, and contracting it caused pain. In the initial months following my hospital admission, I had very little energy and could barely manage short walks. It was then that I started practicing forest bathing⁴¹⁹ in Highgate Woods.

Each morning and evening, I would walk to a particular tree (Fig. 52). I'd approach the tree, placing one hand on its bark and the other on my chest, creating a connection between us. I would stay with the tree for a moment, breathing in the energy the tree was offering me and releasing the illness and the pain in my body through my feet, as I felt into the contact with the ground and the earth beneath me.

After this process, I'd continue further into the woods, moving away from other people. There, I would stand quietly among the trees for a while. My only movements would be prompted by approaching dogs, sometimes curious and other times barking. I noticed that standing still can be unnerving for some beings, especially as I became more attuned to the forest through the practice of deep listening.⁴²⁰ I would also move when the wind gently shifted my position, or I turned my head toward the sun. The more I stood still with the trees, the more I became sensitive to the micro-movement in my body and the more I became aware that the trees, too, are in constant movement.

- fab

⁴¹⁹ 'Forest Bathing: What It Is and Where to Do It', Travel, 18 October 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/forest-bathing-nature-walk-health>.

⁴²⁰ 'PAULINE OLIVEROS - Welcome'.



Figure 53. A reminder to take a moment to *just be*. A drawing by Hannah Formosa, 2020.

From this autobiographical material, it is possible to see how physical illness and Covid were also part of the environment and the conditions that shaped the research. In this embodied narrative, I show how I espoused an ecological and embodied approach to understand, in this case, the complexity of my own long-term physical illness. From this reflection, it is possible to see how the exclusive application of the reductivist paradigm and biomedical model by the specialist team at the Infectious and Tropical Diseases Unit were unable to treat my health issues.

The ongoing health problems and the lack of effective treatment from the medical team led me to consider other possible causes in addition to the biomedical model. By taking this approach, I resisted the role of a passive “patient” that I proposed at the start of this project. I began to consider my autobiographical subjective observations alongside the scientific advice that was being offered to me by the specialist team, like Sarah Pini’s phenomenological account of her experience of cancer and illness in their body.

In the process described above, I employed the material memoirs method as used by authors like Audre Lorde,⁴²¹ Candida Lawrence,⁴²² Zillah Eisenstein,⁴²³ Susanne Antonetta⁴²⁴ and Sandra Steingraber⁴²⁵ in Stacy Alaimo's book *“Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self”*.⁴²⁶ This method allowed me to examine my personal embodied narrative of illness, examining how it entangled with the material aspects of my immediate environment and diet to respond to my health issues.

The material memoirs method offered me an enhanced way to produce knowledge about my body considering the personal, daily internal and external factors, along with the scientific treatment I was receiving. Material memoirs centre the intersections of body politics, and the ecological body as constituted by the material agencies of the political, the biological and the economic. By adopting this method, I was able to approach my body as porous and permeable, leading to an ecological understanding of my body and the illness I was experiencing. It expanded the scientific lens to scrutinise my personal daily observations, allowing me to take an active role in my treatment by offering alternative insights to the expert discourse stemming from the subjective ruminations captured by the material memoirs process.

⁴²¹ Audre Lorde cited in Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 85-86.

⁴²² Candida Lawrence cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

⁴²³ Zillah Eisenstein cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

⁴²⁴ Susanne Antonetta cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

⁴²⁵ Sandra Steingraber cited in Alaimo, 85-86.

⁴²⁶ Alaimo.

In this way, the application of the material memoirs method offered me a broader framework than the medicalised one that was initially being used to address my illness. It enabled me to consider the porousness of the body, as explored in Alaimo's work, and its permeability to the environment in which it is situated. This approach aided my healing by acknowledging my illness as ecologically embedded.

After a year of grappling with symptoms and slowly making my way toward a chronic illness diagnosis, my material autobiographical accounts led me to realise that the chronic stress caused by my housing situation at the time, coupled with an intolerance to gluten, might have been affecting my gut environment. This, in turn, could have been causing the chronic women's health issues. These reflections were substantiated by my GP at the time, who shared a holistic view of the body.

Upon hearing my observations about the effects of gluten on my body, my GP recommended that I may need a more "sophisticated" response to my health issues than what the NHS could provide. She suggested I consider participating in a gut biome research project, recognising the complexity of the issues I was dealing with and the potential benefit of a more comprehensive investigation into my gut health.

A year later, following my relocation and eliminating gluten from my diet, my health has been fully restored. When I shared my observations and the connections I had made between my environment, gluten intake, my gut, and my women's health issues with the specialist team at the Tropical Diseases Unit, they were unable to provide guidance or support for my insights. They cited a lack of scientific evidence to substantiate the links I was drawing.

As Stacy Alaimo argues in their book, there is insufficient data available for certain conditions and the impact of pollution or toxicity. This underscores the value of material memoirs as a method, as it allows for the compilation of more personal data that might otherwise go unnoticed when relying solely on scientific approaches. Therefore, while material memoirs may be presented in the form of personal narratives, it holds relevance for research, science, and activism.

Further, in learning about "The secret sting of cystitis"⁴²⁷ and the fact that 80% of those suffering from autoimmune diseases and chronic illnesses are female,⁴²⁸ suggests that individualised

⁴²⁷ 'The Secret Sting of Cystitis'.

⁴²⁸ Sarah M. Temkin et al., 'Chronic Conditions in Women: The Development of a National Institutes of Health Framework', *BMC Women's Health* 23 (6 April 2023): 162, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02319-x>.

treatment approaches may be inappropriate to deal with women's health issues. The material memoirs approach calls for an interconnected political and ecological engagement that addresses both the structural issues relating to gender and environmental factors that may be contributing to the rise of autoimmune diseases in a post-Covid world.⁴²⁹

Alaimo's concept of the ecological body, which emphasises the porousness and permeability between the body and the environment, highlights the potential connections between Covid and the climate crisis and the shared increase in chronic illnesses post-Covid. This points to a possible connection between medical expert discourse and ecological justice work. In applying Alaimo's theory to my autobiographical narration, it enables me to show how material memoirs matter beyond the personal account to address these complex wider social, political and environmental issues.

In this autoethnography, I also incorporated Paul Preciado's concept of auto-theory from his text "*Testo Junkie*".⁴³⁰ I applied this concept by politicising my experience of illness and treating my body as a "political archive"⁴³¹ to create the necessary conditions for "micropolitical action".⁴³² When referring to "political archive", I build on Preciado's notion of "political therapy",⁴³³ which treats the body as an instrument imbued with political power. It serves as an experimental form of subjective knowledge production that is structurally constituted and inherently political.

Following Preciado's framework, I considered how my housing situation may have been a form of chronic stress in my life, potentially elevating cortisol levels in my body. This, in turn, may have been creating a hormonal imbalance, resulting in an environment in my gut conducive to candida overgrowth. An underlying health issue I was unaware of at the time of my second Covid vaccine. Given that Covid may be linked to the climate crisis,⁴³⁴ that the housing crisis is a collective and structural issue, and the collective struggle of women's health, the shortcomings of the medical system in addressing chronic health issues are clear. This compels me to call for social, political, and ecological justice work as a form of "psychopolitical care."⁴³⁵

⁴²⁹ Chetan Sharma and Jagadeesh Bayry, 'High Risk of Autoimmune Diseases after COVID-19', *Nature Reviews Rheumatology* 19, no. 7 (July 2023): 399–400, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41584-023-00964-y>; Yu Liu, Amr H. Sawalha, and Qianjin Lu, 'COVID-19 and Autoimmune Diseases', *Current Opinion in Rheumatology* 33, no. 2 (March 2021): 155–62, <https://doi.org/10.1097/BOR.0000000000000776>.

⁴³⁰ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*.

⁴³¹ Preciado, 389.

⁴³² Preciado, 362.

⁴³³ Preciado, 378.

⁴³⁴ Carrington, 'Nature Is Sending Us a Message'.

⁴³⁵ Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 378.

Thus, in this analysis, I suggest that chronic illnesses today may be an environmental justice issue that calls for a politicisation of the body and mind, so we may include biological and economic factors to move toward an ecological reframing in health response.⁴³⁶ Taking a politicised, ecologically informed and material autobiographical analytical framework together with biomedical approaches may be one way we may start to respond to health, especially chronic health issues and illnesses, by moving toward the “art science worldings”⁴³⁷ Haraway proposes.

5.6 Practice Research Outcomes.

5.6.1 Dance and Movement.

From the onset of the group work element of the practice research, we were immediately confronted with questions such as: “What is movement? What is dance? Why does it need to look a particular way for us to consider movement, a dance?” This felt like an important starting point to our conversation. In a way, the fact that I did not have the resources to remunerate the artists for their contributions to the research, and operating on the logic of reciprocity,⁴³⁸ resulted in artist participation from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Some of the artists held a formal dance education background, whilst others had experience of experiential, somatic and expressive dance movement practices. This offered a wide range of responses to the themed journey, ranging from indignant resistance to somatic movement to bewilderment toward the absence of set sequences, choreography and a clear directive or instructions. As expressed in Nevena’s vignette below:

I have practiced mostly in street dance and the hip-hop sphere. When I move freely that doesn’t really translate, I don’t think it is particularly visible. At the moment, I am interested in movement that doesn’t use dance vocabulary or doesn’t involve dancers. I am working with a theatre company and I just find so much joy and find it so interesting watching them dance and move without the articulation (the physical articulation that a dancer has) and also watching them come alive because I think we take it for granted as dancers that we are going to feel a certain way whereas I think watching the general population light up with movement has been really rewarding.

- Nevena

⁴³⁶ See Literature Review chapter, section 2.5.

⁴³⁷ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 19–22.

⁴³⁸ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

This differentiation, articulated by Nevena in the vignette above, is a crucial distinction that framed the parameters of the group work with the artists. It names the difference between the movement vocabulary and expert articulation of professional dancers with formal dance education backgrounds and the raw, expressive movement of untrained dancers.

This is an important differentiation for this project, which speaks to the discourses on democratising dance movement practice, and decentring able bodies to foster inclusive spaces in the postmodern dance genre. Therefore, the practice research outcomes documented in this chapter may offer novel ways for facilitators, practitioners, artists and those engaging the moving body with this orientation toward the inner realm and the felt sense experience to embodiment.

5.6.2 Untangling the Knots: Resistance as a Way into Movement Practice.



Figure 54. [Still from "Amanda Untangling the Knots" Video.](#)

Documentation is traditionally considered to be an important component of an artistic practice. This raises important questions that speak to the ways neoliberal and capitalist ideologies inform professional artistic practices in the contemporary art world. Does a movement practice require documentation or an aesthetic outcome for it to be validated or legitimised as a professional artistic practice?

Before commencing the group work, I conceived the practice to be a space that may disrupt, or at least interrupt, dominant narratives about our embodied experience, to explore movement as an aesthetico-existential process that Felix Guattari proposes in "The Three Ecologies".⁴³⁹

In this sense, I was more interested in documenting different aspects of the process of the somatic movement practice. I consider the documentation shared by the artists as creative practice research outputs and findings in themselves. The process that it offered to create and recreate, as Guattari puts it, and not necessarily for the aesthetic outputs it produced.

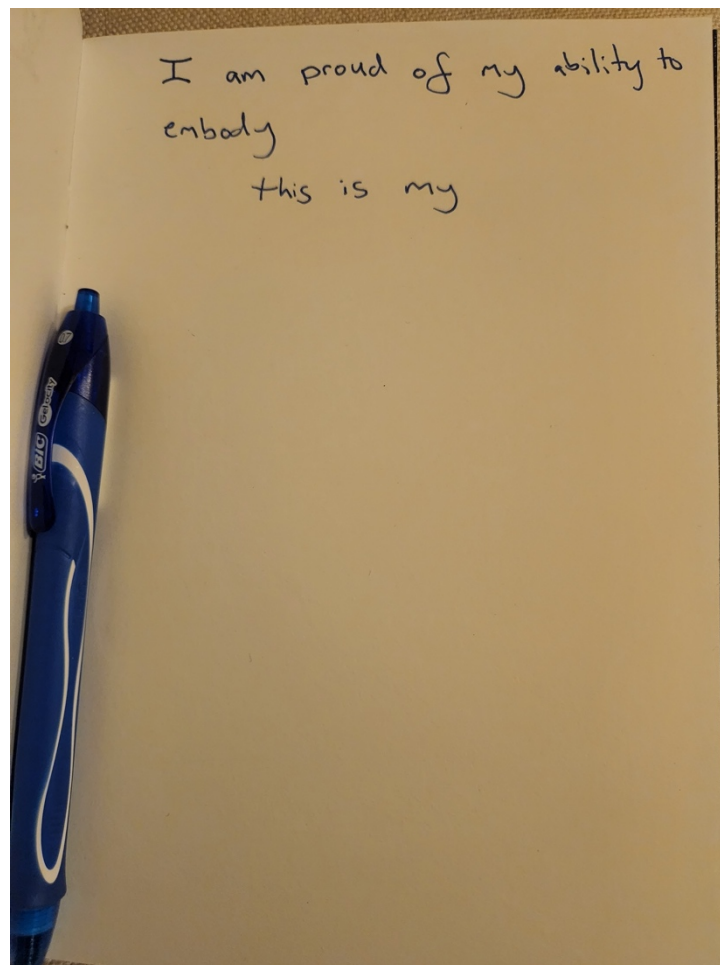


Figure 55. Heidi "Blank Pages" Photo.

- Heidi

In the design of the project, documentation was entirely optional, and it was up to each of us, as we encountered the themed journey, to decide how we wanted to capture the embodied story that emerged. Suggested options included using a video camera during the movement and mark-

⁴³⁹ See Literature Review chapter, section 2.2.3.

making or writing at the end. No documentation might have been the most obvious way to disrupt neoliberal expectations and the pressure put on artists to produce. Guided by this principle, I honoured the participation of an artist who produced one output during the whole nine-week journey, in the same way as the artists who gifted multiple pieces of documentation. Some of us documented our movement encounters using a video camera and blank pages for mark-making or creative writing afterwards.

Whichever form of documentation we chose, it seemed that we all experienced knots and resistance at some point in our journey. This was usually an entry point into the fullness of our movement practice when the knots were met with curiosity, kindness, patience and compassion.

As an artist, I was personally interested in recording videos of bodily sensations and how they guided my gestures and improvisation, as shown, for example, in the video in Fig. 12. There, I was curious to explore a visual language that spoke of the somatic experience I was having in my chest and recording the repetitive movement the sensation and impulses were guiding me to make. I experienced the sensation as a form of pulsing.



Figure 56. [Still from "sensing lava, Snæfellsjökull Peninsula, Iceland, Video.](#)

As a facilitator, I held a firm commitment throughout the group to the neoliberal critique of the self, mental health, movement practice and wellness. I wanted the research space to be a place where we can suspend the pressures and demands expected from us as creatives working in a capitalist economy. I was curious to see what would emerge when we take this pressure of producing an output out of the way.

My thinking as a facilitator was informed by both the somatic and postmodern dance philosophies I had encountered, as well as Foucault's later work on practices of self-care and freedom as spaces of resistance. As a result of this thinking, I guided the artists to allow the somatic experiences and everyday actions⁴⁴⁰ to be the practice research outcomes in their own right.

This allowed us to be with small, gentle and gestural movements and to consider them to be a dance. It allowed slow somatic movement to be a form of subversion, as Antonija Livingstone⁴⁴¹ puts it, and for that to be enough, as well as a time for rest and recuperation. In this sense, the audio-visual outputs, as well as other documentation like mark-making and drawings, may seem elusive and fragmented, but this speaks to the collective experience that we shared as a group and the experience of *being with* that the minimal documentation, in turn, offered us.

5.6.3 The Camera as Gaze.

One of the methods we considered for documenting our movement practice was using a video camera. While we explored various options for capturing our engagement with the research, we encountered a shared experience of resistance or unease when it came to the documentation. Some participants felt more comfortable with one type of documentation than another. This led to conversations about how recording ourselves moving using a camera felt counterintuitive to a somatic movement practice that emphasises tracing the inner landscape through the felt sense.

Additionally, it appeared somewhat discordant to record external movements when our primary task was to focus on tuning our attention to sensations and impulses as they emerged within the body in response to the guided imagery, prompts and invitations provided by the movement scores. In this context, the intuitive mark-making and stream of consciousness writing exercise that followed at the end of the practice seemed like a more natural progression and a way to materialise the embodied experience in contrast to the camera, which called for moving as if for an

⁴⁴⁰ Compagnon, 'Yvonne Rainer, Postmodern Dance, and You'. Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

⁴⁴¹ 'Antonijalivingstone', & Trembling, accessed 30 May 2021, <https://www.antonijalivingstone.com>.

imagined external eye rather than driven by internal impulses, compulsions and desires. This sentiment is expressed in the debrief, as highlighted in the vignettes below by Tammy and myself.

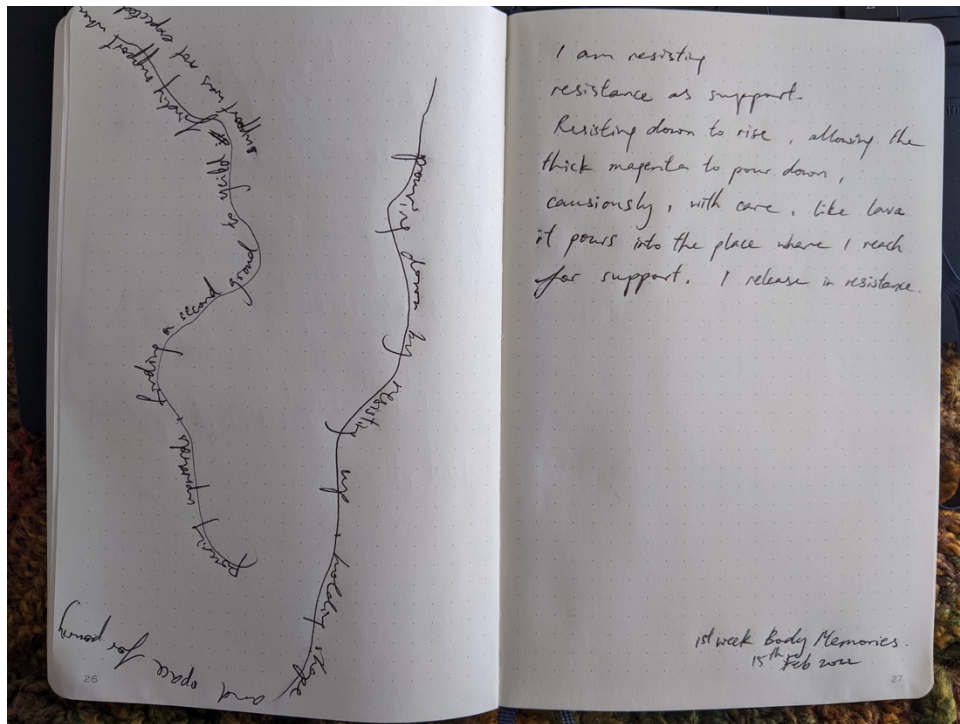


Figure 57. Tammy "Writing", Photo.

I think I'm a little bit opposite with the writing, I hate recording myself. I haven't recorded once. Just because I feel like whenever I set the camera on and then press record, I'm like damn, I'm like performing for someone now not for myself or for exploring. I'm not in that headspace of play or curiosity so I'm like, nah and then I just switch it off. But then I think writing for me feels less like a documentation but more like a oh, this is how I felt it is more like a reflection in a way like trying to capture moments of the felt sense like, not even on a body level, but also for what comes up.

- Tammy

Sometimes it just makes no sense which is fine, but I think documentation for me is quite difficult with this type of work especially because it's so personal as well. When I first tried to introduce a camera into my practice, I felt rage, like, really strong rage. It felt intrusive, like the gaze was invading my space and it was changing how I moved and so it felt like it was taking away the freedom of moving in an ugly, hideous, unappealing way. And yeah, that's kind of like a whole other practice for me. Like, sometimes to say my practice is bringing in this external gaze and everything that it brings up and almost finding a way to find my freedom through resisting performing for it. But it's certainly not for everyone, for sure. And it doesn't have to be the way. So that's why it's wonderful being part of a collective, even though it's such a small collective but like Heidi, really finds her flow in writing, and she kind of runs with that. And then some people, like me and you, maybe sometimes you don't want to write, you just want to move, and you want to play with that. Someone else might like drawing. I'm curious to see what will finally emerge when we bring all our materials together. We are having such different experiences, even though there are these common threads that we can resonate with.

- fab

However, Nevena offered us another way of approaching the camera and engaging with its' gaze. She introduced the idea of the camera as a feedback tool that can enhance and support a movement practice through a visual dialogue and the potential for mirroring and reflection it can offer. As Nevena articulated below:

Recording has always been a part of my practice because I sort of came in the foundation through freestyle within more like hip hop and street dance where it's not necessarily about how you feel or what comes up internally, it's a very external dance form. They are very much geared up for competitions, circles or for parties. You go in and you do your thing, and it is to impress and so then very much when I started improvising or freestyling, I always watched it back. Correcting what was good or what didn't work and so I think for me a camera has been always very much part of my process. Even if I don't like watching it back, I do in the hope that it is a catalogue. And it's interesting, watching it back as well. I can remember exactly what I was thinking in that moment or what I was feeling in that moment, or what I was seeing in that moment or watching it back transports me. Maybe it would be interesting to not record video at all and try to document with words to see how messy it gets.

I think now with this I found that when I watch my stuff, when I watch it back, I can really follow my thoughts and my feelings exactly as they're happening, so I can see and I know my thought process, so I know what's coming up as I watched them which I find useful because I can in the moment feedback. But it does also sometimes come with some judgment you know it not being what you envisage it to be when I watch myself moving. I'm like, oh, I didn't think it looked like that or God that looked horrible, which isn't what this is about at all which is why I'd like to try and resist filming myself and seeing what it would be like to draw too and write about it afterwards.

Yeah, but then again, I think maybe the reason I'm resisting writing is probably because I will judge my writing even more because it's what I feel probably least comfortable in.

So yeah, that may be part of it as well.

- Nevena



Figure 58. [Still from "Nevena_Mark-Making", Video.](#)

I think I'm interested to practice without a camera and take that dimension away. Rather than watching it back basically seeing how I can remember through just thinking and feeling rather than seeing what I've done.

- Nevena

I think for me it's camera as well, but the other way around. Uhm, I think I will not necessarily film myself doing the practice, but I also wanted to just like rethink what my relationship with the camera is, like what am I actually showing the camera? What do I allow it to see? I think there are a lot of questions to unpack there.

- Tammy

I'm going to borrow your tip of playing with watching myself and kind of letting that feed my movement in a different way. So maybe re-framing how I experience the camera as well, like you, Tammy.

- fab

The subtle but significant shift in perspective Nevena introduced regarding the camera as an ally prompted Tammy and myself to consider the camera's affordances as an extension of the body and the self. This angle speaks to the new materialist philosophy of thinkers like Rosi Braidotti and Karen Barad, on which this project was founded. It encourages us to reconsider a view of humanism and binary thinking about technology, inviting us to embrace technologically mediated worlds.⁴⁴²

This stance also echoes Donna Haraway's call for "art science worldings",⁴⁴³ which, in this context, prompts us to explore the entanglements between the possibilities of the camera's gaze that can be expansive, rather than viewing the external gaze as conflicting with the internal gaze. This exemplifies how a new materialist feminist approach to embodied knowledge redefines the body as a hybrid of flesh and technology. This challenges both overly pessimistic views of technological advances and a return to a romanticised notion of nature and the body.

The insight offered by Nevena reframes the camera from being merely a documentation tool to a potential ally in somatic movement practice. It can enrich the internal gaze by introducing projections, reflections, feedback loops, and dialogue. This nuanced relationship between the

⁴⁴² Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

⁴⁴³ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 67.

body, somatics, and the camera as an external gaze represents an entanglement that can be generative. This generative potential is further enhanced by the reflective space within the project that allowed for an openness toward an ecological self that feels itself to be inner and outer at once.

5.6.4 Mark-Making and Resistance.



Figure 59. "resistance" doodle, Photo.

- fab

Likewise, Nevena encountered resistance toward the mark-making exercises at the end:

In terms of writing, I definitely have a resistance. I get myself a pad and then I finish and I'm like OK, done. Because yeah, as you say, I feel like I just can't articulate in words what I've experienced. I don't know, maybe it's, I think probably it's just a, uh, resistance within me that it's just not my natural medium. I know it could just be words or it could, you know, be just words on a page. It doesn't have to be anything that makes any sense to anyone but yeah, I definitely have a bit of resistance to actually write afterwards, and I even drew a few times, but even that I found it was a struggle to fully let go into it. I felt like I was just being quite literal, with the drawing. I know it's not wrong, but it's just I feel like I couldn't get into the flow as I could when I was moving. Maybe my flow time was used up.

- Nevena

In response, Tammy and I shared our embodied experiences of mark-making, explaining how either drawing or writing assisted us in verbalising our gestural and non-verbal movement experiences. We also discussed how it aided in processing difficult emotions that surfaced during the movement practice. In this way, meeting resistance with curiosity and gently untangling the knots became an integral part of the research process. It could be argued that the most valuable insights of the project were often found in meeting points of resistance.

Throughout the research process, resistance emerged in various forms – from questions that arose in response to resistance toward a particular position or theory to resistance regarding specific terminology that often favoured one theory or position over another. Resistance was also experienced collectively in the movement practice, the shared thinking and feeling that resulted from it. In the conversation between Nevena, Tammy and myself, it becomes evident that resistance can serve as a powerful tool, similar to how anger can express our boundaries. The feeling of resistance can reveal what is alive within us, indicating where our learning, stance, or cause may lie.

Something about seeing Valia's movement, really made me feel like I wanted to move like a snake. It was interesting because when I actually started the meditation there was sort of no desire to perform and this is an interesting thing that happens to me when I'm in a group space or when I know that I'm going to be visible to people sometimes, it's very hard to actually be real and not just perform. I mean, performing can be real, it can feel real, but quite often with ecstatic dance, I would look into myself and be like you're actually trying to do something instead of being something. But I haven't really experienced that with your sessions. It's been a lot more just real. Like, not trying to do anything. And when I saw the snake, I wanted to try to do the snake, but when I actually started to do the meditation, it was very, something about being on the floor just very quickly put me into a space, a particular feeling and I just went with it. The gaze generally – the audience, the other. I could tell that I needed something from this work. I wasn't just doing it to please you. Whereas in the past I would definitely try to please someone if I was doing something like this.

- Heidi

The vignettes presented above encapsulate a discussion that led to the questioning of the binary distinctions between performance and authentic movement, challenging the notion that one negates the other. Heidi's embodied response and personal reflections invite us into a space of curiosity about alternative ways of doing. This perspective opens a consideration of the possibilities that might arise from the intersections of different worlds and practices. It prompts us to continually question the binaries between self and other in the context of authentic movement and performance to consider relationality between self and other when somatic movement is witnessed

by another. Moreover, it suggests that performance can serve as a channel and conduit for healing when the focus shifts from the self to the other.

5.6.5 Radical Inclusion.



Figure 60. [Still from "Heidi with swiss ball", Video.](#)

It was repeatedly inviting Heidi to participate in the project, with all the responses she was bringing to it, from her screaming silences to her indignant refusal to move when encountering the guided scores, which forefronted a postmodern approach to dance, embracing all forms of movement, including non-movement as integral to the practice. In Heidi's interaction with the Swiss ball in the video Figure 60 above, we can witness her embodying the apathy and resistance she later expressed feeling when confronted with the movement prompts. Initially, I had the impression that the ball was somehow an extension of her body, and as she held and rocked over the big blue ball, it seemed like she was soothing herself. The experience also brought to mind the provocation posed by post-dance, to consider all movement as a form of dance and Yvonne Rainer's short silent film "Volleyball" (Foot film).⁴⁴⁴

Heidi's embodied response played a crucial role in shaping the practice, and establishing the

⁴⁴⁴ 'Yvonne Rainer. Volleyball (Foot Film). 1967 | MoMA', The Museum of Modern Art, accessed 30 June 2023, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/125929>.

foundational parameters for the movement research. Additionally, her choice to document and record her interaction, driven more by loyalty to me than by considering it a valid response, provided her and the rest of the group to honour the way our body authentically wants to move in the moment as the research process. This was done without being constrained by preconceived ideas we may hold about dance.

Heidi's profound journey through grief and her chronic illness diagnosis models how we may be radically inclusive in movement spaces. Heidi's body story speaks to the important discourses of decentring able bodies in the dance world, so we may be radically inclusive of folk who may not be able to or do not want to move in movement spaces. This approach aligns with the broader discourse on democratising dance practice. It also called for an expanded understanding of movement, one that could encompass resistance to movement as a valid form of communication or a distinct movement language-in-itself. This required a humble and attentive listening to the embodied stories as they unfolded, moment by moment.⁴⁴⁵

In Heidi's own words:

Uhm, because I was rolling on a Swiss ball. That's the only way that I could cope with doing it was to be hugging a Swiss ball. And just like rolling onto my own hands and just I felt like I had this huge belly. I felt like I was sort of absorbing into it, but I was also expanding with it and I felt like I wanted to be saying so, I put on the video but then I was annoyed by the video, but I just kept going anyway, and I was just rolling around and driving around and just the moment that you started talking about being underwater I physically felt like it happened, like I could just feel everything submerged and it was really intense and I felt really crazy, like I felt really uncomfortable and like I love water, and I love being in water, it's usually a very peaceful sensation. But this I just felt overwhelmed yak, like I just wanted to come out and then when you asked for a gesture I just wanted to puke and so I was just like gagging. So, the video is not very pretty. I didn't watch it, so for all I know I was flashing because I was wearing a dress and then I was, like, rolling on this ball. And so yeah, it might be for the best.

I felt underwater all of a sudden and very queasy. I wondered if it was all the movement. I wanted to merge with the ball. Or expand with it. Something felt off all of a sudden. Or became clear how off it always was. I wanted to be witnessed, but then hated the feeling of being watched. I have not played video. I cannot guarantee it will work. I feel uncomfortable but not unsafe.

I feel like this process has really led me back to a much more hospitable place inside my body just like one imperfect uncertain movement at a time. These sessions were such a big part of that.

- Heidi

⁴⁴⁵ Lucia Farinati, *The Force of Listening*, Doormats 6 (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2017).

Furthermore, Heidi's aversion to the audios offers a nuanced engagement with meditation and somatics that troubles the neoliberalisation and positive affect-focused approach of the wellness industry. Her resistance was not solely directed towards the expected movement and aesthetics associated with dance but towards my invitation to induce relaxation-inducing emotions while she was suffering and grieving. This is interesting because it highlights the disparity between the wellness, somatic and healing industry and the rage that often accompanies grief. This speaks to the activist scholarship of mad studies, which this project builds on and the notion of "good grief" that prevails in mainstream approaches to mental health and grieving.⁴⁴⁶ Heidi gifted us with a glimpse into the raw experience of her grieving process, which is often suppressed or overlooked. It also shows that meditation, relaxation and somatic exercises may not always be suitable healing mechanisms. Sometimes, all we can do is sit with, be with, move with and trust in the process.

⁴⁴⁶ See Literature review chapter, section 2.2.1.

5.7 Companion Species.



Figure 61. "Ladybird Kiss", Glastonbury Tor, UK, Photo.

Non-human animals played a significant part in our collective ecologically entangled embodied storytelling practice. Therefore, it is important to name and express gratitude to the companion non-human animals that accompanied in our movement journey. From the snake, which taught us how to honour life transitions through shedding its skin, as told by Amanda, to the bear that encouraged us to reflect on hibernation and the importance of rest, as told by Heidi, to the koala bear that gracefully stumbles as it loses its balance as playfully told by Priiya. These are some

examples of how the movements of non-human animals guided through our collective storytelling practice.

5.7.1 Non-human Animal Teachings.

Below is one instance of how non-human companion animals in our environments invite us into presence with our environments. I adopt the term “companion animals” from Donna Haraway’s book “*The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*”.⁴⁴⁷

I've got an object. I think this says a lot about my day. Actually, when I walked around the room, my cat brought this to me. She loves little rubbish like this. She doesn't play with actual toys. This is a tea bag I used today. She just picked it out of the recycling and is currently looking at me right now, waiting for me to throw it. This piece of rubbish is hard to fetch so yeah, this is what I'm drawn to, of course.

- Tammy

Cats have been constant companions in my writing process. I have always held an affinity with these creatures, and in many ways, I consider them to be my familiars. My connection with cats helped me to navigate my precarious housing situation by catsitting.⁴⁴⁸ I made writing and regenerative retreats out of each catsit. Every cat I have had a relationship with has been integral to my writing, thinking and moving process. Cats have showed me the path to becoming that I live today. They taught me all about stillness, how to cultivate a space centred around being rather than doing, they taught me how to purr, play, the art of kneading, how to listen to non-verbal communication, how to pounce and act on instinct.

Another example is the vignette below, where we can see different manifestations of the more-than-human as both symbolic of the inner and personal realm through the movement and dreaming journeying. Further, we can also see how they may serve as companions, or some cases, as referred to by Heidi - “emotional support”.

⁴⁴⁷ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

⁴⁴⁸ ‘House Sitters UK’, HouseSittersUK, accessed 30 June 2023, <https://www.housesittersuk.co.uk/>. I now only sit for cats that are independent, whose sovereignty is honoured, have access to cat flap and are free to come into the domestic space and go out into the garden as they please.

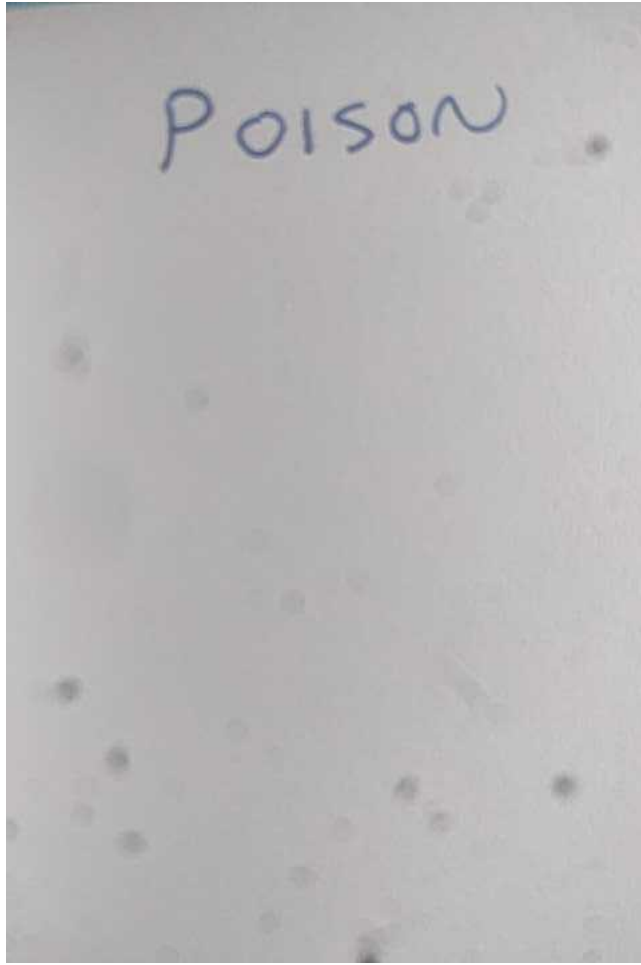


Figure 62. Heidi "Poison" Photo.

When I saw the snake, I wanted to try to do the snake, but when I actually started to do the meditation, it was something about being on the floor that very quickly put me into a space and a particular feeling and I just, went with it. Uhm and during the experience because, this is sort of like a threefold experience for me, that during the actual session I just had lots of feelings, like lots of really stuck feelings and it was just sort of everywhere, like it wasn't just in one part of my body, but it came out in different ways, at different times. Especially when I was thinking to myself, don't fight the snake, embody the snake like you are the snake. Because I knew what the snake represented to me in my mind, I knew it was actually a person. I've been spending a lot of time in a kind of poisonous space where I'm fighting against the snake. Like the snake is this person in my mind and I'm like fighting it and it's a very violent, toxic sort of energy but in this exercise, I was like, just don't put the snake outside and bash the snake but feel into it, like it's not this other person anymore sort of thing.

And then when I said that I had this feeling in my lungs, like it was a cough. At one point, I wound up onto all fours and without even trying this cough just fell out of my mouth. It felt very poetic, I didn't try to do that and it was very physical as well, like um wanting to just like stretch by pushing down into the ground and by just

wriggling and uhm everything felt good because it felt like some movement had been trapped. When the movement was coming out it was like release of that tension but there was also a feeling that I don't quite trust it completely and at one point I visualized screaming. Now screaming made my body kind of resign, like I just kind of collapsed on the floor because I got too tired moving but then when the movement wanted to express itself fully, I wouldn't let it.



Figure 63. [Still from "Heidi and Kahu", Video.](#)

Uhm so that was I think the default experience. Then I straightaway watched the video. I didn't watch the last video. I watched this one and it was so funny. Like I was watching it, and then I saw Kaku, my dog, and this whole other thing was happening that I didn't realise.

And it was just so funny to see her, I was so amused. She kept doing things like I was aware of her walking past me once and sniffing my face, but I obviously, couldn't see what she was doing in the background, and I couldn't see how many times she was kind of coming in and out. And then came forward and just kind of watched me. It gave me a different perspective and I thought that it was really amusing watching. I was also really amused watching myself. I recognized some of the gestures like when I watched I wish I could translate some of the poses that I was seeing. To me it almost felt like I was transforming into a child, like even physically I looked like I remember being a child sometimes. It's weird because how could I have seen myself when I was a child like that, you know from the outside. But I felt like I was

remembering looking like that. As a child and it was really interesting because I wasn't necessarily aware of that in the moment, but seeing myself and those gestures, like I may be trying to get out of something that I couldn't get out of, it's just very clear.

And this is the part it felt like this kind of dance, visually watching it between Kahu and me and um I was sort of lulled into quietness because it was quiet and then all of a sudden, I started making these sounds and it was so funny. And then I did something with my shoulders that cracked me up so much because I looked like a spider. It looked like my body was sort of detached from my head and the spider and then uhm the sounds when I started coughing, Kahu looked like she was going to come back into the room, she perked up, and then she just lay down on the floor. (Heidi Laughing) It's like Uhm, some rescue dog but almost like a yodel that really fascinated me both when I was making that sound because that was the sound that wanted to come out. As I was making that sound, I was like, oh, I never knew I could make the sound, and it felt exactly like I imagined a yodel feels. Then later on I wanted to show Anya (Heidi's partner) the video.

Uh and I laughed so much while I was showing her that video. I was just like, there are tears just streaming down my eyes and it felt like that laughter was quite healing. You know how sometimes a feeling doesn't really know quite how to come out, and so it comes out in that kind of laughter way. That was how it felt like. I didn't feel like I was mocking myself. It just felt very releasing. Very cathartic.

And it also gave the sort of joy like feeling. I can remember being young and being in a real mood and then the release. Being in that mood, and just suddenly being happy again, like just being really joyful again. So that was my experience of the snake.

- Heidi



Figure 64. [Still from "Priya Snaking Ways" Video.](#)

She's a very physical dog. We say her job is emotional support. She's pretty useless with everything else, but she's very good. She helped me through my thesis.

I'd be lying down, and she would come along and sort of making this nest between my legs like, you know, how dogs turn in circles and then flop down. And so, I'd, like, put my legs out, because I've got really long legs. And so, she got very used to being in the nest of my legs and some days it just felt like that warmth, that body right there that I could sort of squeeze a little bit. The body right there just comforted me so much and yeah, just really helped me through those last difficult stages. She's definitely very special.

Uhm, energetically, we've got a special connection, she is very playful, and she can feel it in me, and I can feel it in her. And Anya, who is the sensible one encourages her not to get too wrapped up because she gets very, very silly. She tries to calm her down, but she can feel it in me, and I can feel it in her and she'll just like, look at me in the eyes like I really want to play with you to the full extent of my teeth and I'm just like, oh, I just want to, like, squeeze you. And, like, you know, so we have this, like, intense energy thing.

I definitely did feel her presence in that sense there, but it was so funny watching her, it added this whole other element for me.

Once I heard someone refer to the small, soft animal within. When I heard that description it felt really clear that perhaps we begin like an animal, like little children are very much like that, feeling in the moment, very bodily. Like with babies and toddlers there is really no differentiation between the feeling of the self and the feeling of the environment and it kind of made sense because sometimes there's a part of me that uhm, relates so much to the animal, to the kids and the animal. That just doesn't know how to get out of a situation, that is kind of like reliant on, but there's just no way out. It felt very much like that cough, that feeling that was coming out, that wanted to come out. And when I was seeing myself lying down on the floor, I was like, yeah, that's there.

Uhm, that soft little animal that's been hurt.

You know, like she's just.

She stayed in my body this whole time.

Uhm, she's been hiding in my body.

And.

Every now and then,

she comes out,

like she just.

takes over and becomes my body.

- Heidi

5.7.2 (Unexpected Stories About) Joy and Playfulness.



Figure 65. "embodying methodology" Photo.

Given the heavy emotions and movement articulation Heidi shared experiencing from the start of the project, it was profoundly touching to witness the above shift in her embodied storytelling practice. As Heidi tells us in the vignette above, seeing Kahu in the recording offered her another way of seeing her embodied journey as she engaged with the movement practice, which she responded to with laughter, humour, playfulness and joy. This is a significant shift in Heidi's inner landscape. The non-verbal communication Heidi speaks about when relating with Kahu as her companion in movement, grief, chronic health issues and life, shows the depth of the relationship which goes beyond words and reconnects Heidi with a younger part of herself, as she refers to it, "the child and soft animal within".

Heidi's embodied experience of laughter and joy, despite the heaviness that often accompanies grieving and ill health, introduces another dimension to the project, which was also shared in different contexts with the other artists and myself. The companionship of non-human animals in our embodied storytelling practice speaks to Donna Haraway's storytelling practice of

entanglements and her theory of non-human animals as companion species, which undermines hierarchies of being and troubles anthropocentrism.⁴⁴⁹

This project started with a proposition to merge mad activist scholarship with a posthumanist approach as an alternative way to consider embodied experiences of distress. It is deeply humbling to see how the more-than-human enriches embodied practice. This also introduces the effect of laughter, humour and joy, which, for some reason or another, are not traditionally associated with experiences of distress. However, as adrienne maree brown writes in her book “*Pleasure Activism*” and reflective practice with other embodied, queer and anti-racist activists, laughter and joy are not only radical in themselves, but the only way to make activism sustainable.⁴⁵⁰

This also reminds me of the “doom and gloom” that Haraway writes about in “*Staying with the Trouble*” when we take an anthropocentric view of the climate crisis.⁴⁵¹ This is not to take anything away from the devastating consequences and injustice resulting from the climate crisis. Rather, it is an invitation to consider experiencing and telling our stories of distress, and this sixth mass great extinction event, from a position that de-centres the human and considers possibilities from a conception of the human and the more-than-human in an entangled way.

In this sense, our embodied experiences of joy in a mad activist project during a time of multiple ecological crises disrupts something fundamental about traditional approaches to crisis and distress. It also counters the underlying neoliberal narrative that implicitly suggests contentment, happiness, and joy can only be achieved in the absence of illness and distress and can only follow from achieving and obtaining.

However, if we truly seek to explore what it means in an embodied way to “be with” and “to move with” in a fluid and entangled way, or to explore what it feels like to live fully “in the ruins”, to use Anna Tsing’s phrasing,⁴⁵² then playfulness, humour and joy can reside with loss, grief and uncertainty. It is not the story that the wellness industry and dominant narratives about health tell, but in the unexpected presence of joy, the project offered us a glimpse of what creative ways of “living and dying on a damaged planet”⁴⁵³ could be like when we suspend binary and dominant stories about health.

⁴⁴⁹ See Literature Review chapter, section 2.5.

⁴⁵⁰ Brown, *Pleasure Activism*.

⁴⁵¹ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1–2.

⁴⁵² Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.

⁴⁵³ Anna Lowerhaupt Tsing cited in Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 136.



Figure 66. [Still from "Amanda Joy" Video.](#)

It's a very subtle and gentle shift, akin to the opening that Robin Kimmerer offers us in “Braiding Sweetgrass”,⁴⁵⁴ when we experientially incorporate the logic of reciprocity. She, for example, invites us to consider the strawberry through a culture of gifting⁴⁵⁵ which in turn animates our relationship with the plant world with a deep sense of gratitude. In this way Kimmerer weaves a view of the human and the more-than-human which holds abundance even in the presence of monetary exchange and wealth. This is a subtle but significant shift from the one of scarcity and lack. The possibility of experiencing abundance even when we have nothing.

⁴⁵⁴ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

⁴⁵⁵ Kimmerer, 22–32.

I am feeling so much joy, knowing what you are capable of and what the environment is demanding from you, the clash there and the importance of getting to work with people whether that is in artistic or non-artistic spaces. It is just not the time in the world to be alone.

The heavy dark cloud that is also joyous, a smiling dark cloud.

I actually felt so much joy also from coming here and listening to everybody because I'm actually really used to being alone. I'm so used to it. Then come the whole pandemic, and I mean, I landed in London in the middle of pandemic from India, from being locked down for many, many months so it was quite intense and weird. I absolutely understand what they were saying about this whole surreal space of knowing what you yourself are capable of but then also sort of knowing what your environment is demanding from you and when those things are kind of in a clash is where I feel we sort of find new versions of ourselves. I mean it kind of shifts the way we believe ourselves to be and the ways that we might be stuck in thinking we actually like. This is what I have to do. I have always been like this, so I think it's yeah. It's not directly related to the exercise or the week, but I do understand the importance of working with people, whether in artistic spaces or non-artistic spaces. I think that line is very blurred for me. And yeah, I completely agree with Heidi saying that it's just not the time in the world to be alone. I mean, not just for our own selves, I feel if not for me, it probably is something I feel for others very, very deeply.

The notion of not feeling alone is such a strong,

It's just a really strong.

Heavy Cloud, which is also joyous, strangely.

It's like a smiling dark cloud.

It's, yeah.

- Priya

Mine is a

Glass jar of sand.

that I got in Senegal.

And it was initially layered in all different colours.

But yes, now it looks like this.

And yes, and it was a really magical time.

I went to a dance workshop retreat called Ecole des Sables

Uhm It's such a magical place. It's in a tiny village and they've got two huge dance studios that are open air and one of them is in the sand and you live on campus, should I say and yeah, we were just dancing. And every day it was a huge mix of, in the morning we would have traditional African styles and, in the afternoons, and evenings we'd have things like house and Afro beats and yeah, I had moments on that trip which, like, really awakened my spirituality, like things that I couldn't explain, and I got back and was like - *what happened?* I was just singing on the inside, I was so full of joy and so full of light and so filled up and yeah, I think I'd quite like to connect to this little piece of sand more often and to remember how magical that was and how we can hold on to it.

Every morning we'd start and do a little intro and we pick up some energy and pass it around the circle. When I got back to the UK, I'd be sitting on the train or something and wanting to turn to someone and be like. (blows breath into cupped hands and gestures outward movement) *laughter at how absurd this would be to do in London***

It was really magical. I had pure moments of ecstasy, we had live drummers and live musicians that whole time and yeah.

- Nevena

I like being playful with drawing.

I think playful is the word that comes to me.

Uh, resistance was the word I started with.

Because that's how I feel when I think about.

With this work I feel playful I think because of the conversations that we have.

There is also something playful about being on opposite sides of the world and opposite sides of the day, and opposite sides of the season.

Feels like something crafty going on here.

Uhm but I also like the sound of people's voices.

Uhm, I like what everyone says, but I also like the musicality of everyone's different voices, and I think because I started off this journey in such a dark place in myself and physically.

With some pretty heavy stuff.

I'm just going to feel into the lightness of them.

That's what I'm experiencing this week, playfulness.

- Heidi

5.8 Socio-political Entanglements.

5.8.1 Material Environments: Housing.

The “koala bear”⁴⁵⁶ as a practice of freedom.

In this section on the material entanglement of housing I include a group debrief conversation. The vignettes below highlight the issue of insecure and, therefore, precarious housing situations and the shared experience of this despite our varied socioeconomic and geographical situations. A crisis that is both particular to London but also extends beyond it, and hence, a structural issue of our time, which, as we will see, can be maddening. It was certainly my impression from working with clients in crisis recovery services that homeless and insecure housing has a significant impact on the mental health of clients I worked with. This was also an ongoing issue for me, as I navigated the realities of living in a building site, on low income, while I was also incidentally experiencing chronic health issues for the first time in my life.

My thanks to Amanda and the synchronicity of the first guided score of the themed movement journey, which focused on agitating body memories through contact improvising with a wall, and her generous embodied storytelling, likening the wall to the oppressive feeling of the walls closing in on her, as she experienced being evicted from her own home. Amanda's openness about her experience at different points in our conversation offered a depth in vulnerability and a richness to our authenticity in that we took off our masks, so to speak, with one another. It is also thanks to her initiating an ongoing conversation about our experience that revealed it as one that is shared; and, because of this element, we were able to politicise the housing issue and shed light on its being a structural and social injustice issue.

⁴⁵⁶ A metaphor Priya uses in their response during a debrief conversation as shown in the vignettes below.



Figure 67. Amanda "Body Memories" Photo.

Thanks so much, I have just done the practice and it's been great! It has also reflected my week. Since I was going through some very triggering stuff, feeling in a corner with walls everywhere. I am going through an eviction and everything that comes up with the problems of not finding affordable housing in London. A problem which has come up a lot for me over the last 10 years, and therefore very relating to trauma and body memory! The eviction process is also why I thought it might be good to do the practices now in February since I still have my space and I will most likely stay with friends in March.

- Amanda

The themes have been so synchronistic. The emotions I am going through the things I am experiencing. I felt so numb. That is really the word. I was in my body but in such a clumsy way. I was constantly banging into something. Like feeling oh my god, what is wrong. Why am I suddenly not feeling the world around me? That practice of the wall while I was constantly having such a weird experience of constantly feeling that resistance of banging into things all the time and this week with the theme of the water. With everything that is going on in the world. I just feel so sad. The emotions and the water. All the forms water can have. It can be so bubbly and fresh and so nice, and it can be so heavy.

“Why am I putting so much importance on feeling flow when I move? Maybe I am just not flowing, maybe I am just a clumsy mover right now. why is that not okay? I think it is okay” (smiling)

- Amanda

Like the koala bear that sometimes drugged, stumbles down the tree, there is so much gymnastic right there. To surrender to gravity like that. Obviously, uhm, talking about clumsy Amanda. Uhm, I feel it every time the word clumsy comes to me. I think about the koala bear, which is on the tree, and then quite drugged, sometimes a bit snoozy, and it keeps falling off the branch.

It's trying to sleep you know. Somehow that is the way it is. There's just so much gymnastic right there. The whole idea of being able to just release your body into gravity, without caring about anything, that just makes me feel great about the word clumsy.

Just a thought, I'm grateful for the koala bear.

- Priiya

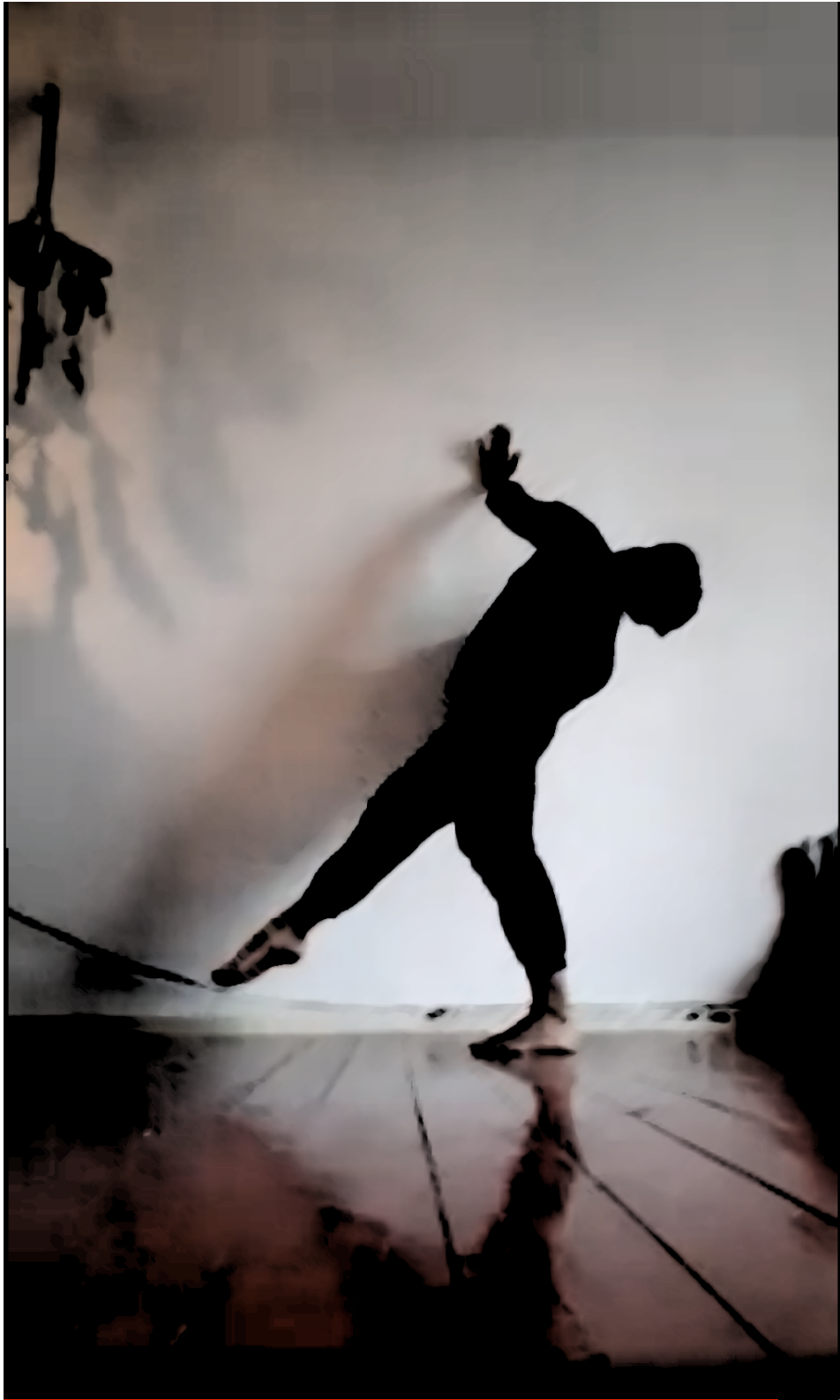


Figure 68. [Still from "Priya Body Memories", Video.](#)

In Priiya's response to Amanda's comments and allegory of the koala bear in the above vignette, we also see the entanglement of non-human animals as companion species, which as we see here offers another uplifting and joyous dimension to our embodied and collective storytelling practice. There is "gymnastics" in the koala bear's stumbling, Priiya playfully enlightens us. This, again, also speaks to the expectations we have about how our bodies move and the frustrations with our bodies when they move in unexpected ways. Priiya's insight here shows us once again the richness in the more-than-human movement teachings and the playfulness that might arise from surrendering to what is.

Uh, I'm not so connected to the happenings of your life, but I can relate to it because that's how I left London. Suddenly the person I was living with, who was a live in landlord and a friend, for me at least, they were somebody who I knew from before and who had offered me a place to stay. I wasn't paying so much rent so I had lots of months where I could cope with being in such an expensive city while studying. And then just 3 months before I had to submit my master's thesis, he came to my room one day said "oh, I'm due to submit my PhD thesis at the end of this year and it would be great if I can use your room as a working space. So, like, please move out." And I was like uhm, "what?" And it was just crazy, like it completely shook me because it was quite unbelievable. I almost thought that I had done something for him to be treating me like that. Taking a roof off somebody's head because you need a working space was just not logical to me. I was like, no, nobody can do that. I must have done something wrong, or I must have behaved in a strange way, or maybe I'm not a great person to live with. That person is just not being honest about it because it's too harsh. How can they do that? It's just like. This is crazy, it was so crazy. Then I swear for two days I was like, ok, if I do this many jobs, if I earn this much money, I'll still like pay all my money on rent. I wouldn't have any savings, but I will make ends meet. Second day, I was in complete overwhelm about what I was going do. And third, day I was like, no, I can't do this. I just can't do this. I just got to leave.

- Priiya

Yes, it's not the same for me, but I can feel. That sense of disbelief, like such a sense of disbelief in connection with the human. But you're like, what happened there, like what happened?

- Heidi

Yeah, I always say that if I were to move out of London, housing would be the reason why. It is the instability that it brings, and it touches something deep as you were saying. Something to the core or there's something about not being able to properly plant my roots and whenever I do it, I know that at any moment I can be uprooted again. This uncertainty does something to you. Sometimes I try to reframe it, I try to say, oh, you know, this is going to be the way that we're going to have to live within the next ten years. So maybe this is teaching me how to be nomadic. Whether we like it or not, even if we have money, sometime in the future we may have to become nomadic because some of our houses will start going under water and many of us will become climate refugees. Hopefully in in eight years' time, I'll be like, oh, right, yeah, all those years of struggle were teaching me these skills because now I'm really adapted at doing this. But for now, what it does is like not having roots. I mean I need roots somehow or maybe that's just the mind, I don't know.

- fab

A lot was coming up for me, about finding home and roots within. Like building a foundation from within, I really believe that and I believe everything you just said, Fabienne, about becoming nomadic, kind of adapting to everything, being in motion. I believe in this life philosophy of everything being in motion. And I live by it, I think, but it has also to do with being allowed to express the receiving end of myself. I'm also somebody who needs to be nurtured and cared for, you know. And so, I think even if we are moving, this needs to happen, like this always needs to be there like we're not going to be all warriors, kind of like roaming around never being in a place. This is not what it means really. There must be an economy of care somehow. And if that's not happening through housing or through other things, then it must happen through networks.

- Amanda

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. There is something that happens to me in my experience, when I hear your story, I find strength through empathising and knowing that this experience is shared. That to me is a form of care coming together, showing up, seeing familiar faces, simply this kind of meeting and sharing and being with.

- fab

Through the conversation above it is clear that these personal experiences of distress due to precarious housing situations in London are indeed shared experiences. The shared dimension of distress points to wider systemic and socio-political issues relating to housing in the UK. As I started analysing the debrief conversations with the artists, I myself experienced a distressing housing experience which led me to move quickly from a house I lived in for almost three years in North London. The way in which I had to leave my home led me to write to my local MP to raise concerns about the criminal landlord I had been living with in an HMO regulated and licensed

property by Haringey council. Through my correspondence with the MP, I learnt about the lack of legislation the environmental health officers had jurisdiction under to safeguard tenant rights living in insecure housing situations. I also learnt about a Renters Reform Bill,⁴⁵⁷ which is currently being voted on in parliament at the time of this writing in May and June 2023. The shared impact of the housing crisis in London on our lives indicates that it is political and legislative change that is needed to protect tenants' rights and to stop the abuse of power by criminal landlords resulting from inadequate legislation.

In this way, the critical, ecological and Foucauldian methodological lenses incorporated to frame the embodied storytelling methods the project espoused served to respond to the critique the project raises in relation to reductivist, and therefore individualising, approaches when considering distress. Building on mad activist and ecopsychological scholarship, the project suggested that when experiences of distress are shared, a common theme features (in this case, housing) in people experiencing crisis. It may be deduced that at least a partial element of the distress is not personal, but social and political. Thus, the material generated through the practice in relation to housing serves to question the dominant use of reductivist paradigms when people experiencing distress are also going through a housing crisis. If the cause of distress is at least partially systemic, then health approaches ought to encompass or at least acknowledge the systemic issues (upheld by institutions) and the legislation (or the lack of it in this case) and, therefore, the ecological factors at play in approaches to health. We should not personalise distressing experiences and treat them as the sole responsibility of the individual.

⁴⁵⁷ 'The Renters Reform Bill', Shelter England, accessed 30 June 2023, https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/renters_reform_bill.

5.8.2 The Personal in Political Entanglements: Hong Kong.

I think it's interesting because I work with a lot of imagery, like in my own stuff and in my teaching so it's really interesting to see these things popping up whilst I'm moving and listening to your voice in them or the snaking. I think it was the third week with the snake, I didn't write anything down at the end but then it was very much like eyes, eyes, eyes are very much forwards rather than backwards. We talked a lot about the scales and the spine but then my brain just went to the place where I just follow the eyes. Snakes don't have the sense of backward eyes or antennas, they don't really have limbs to go like oh, I'll reach backspace, it is all very frontal yes so, I think that's why I ended up not writing anything, but it's really interesting to see how these different forms are popping up when I hear what you're saying.

- Tammy

I started this chapter with the theme of absence and how it was almost another protagonist in the project, an entity that we had to contend with every step of the way. Often, absence showed up in our togetherness space because of the constant demands of neoliberalism and the time pressures in daily life. However, in some cases, especially one case in particular, it was due to the political situation in Hong Kong that we came to experience Tammy more through their absence rather than their presence in the project.

I do apologise for my absence and the trouble that it caused.

It was a less busy time when I first agreed to your research and honestly it is too optimistic of me to say yes to this many things. I would love to say that I can devote some time to this, but lookin ahead at my calendar it would be unrealistic of me to say so. Just for some context, I am currently helping out with my parent's relocation to the UK (not sure if I've mentioned it but it's due to the political situation in HK), which I find myself in a time of uncertainty and disorientation. Though I enjoyed the tasks and this research, it would be unfair to you and your research to keep me on as I am struggling to organise my time. Please feel free to use the little materials that I have submitted if it's useful. I hope you understand and thank you for being so patient with my absence, all the best with your research.

Best wishes,
Tammy

It was important for me as facilitator to receive this response and to realise that I had assumed wrongly. The political situation in Hong Kong was having a very real impact on Tammy and their family's life. I pondered letting Tammy go and then I was reminded of my second supervisor's advice, to consider everything that happens within the project as research. In the same way that I could have let Heidi go from the project when she didn't want to move but made the research

decision to consider no movement and resistance to movement as part of movement research, I felt inspired to welcome Tammy's absence wholeheartedly and to allow it, their absence, to be part of the project. Inviting in what is, moving with and being with the way things are rather than the way I want them to be, had been a guiding principle throughout the project. In many ways, I continually had the experience of death and dying as researcher, facilitator and artist. Every step of the way, I had to choose between shaping it into what I wanted it to be or to make a practice of dying so the experience and the research could be what it is. Tammy could not engage with or contribute to the project in the way I invited them to for very real and very valid reasons. "Blank pages are welcome too" I ended each of the guided scores. How much did I mean this, really? I expressed to Tammy an invitation to include them and their experience as absence, allowing them to be disengaged, allowing what emerged to be what it is. As it is telling when we are absent. To let the silence and the absence and the not doing, for all the loss and the lack to be part of the research.

Soon after Tammy sent us the below:

Hi Fabienne,

It's been a while, hope all is well with you and your research!

I did a little bit of reflective writing, some disorganised thoughts over the last month. Here are some of it if you wish to read it :)

To parent my parents. I remember talking about it with a friend. That we are in the uncomfortable transition of switching roles with our parents. We gradually become the care takers whilst clawing onto our independence that we fought hard for.

Now here I am, bracing myself to meet them again, as an independent adult. There is the fear that they remind me of my dependency on them as my source of primary needs. Standing on my own two feet, but I can feel their incoming need to find ground, orient themselves, by grasping onto me like a lifebuoy. Maybe I have been in fight or flight for too long, and for that I feel like I am barely floating myself, let alone letting someone to rely on me, to be dependent on me. I had this fear before I got Ginny, worried that I will not be enough for her, that I will be a burden to her as she might be to me. We turned out fine. In fact we turned out happy and together. This parent-child reunion is not going to be as easy of course, it will be a tug of war. I am here to provide ground for them to push off as much as they are for me

June 10, 2022 I feel resentment. I don't think that I resent my parents, the government, anyone or anything, but a suppressed sense of anger, resentment or whatever it is that awaits to explode. Or maybe it is guilt. Survivor's guilt. Resentment towards myself. How dare I be happy. How dare I take such good care of myself when others are suffering. I remind myself that it is not my responsibility, to perhaps justify the guilt that I carry. If I were in their shoes, I would like a helping hand. But it is not about that. Why do I feel guilty, like I am stepping on someone's head by celebrating the freedom that the brave fought for us. Because it is. This freedom to dance, to be queer, to believe in something, has the historic burden of many suffering and deaths.

June 21, 2022 17 days until my parents' arrival. I feel like I am hovering, anticipating a somewhat hard landing. I have been putting off thinking about it, occupying myself with work, work and more work. I haven't quite processed the fact that they are moving here, permanently. In fact I cannot. I am struggling to imagine spending time with them in person. The last time I saw them in the flesh was 39 months ago, and last I lived with them was when puberty just hit. This might be the most difficult thing I have ever had to go through to date, more difficult than leaving home, moving countries, leaving education or going through a heartbreak. Destruction is painful, but nevertheless easy. This is repair. Not only is it painful, to mend also takes patience and commitment. I wish to be soft. I wish to be responsive. I wish to be adaptive. I wish to be accepting. I wish to forgive. To those who have wronged me, but more importantly, myself. I wish to be compassionate.

With all that being said and reflected, I feel weirdly in and with my body/myself. Though all this is hovering over my mind like a heavy rain cloud, I feel still. Not frozen, but still. Like the foal that they hold down upon birth, I am feeling the full effects of in my body from the urge to take flight, to run. But at the same time, the sense of false danger. Everything is okay, it's just nerves. It is uncomfortable and it might take some time for the body to ease and eyes to see clearly. It is just nerves. I am constantly reminding myself that change is difficult, caring is tough, but I have the agency to not be paralyzed by them.

All the best with everything.

Warmest regards,
Tammy

With your permission, may I hold on to your e-mail and story here, share it with the group and see if we could include it as text together with everyone else's?

I chose to end this chapter with Tammy's story here because it arose in the gaps from what was missing. It is a silent but potent story that we almost missed out on, partly because of pressures and partly because it wasn't showing the way we expected it to, but it was there all along. We just needed to ask the right questions to invite it in. In Tammy's story, we see the entanglement of a

political situation that has both a global and personal impact. We see the interplay between the macro and micropolitical. Tammy's personal affect and history surfaced as they navigated the political implications for their parents and the subsequent relocation. We also see an artist with a professional dance education background and a pilates teacher who not only does not want to capture their movements with the gaze of the camera, but also does not feel inspired to dance as a way to move through their experience of political and personal distress. Who spontaneously feels called to the pen, arguably another form of movement and quiet reflection and potentially performative of the practice research entanglements. This is the magic of what happens when we have the courage to meet people where they are rather than where we want them to be.

5.9 Conclusion.

This chapter has considered the sociopolitical and ecological entanglements in an embodied storytelling and movement practice. I have looked at six different themes that arose through a nine-week guided movement journey with seven artists. Each theme considers both the personal and shared elements as we navigated our embodied experiences. I hope that the above analysis models how we may look for the entanglements rather than presuppose another overarching formula. I will now turn to outline the research findings of this project and the conclusions drawn from the outcomes of the practice research. I will also consider some limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research in the next chapter.

6. Chapter Six: Conclusions and Considerations for Further Research.

6.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, I streamline my practice research findings as both a novel praxis (practice research methodology) and a source of original theoretical insights. The praxis may serve as a potential model for artists, practitioners, and embodied researchers in community arts, eco-somatics, mental health and transformative justice movements. The practice research methodology fused posthumanist, new materialist, ecofeminist, autoethnographic, embodied and mad studies frameworks with somatic methods to provide a novel eco-somatic praxis developed through this doctoral research. The practice research centres process-oriented and embodied strategies for devising autonomous, non-hierarchical, ecosophical embodied knowledge. An overarching intention for the research focuses on relationality with others and the more-than-human as a way to de-centre (whilst still accounting for) the individual, generating ecologically entangled and collective knowledge with applications for the mental health, health, community arts, movement, and transformative justice fields. Finally, I endeavour to expose the limitations of this project and considerations for further research.

6.1.1 The Aims of the Praxis.

I developed the PhD from my position as a mental health practitioner in a crisis recovery service in London, where I started to question the personalising methods I had been trained to think with during my training as a psychologist and how embodied practices can tell alternative stories about the conditions that exacerbate experiences of distress. Through this practice research, I sought to problematise dominant methods in mental health and the hierarchies between the expert knowledge of the psy professionals and subjective embodied knowledge. This led me to use autoethnography in my research and to investigate my own embodied experience, together with that of a group of artists, to trouble hegemonic forms of power.

6.1.2 The Themed Movement Journey.

The methodological shift evolved the somatic practice into an eco-somatic orientation, actively researching our relation to environments in crises. This orientation facilitated a themed somatic journey tailored to the contextual conditions we were moving with. Collective embodied storytelling provided insights into ecological and systemic conditions causing distress, countering dominant mental health narratives that traditionally depoliticise distressing experiences. Through this practice

research PhD, I sought to mobilise this eco-somatic movement practice that unfolded to investigate the ecological and political entanglements in embodied experience during a time of crisis.

6.1.3 What I did and why.

I developed a themed guided somatic movement journey consisting of 6 task-based somatic movement improvisation scores (listen to audio recordings of the scores in section 4.3.7) using guided imagery developed from meditations on the elements, non-human animals and other objects. I recruited a group of artists to engage with the themed movement journey, and weekly group debrief conversations. The aims of this group work component for the practice research were twofold: to research the interconnectedness between inner, political and ecological landscapes and the shared elements of embodied experiences between a group of artists and to research the effect of the conditions we were collectively situated in. I will now turn to outline the contributions to knowledge of this project.

6.2 The Political Potential of the Body to Disrupt Hegemonic Forms of Power.

I first needed to orientate the practice to generate material that responded to the research question: How can moving bodies tell alternative stories about the material and situated entanglements of distress? I started by problematising hegemonic narratives that depoliticise experiences of distress as “mental illness” and medicalised approaches to mental health that consider the experience of crisis as the sole responsibility of the individual. I based the starting point of my research on the activist scholarship of mad studies. I developed a theoretical framework for my praxis that brought together posthumanist, ecofeminist, materialist, autoethnographic and embodied methodologies together with somatic methods to create a research praxis that considered materiality of both the personal and the environmental when considering distressing experiences through the felt sense.

I researched this by sending the collaborating artists weekly scores as guided audios that offered prompts and invitations for a movement practice that centred the situated and material environments in generating an embodied storytelling practice. The solo contributions from the artists were nuanced as detailed in the Analysis Chapter, which evidenced the interconnectedness between the inner realm, personal biological dispositions, histories and current occurrences set within particular environments and sets of conditions. Examples include my personal experience of long-term physical illness, sepsis and women’s health issues during the global health Covid-19 pandemic and the application of Stacy Alaimo’s material memoirs method to my eco-somatic movement practice toward healing in section 5.5.2, Heidi’s chronic health illness, fatigue and

asthma in New Zealand as discussed in section 5.7.1 and Amanda's experience of navigating eviction, the housing crisis in London, her identity and migration issues after engaging with the "Body Memories" score in week 1 as analysed in section 5.8.1.

6.3 Contribution to Mad Studies Scholarship.

As outlined in the Literature Review and the Methodology Chapter, I chose to work with artists who had previous experience of embodied practices and movement. Although only some of the collaborating artists held a formal dance education background, all of the artists had previous experience encountering somatic movement. The reason for this was partly due to limited resources and recruiting the artists based on a logic of reciprocity. Since I did not offer monetary remuneration, we were left with a limited time of up to a total of nine weeks working together.

Furthermore, the rationale behind recruiting artists with previous experience of movement, instead of direct experience of psychiatric oppression, was informed by the problematisation of identity politics as outlined in the literature review in section 2.2.1 by Cresswell and Spender in mad studies scholarship focusing on the experiences of those that identify as "Mad". The issue with identity politics in mad studies is that it further reinforces the dichotomy between those who identify as mad and those who don't, and the notion that mental health is only relevant to those who do. My practice research focused instead on mental health as a shared experience that is generated by environmental, social and political issues, as well as personal dispositions. The shared autoethnographic storytelling excavated from the weekly group debriefs featuring various ecological crises like the impact of the pandemic, neoliberalism, war, the cost of living, energy, and housing crises indicates that there were shared experiences of distress by the artists and myself through our collective reflective practice and meaning-making. Sections 5.3, 5.4, 5.6 and 5.8, for example, show that people carrying the labels of mental ill health are not the only ones with distressing experiences. The experience of distress, whilst exacerbated by differences in gender, sex, class, and race is one that is shared.

6.4 Embodied Practice as a Decolonial Tool Outcomes.

In order to research the potential of embodied practice as a decolonial tool to undermine hierarchies of being (an orientation that was framed by my second research question: Can embodied research practices perform entangled storytelling to resist or undermine hierarchies of being?) I immersed myself in the project. Through this act of immersing myself, I sought to disrupt the role of the expert between myself and the participants, the power relations and the hierarchies between objective and subjective knowledge.

6.4.1 Contribution to Non-Hierarchical Practice.

I applied an autoethnographic methodology to my embodied practice to pull in my own autobiographical material and to engage together with the artists, thus rejecting an objective and detached position aspiring to make universalising claims. I did this by applying Donna Haraway's Situated Knowledges theory accepting "partiality of vision", as discussed in section 3.3. I included my own embodied storytelling together with that of the artists, for example, in telling my experience of grief after setting up embodied practice groups at Islington Crisis House in section 1.1.4, navigating precarious housing in London 5.8.1 and alternating between facilitator and participant during the group debriefs. In strategically using the autoethnographic methodology in this way, I resisted the expert position and produced knowledge that was partial and situated to the contexts in which I was embedded. I also showed how we can trouble the dominance of psy professionals and the hierarchy between objective and subjective knowledges when encountering distressing experiences in practice.

In using embodied practice and somatic methods to focus on the felt sense, I also aimed to problematise the dominance of verbalisation in Western therapies over embodied knowledge. I did this by validating the felt sense as an outcome in itself that did not need to be verbalised unless the artists wanted to verbalise it. The artists were invited to record themselves moving from impulses and sensations as they emerged and for this to be a form of documenting the practice in its own right in each of the closing guided exercises of each of the scores (written versions are included in the Appendix section A) as shown in 5.6.3 and 5.6.4.

6.4.2 Being in Relationship with the More-than-human: Becoming.

I applied a decolonial orientation to the eco-somatic practice to produce embodied knowledge that counters hegemonic narratives in global mental health that threaten to delegitimise non-Western and indigenous knowledge systems. In practice, I did this by inviting in non-human animals as teachers through guided imagery of cats, serpents and spiders in scores weeks 1, 3 and 6, respectively. This conception surfaced in a conversation with Heidi and Amanda on serpents, as shown in the methods section 3.8.2 and in Heidi's journey with her dog Kahu in section 5.7.1.

I also approach the body as a decolonial tool by moving in outdoor spaces and inviting in the more-than-human as a partner in my movement practice as discussed in sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 where I include autoethnographic material researching cultivating indigeneity through deep listening and the felt sense by swimming in the Ladies Pond, Moving in Queens Wood and Forest Bathing in Highgate Wood. These sites and the partner work I carried out with the more-than-human here

served as a laboratory for the evolution of my practice. The movement philosophy that emerged from my eco-somatic research on the body as a decolonial tool and fostering relationality with particular more-than-human sites as a way of cultivating indigeneity offers a practice that undermines dominant discourses in global mental health and an understanding of indigeneity that focuses on nomadic theory and the 'here and now'. Here, I seek to centre survivors and those who have migrated to flee violence, advocating for the right to forget and start anew, as well as honouring lineage in decolonial discourses on embodiment.

6.4.3 Practice Research and Legitimacy of Knowledges: Decolonising the Academy.

Finally, I extend the concept of decolonisation and remembering where we come from to my thinking and citation practice. I acknowledge where my concepts, ideas and inspiration came from by including oral conversations as well as published material in my citation practice. I intend my thesis to perform the objectives of my research in the academic writing itself.

Furthermore, I have come to conceive my citation practice as one of gratitude and giving thanks. One of the ways I intend my thesis to contribute to discourses on decolonising the academy is to undermine legitimacy of knowledges by citing the people and places that informed my thinking and played a vital part in my creative and healing process. Traditionally, in academic work, we only cite published work, leaving many who would have directly contributed to the body of work invisible. Whilst not central to the argument of my thesis, I evidence my commitment to citing the relationships with human and more-than-human others that played a role in the unfolding of my practice research by referencing them in footnotes. In this way, I intended the citation practice to perform the interdependent conception of self I mobilise in this thesis, as well as making ecologies of thinking and feeling visible.

It is with this same intention – to allow the writing to be performative of decolonising discourses in the academy - that I included the multimodal media together with the text of this thesis to evidence both the organic processes and the methodology of letting it emerge underlying the creation of the thesis. Throughout the thesis, the visual content hovers above, around and underneath the written word by focusing the thematic analysis on the verbal content. My intention for positioning the visual narrative alongside the text is to resist the dominance of language in meaning-making, to allow the visual and the non-verbal to tell their own story and to consider them as practice research outcomes in their own right.

I include excerpts from the verbal conversations as images in the main text instead of including them in the appendix and consider the visual story told through the unfolding of the multimodal

media as a valid form of knowledge in its own right. In writing this thesis, I intend to enact this concept of undermining hierarchies of being and troubling the dominance of the written word as the standard for legitimate knowledge, even for practice PhDs in the academy. This may serve as a contribution to the fields of embodied and practice research, as well as speaking to discourses on decolonising the academy.

6.5 Collective Meaning-making and Group Work Outcomes.

In conceiving the group work as a collective practice, I applied non-hierarchical principles to the facilitation process to let the meaning-making emerge through the group conversations where possible. In order to research this, I recruited a group of artists to engage in a six-week themed movement journey and a nine-week reflective practice, generating personal and shared autoethnographic material through solo and group movements and conversations.

I transcribed the verbal debrief to highlight the aspects that the group shared to evidence how some experiences of distress are caused by systemic issues and the conditions that we are collectively living in. The knowledge that emerged on the impact of precarious housing as a social justice issue that intersects with environments and their impact on bodyminds in London due to the lack of legislation protecting tenant rights,⁴⁵⁸ the hindrances as well as the affordances resulting from using digital environments, the impact of this on the group work⁴⁵⁹, and that even in difficult times, through movement, we can access joy and playfulness⁴⁶⁰ -- all of these evidence the findings that some distressing experiences are shared and therefore not the sole responsibility of the individual, requiring social change.

The above group practice outcomes suggest that the praxis methodology developed through this project may be of service to the Climate and Multispecies Justice and the Climate Psychology Alliances, Institutional Psychotherapists, Psychologists for Social Change, Mental Health Resistance, Feminist and Community Psychology. The group reflective practice focusing more specifically on the movement practice, particularly on how resistance toward movement, documentation and the potential of the camera as a feedback tool⁴⁶¹ may also contribute to the field of Somatic Movement practice research.

⁴⁵⁸ At the time of this writing the Renter's Reform Bill has still not been legislated. See section 5.8.1.

⁴⁵⁹ See section 5.4.4.

⁴⁶⁰ See section 5.7.2.

⁴⁶¹ See sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

Through the design of the group work, I sought to respond to the research question: How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress, given the ecology of our time? The result was that we did come together and share moments of connection. However, this was not always possible for a project that was based on a logic of reciprocity and offered no remuneration -in a neoliberal context - where the artists had to negotiate between engaging with the project and other commitments. This led me to work with absence and missed connections as well as the intimacies forged.⁴⁶²

The reorientation of the practice toward absence as a form of communication in itself led Tammy to re-engage with the project, later offering their contribution in written form that added a nuanced perspective on the notion of mental health as political. Tammy focused on their personal relationship with their parents as they supported them in migrating from Hong Kong to the UK⁴⁶³ instead of the systemic issues at play there. They could have written about the political aspects of the situation in Hong Kong and politicised their experience, but the personal entanglements seemed to be more pertinent to their story, as they resurfaced from silence and made a reappearance after a long period of absence. Further, despite holding a formal dance education background and teaching Pilates, they did not want to move with their experience but chose to write about it instead as a way of processing it. This added an alternative perspective to the project, one that troubled my own expectations as a facilitator and researcher, and one that I found interesting. This outcome resulting from working with silence and absence may offer a contribution to community artists practicing in health and therapeutic practitioners.

6.6 A Practice that can be Shared.

I aimed to devise a practice that responds to my own material situatedness and developed a praxis that can be shared. In the methods chapter, I offer a step-by-step guide for others to generate their own autonomous scores and materials that respond to the conditions they are working in with the resources that are available to them.⁴⁶⁴

The 6 guided audios I co-created with the environments I was embedded in during this project may serve as original contributions to the fields of eco-somatic practice, community arts, mental health and wellness. The scores offer a guided somatic movement process that challenge standardised mental health approaches, resist neoliberalised recovery practices and offer a regenerative practice focusing on sustainable ways of living.

⁴⁶² See section 5.1.7.

⁴⁶³ See section 5.8.2.

⁴⁶⁴ See sections 4.2 and 4.3.

6.7 Time and Neoliberalism.

6.7.1 Radical Inclusion in the Dance World.

Although the guided audios are not scalable and universalisable, I intended them to act as a practice of freedom by resisting a focus on ameliorating outcomes through an engagement with the practice. Applying Donna Haraway's theory of "*Staying with the Trouble*"⁴⁶⁵ and "being with", I actively invited the artists and myself to meet ourselves and each other as we are in the present moment rather than trying to change how we are feeling to become more happy or more productive, as is traditionally expected from neoliberalised appropriations of Meditation⁴⁶⁶ in "*McMindfulness*".⁴⁶⁷ Instead, I continued to apply my philosophy of practice⁴⁶⁸ and how everything that arises in practice research *is* the research. I activated this thinking, for example, when I invited Heidi to continue participating in the research, meeting the resistance she was experiencing toward moving with curiosity and as an entry point. This led me to accept the absence of movement as it was manifesting - in the form of stillness – rather than as I wanted or expected it to be, eventually expanding my understanding of stillness as a form of movement itself. Heidi's personal experience of chronic illness and grief at the time informed my movement philosophy toward a radically inclusive orientation that decentres the able body. These facilitation prompts and practice research outcomes may contribute to discourses on democratising dance practices.

6.7.2 Self-care.

Another example of how I applied this thinking in practice is in the prompt "Blank pages are welcome too" in each of the closing exercises of the guided scores⁴⁶⁹. This affirmed the orientation of the somatic movement as a regenerative practice of self-care cultivating a practice of "being with" as shown in 5.5, 5.6.5 and 5.7.1. In embodying the practice in this way, I sought to contest the neoliberalisation of the wellness industry and the Recovery Model⁴⁷⁰ by applying the notion of sustainability toward the self as well as the focus on the outer in eco-conscious and climate justice movements. This way of practicing sustainability through self-care practices and a recognition that the healing of the earth and of self are not separate but one and the same may contribute to adrienne maree brown's critique of burn-out culture in activist communities. Something which I have witnessed myself through climate justice movement organising in the UK.

⁴⁶⁵ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

⁴⁶⁶ See section 3.4.

⁴⁶⁷ Purser, *McMindfulness*.

⁴⁶⁸ See section 4.2.

⁴⁶⁹ See Appendix section A.

⁴⁷⁰ See sections 2.2.2 & 2.5.

Finally, I would like to offer my autoethnographic and embodied research while enduring long-term physical illness by considering the body as porous, as discussed in section 5.4.1. Here I document the somatic practices I engaged with to heal and recover from sepsis by combining the material memoirs method with the medical treatment I was receiving from the NHS. I offer this embodied research as a contribution to sepsis survivors⁴⁷¹ and to advancements of feminist science on women's health issues and autoimmune diseases.

6.8 Conclusion.

This analysis considered how contemporary issues like neoliberalism, systemic injustices, energy, cost of living and climate crises may cause distress. The resulting praxis, when collectivised, offers counterhegemonic and ecologically entangled knowledge, thus depersonalising and politicising distress. These embodied strategies may generate situated autoethnographies, challenging hegemonic power and hierarchies. This orientation aligns with eco-feminist and new materialist ideologies, fostering a responsive practice in line with Haraway's concept of response-ability, connecting to ecological entanglements and adapting to diverse project needs—from healing to activism, art, and digital environments. The methodology's potential applications span mental health, mad studies, artists, somatic movement practitioners, and social and climate justice movements, offering a versatile approach across diverse fields seeking to generate ecologically entangled embodied knowledge.

6.9 Limitations of this Study and Considerations for Future Research.

As I approach the end of this thesis, I am confronted with grief for the life I could have had if I had not chosen to do this autoethnographic and embodied research spanning the past 12 years of my life, and the death of everything else this project could have become, to draw the parameters around what it is, to bring it to completion. Through this grieving process, I was confronted with the realisation that despite my intention to implement an autoethnographic methodology to my research and to immerse myself in the same maddening conditions generating experiences of distress, ultimately, I always had a choice to opt out, to stop. As a result of my cultural capital and privilege as a white able-bodied European woman, I always had access to alternatives that I could resort to as I navigated my way through the harsh realities imposed by neoliberalism. I recognise that this research was possible because of the inequities that I benefit from. I hope that this work may still serve as the act of solidarity I intend it, despite its flaws and limitations.

⁴⁷¹ 'Sepsis Survivors', *Sepsis Alliance*.

Furthermore, as I sifted through all the visual content, I felt loss, as I let go of the original idea to create a film as one of the outcomes, partly because of my unwavering conviction to maintain a horizontal approach to the group work and partly because I have run out of time. With this ending, I hold and let go of all the non-verbal utterances, the visual material and the ideas I have not had the capacity to tend to and, as a result, have fallen away. I close this project with an acceptance of all that remains in my unconscious awareness, the moments in-between I have not named, the unseen, the forgotten and the uncared for and over time, have become undone.

Over the years of doing this research, I have also been attempting to make a living from my practice, which I recognise is not scalable and will unlikely sustain me because of the activist decisions I have made. Novelty comes at a cost, as what is unfamiliar does not fit and can never belong, so with this ending my search continues.

“A searcher here, a searcher there, a searcher everywhere”, a colleague once told me which links to the observation “You are a natural traveller”, a therapist offered me. This brings me to the tangential practice of clowning, which I have been exploring (on and off) for the past few years as one of the considerations I offer for further research. Clowning⁴⁷² has led me to ask new questions about madness and clowning in relation to the fool archetype and the felt sense, nomadic practice, joy as a form of activism and humour in experiences of distress. I am also interested in the research possibilities that lie between the fields of eco-somatics and psychedelics.

The practice research lives on in various creative forms.⁴⁷³ In her book “*Emergent strategy: shaping change, changing worlds*”⁴⁷⁴ adrienne maree brown argues that small actions can catalyse, that within complex systems sustaining small actions matter, especially those that mimic natural forms that already work so well, these can always catalyse and help facilitate system change. I recognise that knowing that the conditions generating distress are shared does not necessarily disrupt hegemonic forms of power. For systemic change to happen, we need other forms of political and community practices, which although beyond the scope of this project, the practice workshops are entangled with.

⁴⁷² My thanks to Dr. Hugh Sillitoe | Huge Sillytoe for the thought-provoking conversations about clowning, creative practice, performance and activism, indigeneity and more since the very beginning of this project. In the summer of 2022 they invited me to encounter and write about their residency on fooling in contemporary society with [AirSpace Gallery](#); The piece was published as part of Counterfield Publication II: <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/35219/1/Counterfield%20II.pdf>; ‘Goldsmithsvisualcultures | Counterfield | PracticeResearch | London’, counterfield, accessed 26 January 2024, <https://www.counterfield.com>.

⁴⁷³ ‘Embodied Practice | Fabienne Formosa | London, England’, Fabienne Formosa, accessed 30 May 2021, <https://www.fabienneformosa.com>.

⁴⁷⁴ adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017).

The workshops I offer as one of the outcomes of this research may be taken up by particular organisations within the fields of, for example, transformative justice, eco-activism and community arts in such a way that they might help sustain activism within these spaces, and in this way facilitate the disruption of hegemonic power. It is my contribution to this kind of collective political work that gives my practice the potential to disrupt hegemonic forms of power. In this sense, my practice serves as a consciousness raising project that allows people to traverse difficult terrain and looking for ways to live differently.

Beyond this project, I also hold an intention to further experiment with embodied actions and the form of storytelling through performance-making. I include a collaborative performance video piece titled “thesis burning fire ceremony” link in Figure 69 below to indicate my initial steps toward this. In this video, I engage the political climate at Goldsmiths College to consider my experience as a doctoral researcher at a time when the senior management team are effectively attempting to erase the department I have carried out the PhD with. The ceremony focused on burning the paper and the flesh of the thesis in protest and prayer. Through the performative act of burning the thesis and the physical storytelling, I sought to stand against the structural assault toward the arts and humanities and, therefore, epistemic injustice in the Higher Education Sector in the UK in 2024.⁴⁷⁵ I am curious to explore performance-making in community arts as a form of physical and visual storytelling in applied theatre and the public art sphere, and to research the potential of witnessing in performance to change public perception about invisible violence in different contexts.

⁴⁷⁵ Sally Weale and Sally Weale Education correspondent, “Cultural and Social Vandalism”: Job Cut Plans at Goldsmiths Attacked’, *The Guardian*, 27 March 2024, sec. Education.

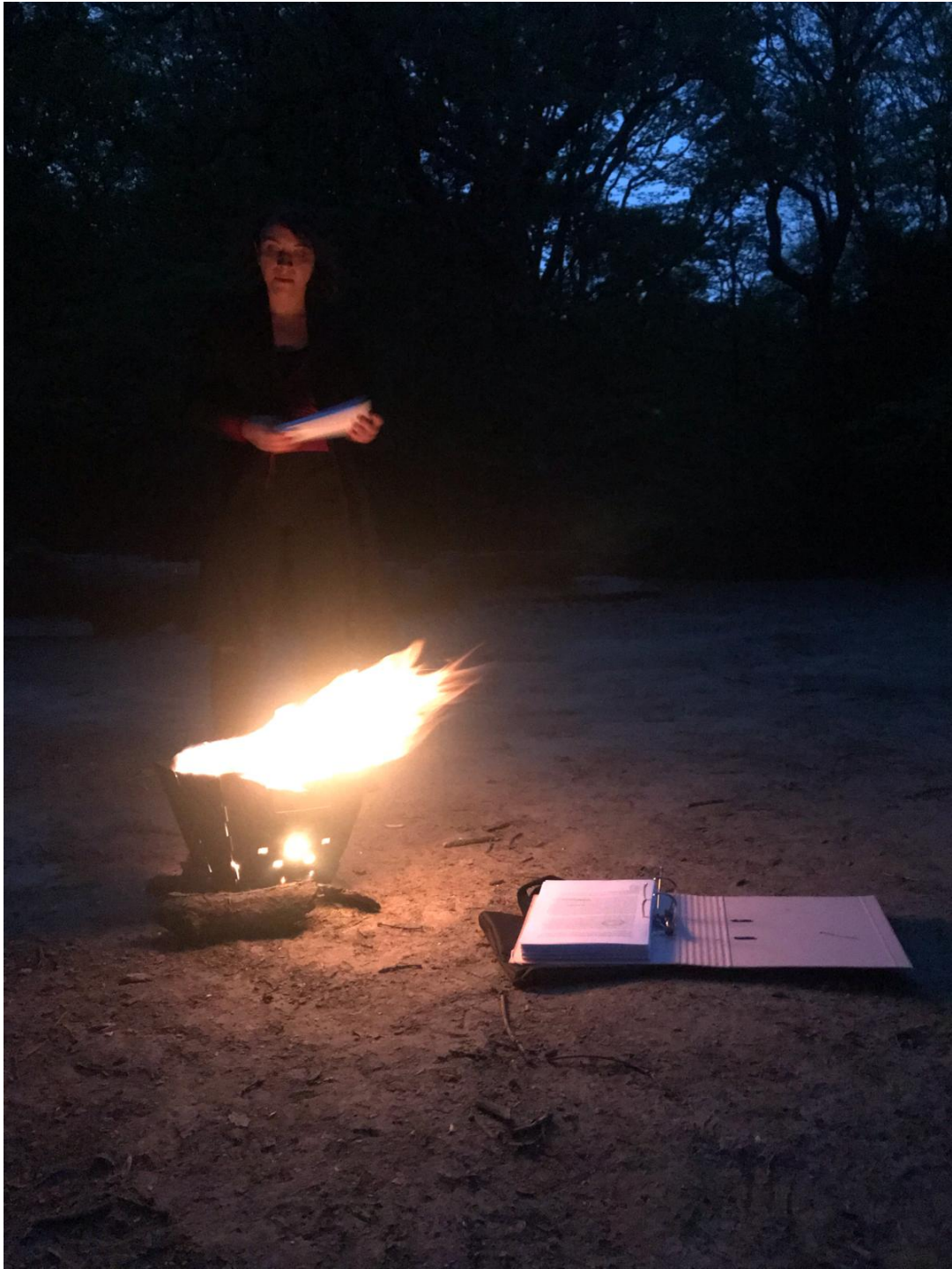


Figure 69. [“Thesis burning fire ceremony”, Queens Wood, UK, Video.](#)

Photo by Bells Davidson and video by Eleonora Cristin.

Bibliography

- 'Antonijalivingstone' & Trembling. Accessed 30 May 2021. <https://www.antonijalivingstone.com>.
- 'About – Adrienne Maree Brown'. Accessed 20 January 2024. <https://adriennemareebrown.net/about/>.
- Accelerator, Academic. 'Institutional Psychotherapy: Most Up-to-Date Encyclopedia, News & Reviews'. Academic Accelerator, n.d. <https://academic-accelerator.com/encyclopedia/institutional-psychotherapy>.
- Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington, Ind.: Chesham: Indiana University Press; Combined Academic distributor, 2010.
- Alecia Youngblood Jackson. *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data across Multiple Perspectives / Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A Mazzei*. [1st ed.]. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2012.
- Allegianti, B. *Embodied Performances: Sexuality, Gender, Bodies*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011.
- American Psychiatric Association and American Psychiatric Association. Task Force on DSM-IV. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR*. 4th ed., text Revision. Arlington, Va.: American Psychiatric Association, 2000.
- Aratani, Lauren. 'George Floyd Killing: What Sparked the Protests – and What Has Been the Response?' *The Guardian*, 29 May 2020, sec. US news. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/29/george-floyd-killing-protests-police-brutality>.
- Aurora Levins Morales. *Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals*. Duke University Press, 2019.
- Bassnett, Susan. 'Postcolonialism and/as Translation'. *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, 1 September 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588251.013.0022>.
- Batcup, Dawn Caroline. 'A Discussion of the Dance Movement Psychotherapy Literature Relative to Prisons and Medium Secure Units'. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy* 8, no. 1 (1 February 2013): 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432979.2012.693895>.
- Beaumont, Peter, and Sam Jones. 'Russia Has Invaded Ukraine: What We Know so Far'. *The Guardian*, 24 February 2022, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/24/russia-has-invaded-ukraine-what-we-know-so-far>.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New ed. Get Political. Pluto Press, 2008.
- Body-Mind Centering®. 'Body-Mind Centering®'. Accessed 2 December 2022. <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/>.
- Bonney, S., and T. Stickley. 'Recovery and Mental Health: A Review of the British Literature'. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 15, no. 2 (March 2008): 140–53.
- BPS. 'Community Psychology Section'. Accessed 29 December 2023. <https://www.bps.org.uk/member-networks/community-psychology-section>.

- BPS. 'Psychology of Women and Equalities Section'. Accessed 29 December 2023.
<https://www.bps.org.uk/member-networks/psychology-women-and-equalities-section>.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.
- brown, adrienne maree. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017.
- Brown, Adrienne Maree. *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good (Emergent Strategy): 1*. Illustrated edition. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019.
- 'The Caravan', SJP, accessed 29 July 2024, <https://www.sjp.org.uk/social-justice/caravan-counselling/>.
- Castaneda, Carlos. *The Art of Dreaming*. First Edition. Element Books, 1994.
- Chaiklin, Sharon, and Hilda Wengrower. *The Art and Science of Dance/Movement Therapy: Life Is Dance*. Routledge, 2015.
- Chang, Heewon. *Autoethnography as Method*. Developing Qualitative Inquiry, 2008.
- Climate Psychology Alliance. 'Climate Psychology Alliance'. Accessed 29 December 2023.
<https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/>.
- Cohen, Bruce M. Z., ed. *Routledge International Handbook of Critical Mental Health*. 1st edition. London; New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Compagnon, Madeleine. 'Yvonne Rainer, Postmodern Dance, and You'. JSTOR Daily, 27 April 2020. <https://daily.jstor.org/yvonne-rainer-postmodern-dance-and-you/>.
- Contact Improvisation UK. 'Contact Improvisation UK'. Accessed 26 September 2023.
<http://www.contactimprovisation.co.uk/>.
- Counterfield. 'Goldsmithsvisualcultures | Counterfield | PracticeResearch | London'. Accessed 26 January 2024. <https://www.counterfield.com>.
- Cresswell, Mark, and Helen Spandler. 'Solidarities and Tensions in Mental Health Politics: Mad Studies and Psychopolitics'. *Critical and Radical Social Work* 4, no. 3 (18 November 2016): 357–73. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204986016X14739257401605>.
- Davis, John Dunne, Barney. 'Husband's Heartbreak as Wife Killed by Tree in Storm Eunice'. Evening Standard, 22 February 2022. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/muswell-hill-storm-eunice-picture-woman-killed-london-b983689.html>.
- Dillenbeck, Megan, and Jo Ann Hammond-Meiers. 'Death and Dying: Implications for Dance/Movement Therapy'. *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 31, no. 2 (23 October 2009): 95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10465-009-9074-2>.
- Dilts, Andrew. 'From "Entrepreneur of the Self" to "Care of the Self": Neo-Liberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics'. *Foucault Studies*, 12 September 2011, 130–46.
- Disability News Service. 'Mental Health Resistance Network', 24 November 2022.
<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tag/mental-health-resistance-network/>.

- Damian Carrington Editor. Environment. 'Coronavirus: 'Nature Is Sending Us a Message', Says UN Environment Chief'. *The Guardian*, 25 March 2020, sec. World news.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/coronavirus-nature-is-sending-us-a-message-says-un-environment-chief>.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. 2nd ed.. Bollingen Series 76. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Ellis, Carolyn. 'Heartful Autoethnography'. *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 5 (1 September 1999): 669–83.
- Ellis, Carolyn, and Art Bochner. 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject'. *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.)*, 1 January 2000, 733–68.
- Embodied Terrain. 'Embodied Terrain'. Accessed 30 June 2023. <http://www.embodiedterrain.com>.
- Estes, Clarissa Pinkola. *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Contacting the Power of the Wild Woman*. 1st edition. Rider, 2008.
- Fabienne Formosa. 'Embodied Practice | Fabienne Formosa | London, England'. Accessed 30 May 2021. <https://www.fabienneformosa.com>.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. Reprint edition. London New York: Penguin Classics, 2001.
- Farinati, Lucia. *The Force of Listening*. Doormats 6. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2017.
- Farman, Jason. 'Stories, Spaces, and Bodies: The Production of Embodied Space through Mobile Media Storytelling'. *Communication Research and Practice* 1, no. 2 (3 April 2015): 101–16.
- Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Penguin Modern Classics. Dublin: Penguin Books, 2021.
- 'Feldenkrais Method'. Accessed 2 December 2022. <https://feldenkrais.com/>.
- Fiordilino, Irene. 'Transitory Architecture: Artistic, Methodological, and Theoretical Insights into a Choreography-Based Project of Practice Research.' City University, Northampton Square, London: Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance., 2023.
- Formosa, Fabienne. 'A Cross-Cultural Study of Self-Complexity and Stress'. M.Sc, University of Essex, 2013, (Unpublished).
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. New Press, 1997.
- . *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1965.
- . *The Birth of the Clinic*. S.I: Routledge, 2002.
- . *The History of Sexuality / Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- . *The History of Sexuality / Vol.1, The Will to Knowledge*. Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984. Histoire de La Sexualité. English. London: Penguin Books, 1998.

- Foucault, Michel, Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton, and EBSCOhost. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.
- Foundation, Poetry. 'Notes Toward a New Language: On La Borde by Cynthia Cruz'. Text/html. Poetry Foundation. Poetry Foundation, 31 May 2021. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2015/04/notes-toward-a-new-language-on-la-borde->.
- Grierson, Jamie. 'Storm Eunice: Cobra Meeting Called as UK Braces for "Worst Storm in Decades"'. *The Guardian*, 18 February 2022, sec. UK news. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/18/storm-eunice-london-added-to-red-weather-warning-amid-danger-to-life>.
- Gros, Nilüfer Ovalıoğlu. 'Carrying the Nest: (Re)Writing History Through Embodied Research'. *Journal of Embodied Research* 2, no. 1 (26 November 2019): 3 (23:30). <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.23>.
- Guadagnino, Kate. 'The Pioneers of Postmodern Dance, 60 Years Later'. *The New York Times*, 20 March 2019, sec. T Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/t-magazine/postmodern-dance.html>.
- Guattari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies*. London ; New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Haraway, Donna. 'It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories'. *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 34, no. 3 (2 September 2019): 565–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2019.1664163>.
- . 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'. *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.
- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- . *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.
- 'Hearing Voices Network: Welcome'. Accessed 7 February 2022. <https://www.hearing-voices.org/>.
- Herbrechter, Stefan. 'Posthumanism, Subjectivity, Autobiography'. *Subjectivity* 5, no. 3 (2012): 327–47. <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2012.13>.
- Home Guides | SF Gate. 'How to Plant Sprouted Bulbs'. Accessed 20 January 2021. <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/plant-sprouted-bulbs-64021.html>.
- HouseSittersUK. 'House Sitters UK'. Accessed 30 June 2023. <https://www.housesittersuk.co.uk/>.
- Hughes, Sherick A., and Julie L. Pennington. *Autoethnography: Process, Product, and Possibility for Critical Social Research*. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483398594>.

- Interdependence: Global Solidarity and Local Actions. 'What Is Decolonization?' Accessed 24 March 2022. <https://globalsolidaritylocalaction.sites.haverford.edu/what-is-decolonization-why-is-it-important/>.
- Inti & Waira House. 'Inti & Waira Events', 27 January 2024. <https://intiwairahouse.com/events>.
- Johnston, Jay, and Ruth Barcan. 'Subtle Transformations: Imagining the Body in Alternative Health Practices'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 2006): 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877906061163>.
- 'Kader Attia'. Accessed 22 November 2021. <http://kaderattia.de/reasons-oxymorons-by-chad-elias-in-kader-attia-the-hood-museum-of-art-dartmouth-2018/>.
- Keeney, Bradford P. *Bushman Shaman: Awakening the Spirit Through Ecstatic Dance*. Original ed. edition. Rochester, Vt: Destiny Books, U.S., 2005.
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*. First edition. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013.
- KLPA. 'THE PONDS', 18 March 2019. <https://www.klpa.uk/the-ponds-2/>.
- Koch, Sabine C., and Beatrix Weidinger-von der Recke. 'Traumatised Refugees: An Integrated Dance and Verbal Therapy Approach'. *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 36, no. 5 (1 November 2009): 289–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2009.07.002>.
- Landreman, Lisa M. *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Stylus Publishing, LLC., 2013.
- Leadbitter, James. 'Madlove: A Designer Asylum'. *The Vacuum Cleaner* (blog). Accessed 21 April 2022. <http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk/madlove-a-designer-asylum/>.
- LeFrançois, Brenda A., Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume. *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies*. Canadian Scholars' Press, 2013.
- Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. 'Trance and Dance in Bali'. Image. Accessed 22 April 2022. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mbrs02425201/>.
- Liu, Yu, Amr H. Sawalha, and Qianjin Lu. 'COVID-19 and Autoimmune Diseases'. *Current Opinion in Rheumatology* 33, no. 2 (March 2021): 155–62. <https://doi.org/10.1097/BOR.0000000000000776>.
- Loaiza, Estenfanía Peñafiel, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Two Works Series Vol.1*. 1st edition. London: Walther & Franz König, 2021.
- Loots, Lliane. 'Embodied Storytelling: Using Narrative as a Vehicle for Collaborative Choreographic Practice – a Case Study of FLATFOOT DANCE COMPANY's 2016 HOMELAND TRILOGY (South Africa and Senegal)'. *South African Theatre Journal* 31, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2017.1408422>.
- Macy, Joanna. 'The Greening of the Self: The Most Important Development of Modern Times'. Films For Action. Accessed 10 August 2021. <https://www.filmsforaction.org/articles/the-greening-of-the-self/>.

- Macy, Joanna, and Molly Young Brown. *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work That Reconnects*. Gabriola Island, CA: New Society Publishers, 2014.
- Maisuria, Alpesh, and Mike Cole. 'The Neoliberalization of Higher Education in England: An Alternative Is Possible'. *Policy Futures in Education* 15, no. 5 (1 June 2017): 602–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317719792>.
- Mills, China. *Decolonizing Global Mental Health: The Psychiatrization of the Majority World*. Routledge, 2014.
- Nehring, Daniel, Ole Jacob Madsen, Edgar Cabanas, China Mills, and Dylan Kerrigan, eds. *The Routledge International Handbook of Global Therapeutic Cultures*. 1st edition. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020.
- OTHER WAYS TO CARE. 'OTHER WAYS TO CARE'. Accessed 4 January 2022. <http://www.otherwaystocare.org/>.
- 'PAULINE OLIVEROS - Welcome'. Accessed 2 December 2022. <https://paulineoliveros.us/>.
- Pini, Sarah, and Ruggero Pini. 'Resisting the "Patient" Body: A Phenomenological Account'. *Journal of Embodied Research* 2, no. 1 (29 May 2019): 2 (20:05). <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.11>.
- Pinkskythinking. 'Mad Studies'. Accessed 4 January 2022. <https://www.pinkskythinking.com/mad-studies>.
- 'Podcasts | Podcasts', 21 December 2021. <https://charleseisenstein.org/podcasts/>.
- Poole, Jennifer, and Janet Durbin. 'Behind the Rhetoric: Mental Health Recovery in Ontario'. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health* 31, no. 2 (September 2012): 119–21. <https://doi.org/10.7870/cjcmh-2012-0017>.
- Preciado, Paul B. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. Espasa Calpe; The Feminist Press, 2008.
- PsyCare UK Welfare & Harm Reduction. 'PsyCare UK Welfare & Harm Reduction'. Accessed 11 January 2024. <https://www.psycareuk.org>.
- PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. 'Psychologists for Social Change'. Accessed 29 December 2023. <https://www.psychchange.org/>.
- Purser, Ronald E. *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*. London, New York: Repeater, Random House, Inc, 2019.
- QAGOMA. 'Latai Taumoepeau'. Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art. QAGOMA. Accessed 3 July 2020. <https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/the-9th-asia-pacific-triennial-of-contemporary-art-apt9/artists/latai-taumoepeau>.
- Ramazanoglu, Caroline. *Feminist Methodology Challenges and Choices*. London ; Thousand Oaks, [Calif.], London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif., London: SAGE, Sage, 2002.
- Recovery in the Bin. 'Recovery in the Bin'. Accessed 29 May 2021. <https://recoveryinthebin.org/>.

- Reuters. 'Candida Auris: Deadly Fungal Infections Spreading across US at "Worrisome" Rate'. *The Guardian*, 21 March 2023, sec. Society.
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/mar/21/candida-auris-symptoms-fungal-infection-skin>.
- Rissmiller, D.O, David J., and Joshua H. Rissmiller. 'Evolution of the Antipsychiatry Movement Into Mental Health Consumerism'. *PSYCHIATRIC SERVICES* 57, no. 6 (2006): 4.
ps.psychiatryonline.org.
- Rober, Peter, and M. A. Psycha. 'Clinical Theory & Practice International Perspectives on Theory and Practice Fam Proc 37:201-213, 1998 Reflections on Ways to Create a Safe Therapeutic Culture for Children in Family Therapy', n.d.
- Sala, Ilaria Maria. 'Hong Kong's "be Water" Protests Leave China Casting about for an Enemy'. *The Guardian*, 30 August 2019, sec. World news.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/30/hong-kongs-be-water-protests-leaves-china-casting-about-for-an-enemy>.
- Sally Weale and Sally Weale Education correspondent, "'Cultural and Social Vandalism": Job Cut Plans at Goldsmiths Attacked', *The Guardian*, 27 March 2024, sec. Education.
- Samaritans. 'Samaritans - Here to Listen'. Accessed 11 January 2024.
<https://www.samaritans.org/>.
- 'School Of Movement Medicine | Dare To Dream, Dare To Dance'. Accessed 29 December 2023.
<https://www.schoolofmovementmedicine.com/>.
- School of Philosophy. 'Welcome to the School of Philosophy and Economic Science'. Accessed 22 November 2021. <https://schoolofphilosophy.org/>.
- Sean Chiddy. 'Online Psychotherapy and Integration Coaching'. Accessed 20 January 2024.
<https://www.seanchiddy.com>.
- Seibert, Brian. 'A D.I.Y. Dance for Your Home, From Yvonne Rainer'. *The New York Times*, 24 March 2020, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/arts/dance/yvonne-rainer-do-it-yourself-coronavirus.html>.
- Sepsis Alliance. 'Sepsis Survivors'. Accessed 30 June 2023.
<https://www.sepsis.org/education/patients-family/sepsis-survivors/>.
- Shaner, David Edward. *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Study of Kūkai and Dōgen*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.
- Sharma, Chetan, and Jagadeesh Bayry. 'High Risk of Autoimmune Diseases after COVID-19'. *Nature Reviews Rheumatology* 19, no. 7 (July 2023): 399–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41584-023-00964-y>.
- Shelter England. 'The Renters Reform Bill'. Accessed 30 June 2023.
https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/renters_reform_bill.
- Siobhan Davies Studios. 'About'. Accessed 30 June 2023. <https://www.siobhandavies.com/about/>.

- Skinner Releasing Network. 'About SRT'. Accessed 19 September 2023.
<https://skinnerreleasingnetwork.org/welcome-to-srn/about-srt/>.
- Sky News. 'Millions Risk Getting Ill Because They Are "too Scared to Put Heating on" When It's Cold, Survey Finds'. Accessed 10 November 2023. <https://news.sky.com/story/millions-risk-getting-ill-because-they-are-too-scared-to-put-heating-on-when-its-cold-survey-finds-12944925>.
- Slack. 'Slack Is Your Digital HQ'. Slack. Accessed 2 December 2022. <https://slack.com/intl/en-gb>.
- 'Soltara: Safe Ayahuasca Ceremonies in Costa Rica & Peru', 24 January 2018. <https://soltara.co/>.
- SoundCloud. 'Discover the Top Streamed Music and Songs Online on Soundcloud'. Accessed 20 December 2023. <https://soundcloud.com/discover>.
- Spandler, Helen, Jill Anderson, and Bob Sapey. *Madness, Distress and the Politics of Disablement*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2015.
- Spatz, Ben. *Blue Sky Body: Thresholds for Embodied Research*. 1st edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 2019.
- . 'Embodied Research: A Methodology'. *Liminalities* 13, no. 2 (2017): 1–31.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1927462602/?pq-origsite=primo>.
- . *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Studio, Familiar. 'Antonija Livingstone'. Text/html. Movement Research. Movement Research, 2 July 2020. <https://movementresearch.org/>. <https://movementresearch.org/>.
- Sung Im Her 허성임. 'Sung Im Her 허성임'. Accessed 26 September 2023.
<https://www.sungimher.com>.
- Taylor, L. H., S. M. Latham, and M. E. Woolhouse. 'Risk Factors for Human Disease Emergence'. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences* 356, no. 1411 (29 July 2001): 983–89. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2001.0888>.
- Temkin, Sarah M., Elizabeth Barr, Holly Moore, Juliane P. Caviston, Judith G. Regensteiner, and Janine A. Clayton. 'Chronic Conditions in Women: The Development of a National Institutes of Health Framework'. *BMC Women's Health* 23 (6 April 2023): 162.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02319-x>.
- The Gestalt Centre. 'Counselling and Psychotherapy Training'. Accessed 11 January 2024.
<https://gestaltcentre.org.uk/>.
- The Museum of Modern Art. 'Yvonne Rainer. Volleyball (Foot Film). 1967 | MoMA'. Accessed 30 June 2023. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/125929>.
- The School of Practical Philosophy in Malta. 'The School of Practical Philosophy in Malta'. Accessed 22 November 2021. <http://practicalphilosophymalta.eu/>.

- Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*: 1st edition. London: Yellow Kite, 2001.
- 'Toxic Bios'. Accessed 3 July 2020. <http://www.toxicbios.eu/#/stories>.
- Travel. 'Forest Bathing: What It Is and Where to Do It', 18 October 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/forest-bathing-nature-walk-health>.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: University Press, 2015.
- University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. 'Infectious and Tropical Diseases'. Accessed 30 June 2023. <https://www.uclh.nhs.uk/our-services/find-service/tropical-and-infectious-diseases>.
- Ussher, Jane M. *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience*. Women and Psychology. 0. Routledge Ltd, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203806579>.
- Verreault, Katia. 'Dance/Movement Therapy and Resilience Building with Female Asylum Seekers and Refugees: A Phenomenological Practice Based Research'. *Intervention: Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas* 15, no. 2 (2017): 120–35. <https://doi.org/10.1097/WTF.000000000000150>.
- 'Videos on Vimeo'. Accessed 29 January 2024. <https://vimeo.com/>.
- 'Vipassana Meditation'. Accessed 2 December 2022. <https://www.dhamma.org/en-US/index>.
- Weldemariam, Kassahun. "'Becoming-with Bees": Generating Affect and Response-Abilities with the Dying Bees in Early Childhood Education'. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 41, no. 3 (3 May 2020): 391–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2019.1607402>.
- Wellcome Collection. 'The Secret Sting of Cystitis', 20 April 2021. https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/YHgU_xAAACsAst7J.
- woodlandarttherapy. 'Queens Wood Art & Therapy Cabin'. Accessed 30 May 2021. <https://www.therapycabin.co.uk>.
- Woods, Angela, Akiko Hart, and Helen Spandler. 'The Recovery Narrative: Politics and Possibilities of a Genre'. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 2019. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s11013-019-09623-y>.
- 'YOUR WOUNDS BLEED ME تمہارے زخموں سے میرا خون | Performance Art Video'. Accessed 30 December 2023. <https://performanceartvideo.org/videos/your-wounds-bleed-me-/>.

Appendix

Section A: Guided Scores (Written versions).

Week 1: Body Memories

Before we begin

First find a wall in a safe space where you can do your practice in. Clear any objects in the way and create enough space for you to be able to move in. Perhaps start by putting one hand on the wall and stretch your other hand out as a guideline for the space you may need to clear from any objects or furniture that might interrupt your movements. You may also choose to keep objects or furniture that you may want to interact with/have contact with or surfaces that you may want to touch to provide you with more material for your mindbody practice. When you've settled on a space that you feel safe and comfortable in, close the door if you do not want to be witnessed and there are people around, prepare the camera if you want to record your movement practice, a voice recorder, sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials and leave them sitting on the edges of the boundaries that you've created for your space. Also prepare a blanket or a jumper next to the writing or drawing material in case you feel cold after the practice. I suggest doing this barefoot if it feels comfortable for you, if not just make sure the socks or shoes you wear have a grip as we will be working with contact, pressure and playing with shifting body weight. Wear comfortable clothing to move in. You can either do this practice with your eyes wide open, by gently softening your gaze, closing your eyes completely or blindfolding yourself with a piece of cloth. If you choose eyes closed make sure the space is cleared from any tripping hazards. Know that you can stop this exercise at any point and all the guidelines offered are mere invitations and you may or may not choose to do all and leave some of them out to follow your own intuitions and sensations as they come to you. When you have set-up the space, start by finding a comfortable position standing upright and start reaching for the wall, establishing contact with at least one hand.

Guided practice

As you sense the contact with the wall start drawing attention to your body, starting with your breath, noticing your chest and your belly rising and falling with the inhale and the exhale, you may want to start by deepening your breath and if it feels comfortable allowing a gentle sigh on the exhale. Now start to fill your body with this breath or if you find it helpful with a colour that comes to mind, starting with your toes, the soles of your feet, rising to your calves all the way up to your knees, thighs, your pelvis, bottom, all the way up to your belly, your lower back, up along your

spine, your chest, all the way up circling your neck, your jaw, your cheeks, nose, forehead, filling your head with all the shades you can imagine of this colour you see, right to the very top of your skull, all the way up to the ceiling. Notice how your body stands in the space you are in. Notice any sensations in your body. Now start by bringing some gentle movement to your body. Perhaps stretching a little or perhaps rocking side to side, backwards and forwards and as you move further closer to the wall, feeling and sensing the texture of the wall with one hand or both hands start noticing your feet firmly on the ground. Maybe you would like to come onto your tippy toes, play with shifting the weight in different directions and noticing the different sensations on your feet as you shift your weight. Then gently bend your knees and perhaps bring some movement into your knees, you may want to bring in a gentle bounce or a circling of the knees to one side all the way back to centre and then again the other side, bringing your pelvis and your hips into the movement, circling your hips to one side then the other side and you may want to play with shifting your weight into your contact with the wall and see how your body feels when you surrender your weight into the wall, as you push the wall away from you allow your upper body to come into contact again with the wall. Give yourself time to feel the surface of the wall on your skin, your face, your arms, notice how your spine twists and curls as you play with the contact with the wall and shifting your body weight through the contact with the wall. Continue this practice in your own time, maybe turning while maintaining shoulder contact with the wall, surrendering your weight as you turn and feel the support of the wall on your back, holding you upright. You may want to bring some gentle movement into your back, stretching a little, first one side then the other side, like a cat, feeling internal sensations as your spine snakes and slithers across the surface. Take another deep breath in and play with pushing different parts of your back into the wall, notice how your body feels as you push one shoulder, maybe the other shoulder, your lower back, giving yourself a massage with the contact with the wall. Take your time to explore moving your body in contact with the wall, you may want to come down to the floor and play with surrendering your weight into the ground, perhaps pushing yourself up and sliding back down, notice how it feels to push the ground away from you with your hands, arms, with your feet and as you slowly find yourself surrendering to gravity as your weight softly and gently drops into contact with the floor again. Take some more time to play with these sensations on your skin and internal sensations in your body as you move in contact with the space.

Allow 15 minutes for improvised movement.

When you are ready, start to gently open your eyes, take a few deep breaths and slowly make your way to the edges of your space either sitting on the floor or by finding any other comfortable space to sit in, perhaps wrapping yourself in the blanket if it feels cool. When you find a position that feels good, take a moment to notice if there are any lingering sensations present with you right now. Are

any thoughts or mental images inviting your attention? Now pick up your pen, pencil, voice recorder or art materials that you feel drawn to and start pouring any words, thoughts, sensations that capture your attention in this moment, drawing any forms taking shape, or making movements as your pen, pencil makes contact with your sheet of paper in any direction that feels good for you. If your body could speak right now what would it say? If your hands, feet, toes had a voice what tale would they tell? Do any stories of times long passed surface? Any experiences that your body once saturated come to you in this moment? What yearnings is your body calling to? Allow here some time for your body to speak. The words may or may not keep spilling, they may form sentences and they may not, they may make sense and they may make no sense at all. The shapes you may be drawing may morph into other shapes, maybe it all comes together in a form you recognise and it may not. All words, shapes are welcome. Blank pages are welcome too.

Continue this practice for however long feels right for you, then put the materials away and go back to your day.

Week 2: Changing Waters

Before we begin

Start by creating a safe space where you can do your practice in. Clear any objects in the way and create enough space for you to be able to move in. Perhaps stretch both arms out in a 90 degree angle to see if it is enough space for you to move in. You may want to clear any objects from your chosen space or furniture that might interrupt your movements. You may also choose to keep objects or furniture that you may want to interact with/have contact with or surfaces that you may want to use to support your practice. When you've settled on a space that you feel safe and comfortable in, close the door if there are people around and you do not want to be witnessed, set the camera if you want to record yourself, leave a voice recorder at hand if you only want to record your voice, prepare sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials and leave them sitting on the edges of the space that you've created for yourself. I suggest to also prepare a blanket or a jumper next to the writing or drawing material in case you feel cold after the practice. I suggest doing this barefoot if it feels comfortable for you, if not just make sure the socks or shoes you wear have a grip so your contact with the floor can provide you with enough tension and friction to move freely around and enable you to play with shifting your body weight. Wear comfortable clothing to move in. You may want to keep your eyes open for this practice, to gently soften your gaze, or close your eyes completely from time to time so you can sense into your internal reality and body sensations, your movement and the space around you. Before you start make sure the space is cleared from any tripping hazards. Know that you can stop this exercise at any point and all the guidelines offered are mere invitations and you may or may not choose to do all and leave some of them out to follow your own intuitions and sensations as they come to you. When you have set-up the space, start by finding a comfortable position.

You may choose to stand, sit or lie down. Take a moment to listen to your body, notice your energy levels in this moment and allow yourself to find a position that feels effortless, when holding your body in movement. Imagine a wave of the sea, the ocean, washing through your body, beckoning you to just be and flow with each moment as it arises, as it dissolves.

When you find a position that feels good, go ahead and soften your gaze or close your eyes completely. I invite you to call in a gentle presence to your body now. Starting with your breath, noticing your chest and your belly rising and falling with each inhale and exhale. Perhaps putting one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly and feeling into the sensations on your hands as they make contact with your chest and your belly as they rise and fall. You may want to try deepening your breath here and allowing a gentle sigh on the exhale. Perhaps start inviting your

body to rock to and fro, slowly, gently and you may want to invite your movement to evolve into a wave. Pushing your pelvis forward first and slowly moving your chest outward as you pull your hips and pelvis in. Continue being generous with the breath here. Notice the sensations on your skin and in your torso as you roll your chest forward and you pull your belly, stomach inward before releasing into this cyclical movement. Notice the sensations on your feet as you continue to move, synchronizing the breath so you're breathing in as you push your pelvis and belly, stomach forward and exhaling and you pull your belly in and expanding your chest, the lungs out. Allowing your arms to drop to your sides and letting them hang loosely. Allowing your presence to rest with any areas of your body where you may be holding on to any tension or resisting the flow of the movement as we move through the different parts. Letting your presence to wander to the soles of your feet, rising to your calves, as if your presence was gently caressing each part of your body you're inviting your attention to. Calling yourself in more and more. Rising all the way up to your knees, thighs, your pelvis, bottom, showing up in this moment, in your body, as you are, for yourself, your moving body. Climbing all the way up to your belly, your lower back, trickling along your spine, caressing your chest with your inner eye, calling your shoulders into movement, your arms, circling your neck as if stroking it into being with each passing moment, becoming fuller and fuller with your presence. Arriving at your jaw, firmly showing up for your cheeks, tickling your nose with your presence as if with a feather, continuing on to your forehead, right to the very top of your skull, around your head allowing the weight of your head to gently wobble from side to side. Allow any tension that you may be carrying with you today to gently wash away, with each inbreath and each outbreath, allowing it all to fall away. Noticing the fullness of your body, as you hold yourself in this space.

Now begin to create a picture in your mind.

Imagine that you are near a body of water. It could be a salty sea that you know and trust very well, the cool ocean, a pond, a misty river, a mountain stream. The water that pours through your shower and fills your bath to keep you clean. The water that quenches your thirst every day. The water that flows through you, forever gives and expects nothing from you. The water that reminds you of the knowing of your soul.

Take a moment to be with the knowing presence of water here.

I invite you to move with this concept and image of being water now. Feel your limbs, your neck and head becoming loose, heavy and relaxed as your body becomes immersed in this water. Your eyelids feeling heavy. Calling in the shadows of your dreams. Be generous with the breath here as you follow this image.

Perhaps now starting to make small ripples with your fingers, your toes, moving as a peaceful wave rolling in toward the shore. Use wave patterns to transform your entire body into moving water. Allowing the image of the wave patterns to create ripples between your fingers, behind your ears, the back of your knees, and under your feet. Feeling your joints become liquid, moving the depths of your consciousness into dreaming so that you are no longer separate from the image of water but are the water, seeing and sensing through your body of water. Imagine algae caressing you, pulling you back and forth, deeper in. Moving inside out, travelling up and down from the bottom of your feet, through your legs, pelvis, and spine to top of your head. Allow your movement to be guided by this rippling pattern, following the pull of the water as if the pull of tide were moving you around the space.

Playing with the pull in direction of the rippling water moving you on, spiraling you toward the floor and spreading out, using up all the space available to you. Continue to breathe here, feeling the fresh breeze on your skin. Let the breath energise you like an electric current charging your watery ways. Imagine the sound of the waves crashing against the sea bank, shore, stones. With each crashing of every wave, let it be a call for surrender into your dance. Allow your body to lead your movements, your dance.

Imagine descending deeply into your body of water, getting colder and colder. The water gaining density and as it grows in weight, you descend furthermore, feeling your body becoming heavier, as you spiral down to the bottom of the seabed. It is very cold here, your movements become heavy, falling into stillness, lying down, feeling the soft touch of the earth, until the pressure of the water contracts and you are pushed up toward the surface again. Feeling lighter, quickly and rapidly gaining elevation as you reach for the surface, you see the rays of light flickering through the water, pausing to play for a moment here with the flickering light, moving through them, dancing your way around them as a creature of water would. Allowing the sun to offer you its' warmth you, knowing that it nourishes the food of the waters that sustains you.

Now as a way of closing this exercise I invite you to listen to an emotion or a sensation that is present with you right now and to express that in a gesture. It can be anything. When you've clearly articulated a gesture go ahead and repeat it, perhaps at different rhythms or exploring different variations.

Take some time here to explore improvised movement. Allow yourself to be surprised and led by the way your body wants to move right now (10min).

Then when you are ready, start to gently open your eyes, take a few deep breaths and slowly make your way to the edges of your space either sitting on the floor or by finding any other comfortable space to sit in, perhaps wrapping yourself in the blanket if it feels cool. When you find a position that feels good, take a moment to notice if there are any lingering sensations present with you right now. Are any thoughts or mental images inviting your attention? Now pick up your pen, pencil, voice recorder or art materials that you feel drawn to and start pouring any words, thoughts, sensations that capture your attention in this moment, drawing any forms taking shape, or making movements as your pen, pencil makes contact with your sheet of paper in any direction that feels good for you. If your body could speak right now what would it say? If your hands, feet, toes had a voice what tale would they tell? Do any stories of times long passed surface? Any experiences that your body once saturated come to you in this moment? What yearnings is your body calling to? Allow here some time for your body to speak. The words may or may not keep spilling, they may form sentences and they may not, they may make sense and they may make no sense at all. The shapes you may be drawing may morph into other shapes, maybe it all comes together in a form you recognise and it may not. All words, shapes are welcome. Blank pages are welcome too.

Continue this practice for however long feels right for you, then put the materials away and go back to your day.

Week 3: Snaking Ways

Before we begin

Start by creating a safe space where you can do your practice in. Clear any objects in the way and create enough space for you to move in. Today we will move on the ground so make sure you have enough floor space to move in. Perhaps stretch both arms and legs as wide and far apart as possible to see if it is enough space for you to move in. You may want to clear any objects from your chosen space or furniture that might interrupt your movements. You may also choose to keep objects or furniture that you may want to interact with/have contact with or surfaces that you may want to use to support your practice. When you've settled on a space that you feel safe and comfortable in, close the door if you there are people around and you do not want to be witnessed, set the camera if you want to record yourself, leave a voice recorder at hand if you only want to record your voice, prepare sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials and leave them sitting on the edges of the space that you've created for yourself. I suggest to also prepare a blanket or a jumper next to the writing or drawing material in case you feel cold after the practice. I suggest doing this barefoot if it feels comfortable for you, if not just make sure the socks or shoes you wear have a grip. Wear comfortable clothing to move in. You may want to keep your eyes open, gently soften your gaze, or close your eyes completely. You may also play with closing and opening your eyes whenever you feel a need to sense more deeply into your internal reality and body sensations, while maintaining an awareness of the space around you. Before you start make sure the space is cleared from any tripping hazards. Know that you can stop this exercise at any point and all the guidelines offered are mere invitations and you may or may not choose to do all and leave some of them out to follow your own intuitions and sensations as they come to you. When you have set-up the space, start by finding a comfortable position lying flat on your belly facing down.

Breathing

Start lying down on your belly, palms flat on the floor, feeling into the ground underneath you. Breathing in deeply into your belly, allowing the breath to reach all of your body, your feet, your legs, knees, thighs, bottom, lower back, rising through your spine, all the way up to your shoulders, your arms, the back of your head, filling your skull, your face, your hair, coming back to your arms and hands, and imagining the breath leave your body through your hands as you exhale maybe allowing a gentle sigh on the exhale. Repeat this 3 times, breathing all the way into yourself, right through your core and then spreading out to fill up all of your body and exhaling the breath through your hands into the contact with the floor and imaging the ground beneath you absorbing anything

you are bringing to your practice today, anything you are ready to let go and release, letting it all dissolve into the ground and as you do this notice your body becoming softer and softer melting into the ground. And one last time, taking a deep breath in, starting by filling your centre with the breath and then allowing the breath to spread out through every, inch, corner and curve of your body, filling all of your bones, your muscles, lighting everything up and then releasing and clearing away with the exhale through your hands, your palms and fingers into the contact with the ground. Take a moment to sense into the contact with the ground, releasing any tension in the body that you may still be holding on to and letting your body grow softer and softer with each exhale as you sink into the ground.

Activating the spine

Now I invite you to push your body up with your hands flat on the floor coming onto your hands and knees and start to make a figure 8 movement starting with your hips moving them to the right and as you circle your hips to the left allowing your back, your spine and your shoulders first move to the left and then be pulled into the movement as you circle your hips back to the right. Supporting this movement with plenty of breath and repeating several times allowing your body to become loose and relaxed. Notice that with time your spine and back become more and more active, allowing your head to join in with the movement perhaps shifting your body closer to the floor and back up as you stretch and pull and the whole torso becomes activated, making circular movements, shifting to the other side and making several figure 8 movements starting with shifting the hips to the left, the left side of your body to the right and then bringing you whole torso into the figure 8 movement.

Spend 1-3 minutes exploring this spine movement, allowing your body to guide the movement. Until your spine starts guiding the movement and your body is just following.

Guided practice

I now invite you to lower back down flat on the floor, with your face, chest, belly, legs, feet, arms and hands making contact with the floor. Notice the sensations of the parts of your body making contact with the ground and the parts of you not making contact. Notice the difference in sensations, between parts of your body making contact and parts that aren't. Notice how the air feels on your skin. Take another deep breath in allowing your body to sink into the ground on the exhale. Growing heavier and heavier, noticing any sensations from the movement earlier still present, letting your body rest for a moment. (30 seconds)

I now invite you to move with the concept and image of being a serpent. Rather than imitating the imagined movements of the serpent, I invite you instead to *become* the serpent, to move as if *you are* the serpent, snaking your way around the room. Allow the becoming of this knowing to drive the improvisation.

Take a moment here to become a serpent and then slowly start to invite gentle movement to your body.

Perhaps try to glide forward using the ribs and belly, imagine that you have scales to push you forward and backward, moving your chest sideways, first to one side and then the other side. Imagine you are a big serpent able to lift yourself up using the muscles in your upper body, able to move like an accordion. Taking a deep breath in, stretching out the front of the body, then pull the rear part of your body forward. Really try to use your muscles and scales to move you forward and backward instead of using your limbs. Try moving in a wavy motion, imagine waving your way around bumpy surfaces, trees, rocks and objects that may be in your way. How would you snake your way around these objects if you couldn't push them out of your way?

Take a moment to look around you, look at the room you are in while you are the serpent on the floor. Does the room look bigger or smaller? How does snaking around your room feel? Maybe make a hissing sound. Do you notice any sensations in your body as you hiss? Take your time moving in slow, wavy, straight, circular, creeping, ways. Maybe bring your arms into the movement and then try moving without the support of your arms again. How do your muscles feel? Can you feel the scales on your skin? Imagine having wider scales on your belly that you can use to grip the ground while pushing your reptilian body forward.

Allow some time here for improvised movement. Maybe play with the imagery of the serpent some more or allow the imagery to evolve into other imagery and move with those images. Allow your body to follow impulses and sensations as they arise. Let the improvised movements guide your body. Allowing yourself to be surprised by unexpected sensations, images, feelings, experiences (15 minutes)

Come to stillness again and pause here for a moment and let all the movement, all the imagery rest. Then start to wiggle your fingers and toes, feeling your body reawaken. Shrug your shoulders. Move your arms and legs. Turn your head. Gently opening your eyes, taking your time to come back in the room in your human form.

When you are ready, start to gently open your eyes, take a few deep breaths and slowly make your way to the edges of your space either sitting on the floor or by finding any other comfortable space to sit in, perhaps wrapping yourself in the blanket if it feels cool. When you find a position that feels good, take a moment to notice if there are any lingering sensations present with you right now. Are any thoughts or mental images inviting your attention? Now pick up your pen, pencil, voice recorder or art materials that you feel drawn to and start pouring any words, thoughts, sensations that capture your attention in this moment, drawing any forms taking shape, or making movements as your pen, pencil makes contact with your sheet of paper in any direction that feels good for you. If your body could speak right now what would it say? If your hands, feet, toes had a voice what tale would they tell? Do any stories of times long passed surface? Any experiences that your body once saturated come to you in this moment? What yearnings is your body calling to? Allow here some time for your body to speak. The words may or may not keep spilling, they may form sentences and they may not, they may make sense and they may make no sense at all. The shapes you may be drawing may morph into other shapes, maybe it all comes together in a form you recognise and it may not. All words, shapes are welcome. Blank pages are welcome too. Continue this practice for however long feels right for you, then put the materials away and go back to your day.

Week 4: Blossoming Bulbs



Before we begin

Start by creating a safe space where you can do your practice in. Clear any objects in the way and create enough space for you to be able to move in. Perhaps stretch both arms to out in a 90 degree angle to see if it is enough space for you to move in. You may want to clear any objects from your chosen space or furniture that might interrupt your movements. You may also choose to

⁴⁷⁶ "How to Plant Sprouted Bulbs," Home Guides | SF Gate, accessed January 13, 2021, <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/plant-sprouted-bulbs-64021.html>.

keep objects or furniture that you may want to interact with/have contact with or surfaces that you may want to use to support your practice. When you've settled on a space that you feel safe and comfortable in, close the door if there are people around and you do not want to be witnessed, set the camera if you want to record yourself, leave a voice recorder at hand if you only want to record your voice, prepare sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials and leave them sitting on the edges of the space that you've created for yourself. I suggest to also prepare a blanket or a jumper next to the writing or drawing material in case you feel cold after the practice. I suggest doing this barefoot if it feels comfortable for you, if not just make sure the socks or shoes you wear have a grip so your contact with the floor can provide you with enough tension and friction to move freely around and enable you to play with shifting your body weight. Wear comfortable clothing to move in. You may want to keep your eyes open for this practice, to gently soften your gaze, or close your eyes completely from time to time so you can sense into your internal reality and body sensations, your movement and the space around you. Before you start make sure the space is cleared from any tripping hazards. Know that you can stop this exercise at any point and all the guidelines offered are mere invitations and you may or may not choose to do all and leave some of them out to follow your own intuitions and sensations as they come to you. When you have set-up the space, start by finding a comfortable position standing upright or sitting down.

Guided Practice

Plants that grow from bulbs are considered magical plants because they have the ability to return from the dead. Whilst plants that grow from seeds are dependent on the soil for survival, bulb plants are connected to the soil through small bulbs. Bulbs can store all the water and nutrients the plant needs for survival so when the temperature drops or the soil conditions are poor, the part of the plant that is above the ground will wither and die but the life force of the plant takes refuge in the bulb underground. The plant will seem to be dead overground but will be lying dormant in the bulb underground and when the conditions overground are good enough for the plant, it returns to life.⁴⁷⁷

This week I invite you to move with this concept and image of being the bulb. Rather than imitating the imagined movements of the bulb underground, I invite you instead to become the bulb, to move as if *you are* the bulb and the plant. Imagine bursting into life overground when the conditions are friendly and taking refuge in the bulb underground when the conditions are poor. Allow the becoming of this knowing to drive the improvisation.

⁴⁷⁷ 'How to Plant Sprouted Bulbs'.

You may want to begin taking the shape of a bulb on the ground, perhaps finding a fetal position. Imagine yourself being buried deep underground, lying dormant during winter. Imagine the frost biting the surface of the ground above you, and feel into having everything you need stored inside you. You as the bulb. Breathing deep inside your belly, your centre, sensing into the life force within you. You may want to allow some time here to become the bulb maybe rolling from side to side, holding yourself, brushing your hands over different parts of your body, really feeling into this life force in your body, feeling into the fullness of the bulb, knowing that you have everything you need to sprout up and out when the time feels right. Stay with this for as long as you feel a desire to start moving outward. Letting all movement impulses to build within you until a part or different parts of your body start moving outward. Then expanding further outward until the parts of you that moved become a shoot that breaks through the bulb, allowing the life force to build some more so it can push its way all through the ground, until it reaches overground, meeting the light. Take a moment here to feel into the sensations of your body as you imagine the sprouting parts of you meeting the light and the air, coming to life again, returning from the dead. Sense the warmth of the sun on your skin, pushing further up through the earth toward the light, the sun, while at the same time feeling the roots beneath you pulling deep down into the ground beneath you.

How does it feel to blossom and bloom upward, away from the ground? How does it feel to return to yourself, coiling and spiraling inward, downward? Repeat this process of retreating into a bulb and pushing forth to blossom as many times as it feels good. Allow yourself to be led by impulses and sensations in the body, allow yourself to be surprised by unexpected movements, follow them. See where they take you.

Allow some time here to explore moving from sensations as they arise (15 minutes).

When the body finds stillness again, whether that is standing upright or lying down, curled up, flat on your face and belly or on your back, take a moment to be in the pose your journey ended in, feeling into it, noticing the gestures, the way you are holding your body right now, the way you are bending and curving, expanding or closing.

Then when you are ready, start to gently open your eyes, take a few deep breaths and slowly make your way to the edges of your space either sitting on the floor or by finding any other comfortable space to sit in, perhaps wrapping yourself in the blanket if it feels cool. When you find a position that feels good, take a moment to notice if there are any lingering sensations present with you right now. Are any thoughts or mental images inviting your attention? Now pick up your pen, pencil, voice recorder or art materials that you feel drawn to and start pouring any words, thoughts, sensations that capture your attention in this moment, drawing any forms taking shape, or making movements as your pen, pencil makes contact with your sheet of paper in any direction

that feels good for you. If your body could speak right now what would it say? If your hands, feet, toes had a voice what tale would they tell? Do any stories of times long passed surface? Any experiences that your body once saturated come to you in this moment? What yearnings is your body calling to? Allow here some time for your body to speak. The words may or may not keep spilling, they may form sentences and they may not, they may make sense and they may make no sense at all. The shapes you may be drawing may morph into other shapes, maybe it all comes together in a form you recognise and it may not. All words, shapes are welcome. Blank pages are welcome too.

Continue this practice for however long feels right for you, then put the materials away and go back to your day.

Week 5: Heavy Balloons

Find light objects to move with. You may want to blow up a balloon and tie a string to it, you may want to find a feather, a dried leaf, a silk scarf, a piece of paper. Any object or multiple objects that are very light and give you a sense of weightlessness.



Before we begin

Start by creating a safe space where you can do your practice in. Clear any objects in the way and create enough space for you to be able to move in. Perhaps stretch both arms to out in a 90 degree angle to see if it is enough space for you to move in. You may want to clear any objects from your chosen space or furniture that might interrupt your movements. You may also choose to keep objects or furniture that you may want to interact with/have contact with or surfaces that you may want to use to support your mindbody practice. When you've settled on a space that you feel

safe and comfortable in, close the door if you there are people around and you do not want to be witnessed, set the camera if you want to record yourself, leave a voice recorder at hand if you only want to record your voice, prepare sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials and leave them sitting on the edges of the space that you've created for yourself. I suggest to also prepare a blanket or a jumper next to the writing or drawing material in case you feel cold after the practice. I suggest doing this barefoot if it feels comfortable for you, if not just make sure the socks or shoes you wear have a grip so your contact with the floor can provide you with enough tension and friction to move freely around and enable you to play with shifting your body weight. Wear comfortable clothing to move in. You may want to keep your eyes open for this practice since we will be working with the object or objects of your choice, but you are welcome to gently soften your gaze, or close your eyes completely from time to time so you can sense into your internal reality and body sensations, as well as the space around you and your movement with the object. Before you start make sure the space is cleared from any tripping hazards. Know that you can stop this exercise at any point and all the guidelines offered are mere invitations and you may or may not choose to do all and leave some of them out to follow your own intuitions and sensations as they come to you. When you have set-up the space, start by finding a comfortable position standing upright and start reaching for the object of your choice, for the purposes of this exercise I will use a balloon, but you may use the alternative of your choice to this and you may also alternate between different objects as we go along.

Guided practice

Start by holding on to the string attached to the balloon, and take a moment here to look at the balloon, taking it in. Looking at the shape, the colour, feeling into the texture, the weight. Now slowly start to draw attention to your body, while keeping the connection with the balloon. Maybe starting with your breath, noticing your chest and your belly rising and falling with the inhale and the exhale, you may want to start by deepening your breath and if it feels comfortable allowing a gentle sigh on the exhale. Look at the balloon and sense into your stomach and belly as you start to pull the string through the air, swaying it from side to side, breathing deeply into your belly and exhaling. Now start to move around in the space holding onto the balloon, moving it closer to you, moving it further away.. inviting all of your body to be swayed by the balloon, receiving its' lightness, its' ease of being, perhaps rising on your tippy toes and allowing your arm to rise toward the ceiling, letting your arm be guided by the balloon, circling the balloon in the air, then pulling it down toward you, maybe allowing the weight of your body to pull it all the way down to the ground as you allow your body to fall into the ground, then grabbling the string with your arm, rising up again, moving your torso, pushing your hips into the ground and then finding your way up again. Invite all of your body to come into movement, to be swayed by the balloon, to be guided by the

increasing lightness in your body as you rise and fall, shift and sway, maybe grabbing the string with your toes, letting the soles of your feet rise up toward the ceiling, lifting your calves, your knees, thighs, your pelvis, bottom, your belly, your lower back, your spine, chest, bringing your neck, your jaw, cheeks, nose, forehead, your skull, into the movement inviting every little bit of you, seen and unseen, to listen closely to the parts of you that are being guided by the balloon. Keep tuning in with sensations inside your belly, your chest. Allow 2-3 minutes of improvised movement here.

Now start to imagine the balloon gaining weight and the more it gains weight, the lighter you feel. Let your body guide the balloon and as you do this your body gains elevation. Feeling lighter, softer. Moving freely in the space around you. Allow 2 minutes to explore improvised movement with lightness here.

Then start to reverse roles with the balloon, allowing the balloon to become weightless again and letting the weight of your body counterbalance it and as soon as your body is full and weighty again, moving and shifting around, releasing your weight into the balloon again, letting it soak up on the heaviness to offer you lightness again and again breathing in weight and letting your weight resist the balloons weight to shift it into its lightness again. Pulling it down toward you and letting it go when it feels right, peeling yourself away, maybe taking a moment lying down to find yourself again, allowing the breath to return to its regular, gentle flow of rising and falling.

Allow 15 minutes for improvised movement.

Now allow the movement to gradually ease and your body to fall into stillness again (30 seconds). When you are ready, start to gently open your eyes, take a few deep breaths and slowly make your way to the edges of your space either sitting on the floor or by finding any other comfortable space to sit in, perhaps wrapping yourself in the blanket if it feels cool. When you find a position that feels good, take a moment to notice if there are any lingering sensations present with you right now. Are any thoughts or mental images inviting your attention? Now pick up your pen, pencil, voice recorder or art materials that you feel drawn to and start pouring any words, thoughts, sensations that capture your attention in this moment, drawing any forms taking shape, or making movements as your pen, pencil makes contact with your sheet of paper in any direction that feels good for you. If your body could speak right now what would it say? If your hands, feet, toes had a voice what tale would they tell? Do any stories of times long passed surface? Any experiences that your body once saturated come to you in this moment? What yearnings is your body calling to? Allow here some time for your body to speak. The words may or may not keep spilling, they may form sentences and they may not, they may make sense and they may make no sense at all. The

shapes you may be drawing may morph into other shapes, maybe it all comes together in a form you recognise and it may not. All words, shapes are welcome. Blank pages are welcome too. Continue this practice for however long feels right for you, then put the materials away and go back to your day.

Week 6: Spider dance

Optional music:

<https://open.spotify.com/album/6LZSrxXJ2e7usYEWluUfdX?si=k20f3GpDQ16bLfuqGbzRUA>

Or search for “Pizzica pizzica” literally translated as “bitten bitten” music for “la danza della taranta” or the traditional folk dance in southern Italy of the dance of the spider.

Optional blindfold to increase awareness of internal sensations.

Before we begin

Start by creating a safe space where you can do your practice in. Clear any objects in the way and create enough space for you to be able to move in. Perhaps stretch both arms out in a 90 degree angle to see if it is enough space for you to move in. You may want to clear any objects from your chosen space or furniture that might interrupt your movements. You may also choose to keep objects or furniture that you may want to interact with/have contact with or surfaces that you may want to use to support your mindbody practice. When you've settled on a space that you feel safe and comfortable in, close the door if there are people around and you do not want to be witnessed, set the camera if you want to record yourself, leave a voice recorder at hand if you only want to record your voice, prepare sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials and leave them sitting on the edges of the space that you've created for yourself. I suggest to also prepare a blanket or a jumper next to the writing or drawing material in case you feel cold after the practice. I suggest doing this barefoot if it feels comfortable for you, if not just make sure the socks or shoes you wear have a grip so your contact with the floor when moving can provide you with enough tension and friction to freely move around and enable you to play with shifting your body weight. Wear comfortable clothing to move in. You may want to keep your eyes open, gently soften your gaze, or close your eyes completely from time to time so you can sense into your internal reality and body sensations, as well as the space around you. Before you start make sure the space is cleared from any tripping hazards. Know that you can stop this exercise at any point and all the guidelines offered are mere invitations and you may or may not choose to do all and leave some of them out to follow your own intuitions and sensations as they come to you. When you have set-up the space, start by finding a comfortable position standing upright.

Guided practice

In southern Italy “pizzica pizzica” or “bitten bitten” is a traditional dance called the dance of the Tarantula. “Pizzica” is a Salentine version of the nationwide dance called Tarantella, in the southern most part of Puglia. The traditional dance form grew out of a myth where women were believed to become possessed after being bitten by a Tarantula, hence it’s commonly known name “The Dance of the Spider Women”. The ritual is traditionally associated with oppressed women who upon being bitten by the tarantula would start writhing on the ground and become increasingly delirious as they become infected with the poison. Accompanied by frenetic folk music, the afflicted women would eventually rise up to stomp on the ground, convulse, dance wildly, chaotically and in circles for days, until the experiences peaks and fades away.⁴⁷⁸

Lets’ start on the floor, sitting with your knees pointing upward and your feet flat on the ground. Start to breathe deeply into your belly and as you exhale through your mouth, maybe invite a sigh or a prolonged “h” sound on the exhale. Allow your knees to fall to the sides either in a cross-legged position or in a butterfly position. First start to move your chest forward while contracting the muscles of your belly breathing in and as you pull your chest inward exhaling, relaxing your belly muscles and looking down. Make this movement synchronizing your breath 3 times, pulling the breath and contracting as you push the chest out and exhaling as you pull the chest in and down. We really want to activate the belly here (1-2minutes).

When you are ready start to move your belly in circular movements. As you move your lower back and your belly first to one side and then to the other side, push the base of your spine and the bones of your bottom further into the ground so while making the circular movements with your lower back and belly you also start to reach toward the ceiling with your upper body. Breathing in, as you fill up your lungs opening the diaphragm and allowing the muscles of your belly relax and soften even more. Continue to make circular movements starting from your base and lower belly and invite more of your upper body to flow with the movement, perhaps even inviting your arms and hands to join in, first one side and then the other side. Continue to support this movement with deep breaths, pushing the bones of your base further into the ground and growing taller at the same time. Notice the changing sensations in your torso and notice the spine becoming more and more active, as your body generates the movement, and you find flow in the circular movements. Inviting your head and your shoulder to lead the movement spiraling down and then starting from the belly again going up, head shoulders down to the belly and belly, head shoulders to the ceiling.

⁴⁷⁸ ‘Dance of the Spider Women: A Mystical Tradition in a Forgotten Corner of Italy’, AFAR, accessed 20 January 2021, <https://www.afar.com/magazine/in-salento-italy-for-the-night-of-the-tarantula>.

Be generous with the breath and allowing the base of your body and your legs to support all the movement in your upper body.

Enjoy this movement for some time. (30 seconds more)

Then when you are ready, I invite you to put your hand out, either the left or the right, it doesn't matter which and to imagine a spider appearing on your hand. Now I invite you to spend some time improvising movement with the spider as it jumps from your hand to your shoulder, your shoulder to your nose and every time this spider jumps from one point on your body it leaves a thread and your body moves with this thread. Sometimes the spider crawls on you and you move with that, sometimes you can't find the spider and you need to twist and turn around, upside down, over and around to find the spider again. Let this movement led by the spider be playful, full of surprises. All the while the spider is weaving its web around you and the more you move the more you become entangled until in the end you are an entangled mess with the spider and its web.

Allow some time to improvise here, to discover new movement, sensations, experiences. Allow images that come to mind to guide your movement, allow your body to lead (5 minutes).

How does it feel to be entangled with this web? Can you create space for yourself within the web, breathing in, stretching out? How does it feel to close in on yourself and be wrapped up with the web? How does it feel to play with web?

When you are ready come to your feet if you haven't stood up yet and put the suggested music on, or fast rhythmical music of your choice, put the blindfold on if it calls and allow yourself to dance and improvise some more. Imagine being bitten by the spider, imagine the venom rushing through your veins and the poison driving your body in all sorts of unexpected ways. Let your body drive the movement here. Let this be a dance of chaos, release, joy if you feel enthralled by the entanglements the spider wove around you. Let this be a dance of freedom and liberation. Let every movement, every shake, shed more of the web away or for every wave and circular movement entangle you further in. Let your dance be wild, fast and rhythmical or slow and still. Make this your dance, whatever your experience, make this yours.

Allow 15 minutes for improvised movement..

Now slowly and gently allow the movement to gradually become slower until you come back to stillness. Take the blindfold off if you were wearing one. Take a moment here to be (30 sec - 1 min).

When you are ready, start to gently open your eyes, take a few deep breaths and slowly make your way to the edges of your space either sitting on the floor or by finding any other comfortable space to sit in, perhaps wrapping yourself in the blanket if it feels cool. When you find a position that feels good, take a moment to notice if there are any lingering sensations present with you right now. Are any thoughts or mental images inviting your attention? Now pick up your pen, pencil, voice recorder or art materials that you feel drawn to and start pouring any words, thoughts, sensations that capture your attention in this moment, drawing any forms taking shape, or making movements as your pen, pencil makes contact with your sheet of paper in any direction that feels good for you. If your body could speak right now what would it say? If your hands, feet, toes had a voice what tale would they tell? Do any stories of times long passed surface? Any experiences that your body once saturated come to you in this moment? What yearnings is your body calling to? Allow here some time for your body to speak. The words may or may not keep spilling, they may form sentences and they may not, they may make sense and they may make no sense at all. The shapes you may be drawing may morph into other shapes, maybe it all comes together in a form you recognise and it may not. All words, shapes are welcome. Blank pages are welcome too.

Continue this practice for however long feels right for you, then put the materials away and go back to your day.

Section B: Informed Consent Form

“Embodied storytelling and the entanglements of distress: practice-led research of mad experience in a time of crisis.”

Researcher: Fabienne Formosa

Institution: Department of Visual Cultures. Goldsmiths, University of London

This consent form has three parts:

1. Participant Information Sheet
2. Participant Screening Questions
3. Participant Consent Form

Part 1: Participant Information Sheet

Introduction

About the project

As we move through this web of ecological crises with the climate crisis on the one hand and the global coronavirus pandemic on the other, many of us will be experiencing increasing levels of distress right now. Often, we think of our mental health as a personal problem, something we must tend to privately. However, when so much of our internal experiences are influenced by what is happening outside of us, we can no longer deny the impact our changing environment is having on our mental health.

Who?

I am looking for 10 dance movement improvisation artists to take part in my practice as research project looking to unpick these layers of personal, political and ecological complexities in our lived experiences of distress. The project seeks to explore how dance and movement improvisation practice may serve as an alternative way to start articulating these entanglements of our time. Two of the questions guiding the research are:

- How can moving bodies tell stories about the personal and contextual entanglements of distress?

- Can embodied research practices perform entangled storytelling in order to resist or undermine hierarchies of being?

What?

Given the restrictions currently posed by social distancing we will be using digital environments to perform this research. I would send you a weekly audio-recording of a themed guided journey linked to these questions over a period of 6 weeks. You would be invited to record your practice and then share some of the material you generate through the guided journey. In-between themes, you would also be invited to a 1 hour online weekly group debrief session, where you would have the opportunity to reflect on personal and shared experiences with other participating artists. We would then collaborate on a final audio-visual piece from the material we produce individually. This final piece is led by a third research question:

- How can the practice be a way to forge intimacies and offer novel ways of communicating about shared experiences of distress given the ecology of our time?

Why?

The jump from the personal to the collaborative work is vital in exploring some of the tensions that may lie between personalised, collective and shared experiences of distress.

Duration

The research will take place over approximately 9 weeks: 6 weeks for the movement practice and 3 weeks for the collaborative component. The data collection will be undertaken either using digital environments and cloud-based systems, that is video conferencing services like zoom for discussion. You will then be invited to send your material video files and are advised to send them either as web links to streaming video hosted on a site such as Vimeo or YouTube or as video files transmitted directly via sites like WeTransfer or DropBox. Written and audio material can be shared as a copyrighted PDF document or via sites like Google drive, DropBox or Soundcloud.

Accessibility notice

This is a trauma informed project, intended for all dance movement artists, independent of mental, physical or cognitive disabilities, illness, impairments, or any other condition that tends to negatively affect one's equal access to dance. I aim to create a brave space where you can

explore your bodymind experiences through guided movement. I have strived to provide a programme that is equitable and conducive to generating dance movement material for all participating artists. The project welcomes people of all (adult) ages, genders, sexualities, races, body types, experience levels and is adaptable to people with different physical abilities. You will need physical space for the movement practice, you may choose to engage with the guided scripts in your own home, studio or outdoor spaces. It is entirely up to you where you choose to move. You will need a way to record your movement practice, this may be using a camera (you can use your phone camera if you have one), a voice recorder, sheets of paper, a pen and/or art materials. You may choose to record your practice in different ways using different recording devices or materials for different sessions or pick some and exclude others entirely. It is your choice how to record the material you generate throughout the journey and which material you select to share. You will also need a good internet connection and one device for the weekly 1 hour group debrief sessions and any optional one-to-one debrief sessions that will be taking place online via Microsoft teams. If at any point during the research, you find yourself not able to fully access online space, the guided scripts, or experience of this research, you are very welcome (but not required) to contact me so we can discuss your specific needs. If you prefer to speak to someone else than myself, you can also contact my supervisors whose contact details you can find at the end of this information sheet. You are not required to disclose anything if you do not want to.

It is never too late to request accommodations – our bodies, minds, and circumstances are continuously changing.

Safe Practice Guidelines

This project is not a clinical intervention and whilst embodied practice may hold therapeutic value, this practice research is not therapy. You may find somatically experiencing, moving with, drawing or writing about difficult experiences a potentially distressing experience in itself. I will include grounding techniques, offer one-to-one and participant group debriefing sessions and resources including emotional and psychological support helplines to you as part of the research. During the screening process we will discuss the degree of discomfort or distress that you may potentially experience given your personal history and the strategies you may employ or the networks you may reach out to if you feel a need for external support other than the grounding techniques and the one-to-one debrief sessions on offer by myself. Please let me know if you find anything stressful over the course of our conversations or would prefer not to talk about certain events or experiences. We can focus on other things that you are comfortable moving with, or if necessary, stop the research. There is also a risk that you may inadvertently share some personal or confidential information that you do not want to have included in any documentation or other

materials resulting from your participation. You have the right to review, modify and remove any information or comments.

About me

My name is Fabienne Formosa. I am a creative practitioner and a doctoral researcher with the Visual Cultures department at Goldsmiths College. Both my applied practice and research evolved from weaving 5 years of experience working in third-sector mental health services in London and a personal ongoing dance movement improvisation practice.

Get in touch

This document is intended to introduce the rationale of the project, however, if you have any further questions or would like to discuss any aspects of the project please do get in touch by sending an e-mail to fform003@gold.ac.uk. You do not have to decide today whether you would like to participate. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. If there are any terms in this information sheet that you do not understand, please ask and I will take time to explain them. Please also feel free to ask if you have further questions at any point later.

Purpose of the research

As an embodied practice-led researcher working at the intersections of mental health (MH) and the arts, I am interested in the way in which mental distress is treated as the problem and responsibility of individuals rather than a complex intermesh of personal and ecological entanglements. Western understandings of MH often also use highly circumscribed forms of storytelling of cure, like the Recovery Narrative; a “technology” widely used by mental health professionals, to prescribe a return from madness to “normal” existence measured by one’s ability to participate in the economic paradigm of individual productivity. I find these normative understandings to be deeply problematic when we are living in a time of multiple ecological crises and so much of our internal experience is influenced by what is happening around us. This mismatch between the dominant narratives espoused by psychological sciences and the tendency to overlook the complex ecological entanglements contributing to MH, compels me like many others within: the Mad Studies Project, the Climate Psychology Alliance, Institutional Psychotherapy, Psychologists for Social Change, Mental Health Resistance, Feminist and Community Psychology networks and more, to find alternative ways of understanding experiences

of distress that may start to problematise individualising narratives when considering the social, political and environmental causes, as well as the personal and internal dimensions.

I hope that this project may serve to contribute to these much needed new ways of thinking about distress given the added pressures of our times by producing these artistic embodied and personal narratives. It is important to be doing this work with people that may not be currently using nor have previously used the mental health system to research experiences of distress as shared experiences and thus not to be individualised only by those deemed as “mentally ill”. Your contribution would be invaluable in this attempt at troubling the dichotomy between those considered to have mental health issues and those that don’t – since we all have bodies and minds and may at times experience distress. Further, I would hope that the artistic work might offer a glimpse into another way of embodying, experiencing and expressing distress, through the moving body and outside of the language of pathology.

As a creative practitioner working with dance and movement improvisation with a background in psychology and professional experience in the mental health field, I am exploring how working with an artistic-embodied methodology, that gives value to the knowledge held in the body, may start to articulate this ecological complexity. My creative practice emerged from weaving my own autoethnographic practice working with dance movement improvisation, somatic and embodied techniques over the past ten years with my experience of working with others in crisis recovery services in London. Given the circumstances due to the coronavirus pandemic and the restrictions in place I will use digital environments for the research. We may also use props, contact surfaces like a wall or the floor, writing/drawing materials and audio-visual tech for documentation.

I take an experimental approach to the research and have developed a thematic journey in the form of 6 guided scripts from my own embodied practice of moving with these research questions. I would send you an audio recording of each of the scripts to facilitate your participation in the project and to guide you to generate movement material in relation to the themes the project is investigating.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary: it is your choice alone whether to participate or not. You may withdraw from the research anytime and the option to opt out and not engage with any with any invitation, prompt or guidance that may feel uncomfortable. Please read through this information carefully and go through the screening questions which are designed to help us determine if the project structure and aims meet your expectations and vice-versa. The screening

questions will ask you about your personal mental health history which you may feel is relevant to disclose as part of your participation of the project, your dance movement improvisation practice and your expectations from the research. If after reading this form you decide to participate in the research, I will book an online meeting with you to go through the screening questions together. All information will be treated confidentially and will be stored in an encrypted document which I would send you to sign together with the informed consent sheet before you may engage in any aspect of the work. Should you wish to withdraw from the research at a later date you can do so either by advising me in person, emailing me at fform003@gold.ac.uk or by using the contact details of my PhD supervisors given on the form. If you notify me of your withdrawal, all identifiable data will be destroyed. If any materials resulting from your participation have already been published, I will make efforts to remove all mention of you from the publications but cannot guarantee this will be possible. You can also ask me to modify or remove your contribution in the final piece if you do not agree with how it is being presented.

Procedures

The focus of the research, as detailed above will center around articulating the material and situated entanglements of our current embedded embodied experience as we move through this time of multiple ecological crises. If you agree to take part in this research, your participation will involve engaging with a themed guided embodied practice over ten weeks together with 9 other dance movement artists and myself. You will be invited to document the material that emerges from your movement practice as you engage with guided scripts using audio-visual technologies of your choice.

The guided movement scripts have been developed from my embodied practice exploring the research questions. I will be sending you one guided script weekly over a 6-week period. You are welcome to share all your embodied stories or excerpts from them using media in an art form you feel comfortable with - whether that is audio-visual material, visual narrative with or without audio, drawing, written material in the form of prose text, creative or poetic writing, stream of consciousness or audio narrative clips. It is entirely up to you to create your own version of embodied storytelling material in visual or poetic form using dance and movement improvisation.

Finally, in order to address the question on complexity as a collective experience of our times, I invite you to collaborate on a final audio-visual piece that would be created from the material we produce individually with the other participating artists on the project and myself. You would be credited for the artwork which we may use to exhibit the work and/or publish with online journals. I would also use the video for the meaning-making of my PhD research. I suggest that the outcomes

of this research articulating complexity, and shared experiences of distress may respond to some of the dominant (individualizing) discourses prevalent in MH today.

You can choose the extent to which you want to be involved in the editing process of the collective audio-visual material in the end. I will always try to find ways to make any changes necessary so that you are able to participate if you want to. Please do reach out if you have any accessibility needs that you would like to discuss.

Contribution

You are invited to participate in this research project on a voluntary basis. The project is a collective project that respects differences and the ethics of authorship over one's own project where each artist will produce their own individual outcomes as well as a collective outcome. There will not be any financial remuneration for the material you produce through the practice research, however, you will retain full authorship over the artwork you create and you will also be credited with authorship for the collective audio-visual piece as detailed in the "authorship, copyright and fair use" section below. I will produce my PhD research through this shared project and for this I will retain full authorship for the research, my thesis and any meaning-making I may extract from the artwork produced through this practice for the purposes of the research. Whilst the practice is not intended as therapy, the artistic practice may hold therapeutic value and is intended to be an enjoyable creative process for all involved. Your participation may also help to further scholarly research on experiences of mental distress and has the potential to inform the public about mental distress in the wider population, people not necessarily using the mental health system and finding ways of articulating experiences outside the language of pathology.

Authorship, copyright, and fair use

It is important to be clear that should you decide to participate in this project we would have multiple relationships to navigate through our work together. I am both a creative practitioner and a researcher in this project which raises different power dynamics according to the type of relationship we are enacting. Whilst you will retain full authorship of the artwork you produce through participating in the research and all artists will be credited with authorship for the final video I will retain full authorship over the research and the meaning-making derived from the artwork for the PhD thesis. These multiple roles and relationships will raise different power dynamics between us. We would be collaborating artists having equal power and say over decision making relating to the artwork but would be a power imbalance when I am in the role of facilitator and researcher facilitating the dance movement research and when I am extracting meaning for

the analysis of research. I will address these power imbalances during the screening process and we may revisit them again during one-to-one and group debriefing sessions. Please do let me know if this is unclear and if you would like further information on how our multiple relationship would work.

Confidentiality

Non-anonymised data will be used for this research, and you are required to sign the informed consent form before you can participate in this research. It is possible for you to change your names or to use a pseudonym as an alternative to using non-anonymised data from the beginning of the research or at a later stage. Please contact me should you decide to use a pseudonym after you sign the consent form attached. The information gained from this research will only be used for the objectives stated above. It will not be used for any other purpose. The findings from this project may be published in international conferences and journals. The resulting collective artwork may be disseminated in online journals and exhibitions. It is expected that only the participating artists in the project and will have access to the original research materials you share with me from your solo work while working with the guided themes. It may, however, be necessary for officials at Goldsmiths, University of London to access these original materials for regulatory purposes only. Any other use of these materials must be explicitly permitted by you at a later date.

Who to contact

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or at any other time. If you wish to ask questions at a time outside of a face-to-face meeting, you can contact me using the details below. You may also contact my MPhil/PhD supervisor if you want to speak to someone other than myself. Their contact details are also below.

MPhil/PhD candidate (researcher):

Fabienne Formosa
Department of Visual Cultures
Goldsmiths, University of London
New Cross, London, SE14 6NW

Tel.: +44 (0)7751775656

E-mail: fform003@gold.ac.uk

PhD supervisors:

Primary Supervisor

Dr. Alice Andrews

Lecturer in Visual Cultures

Department of Visual Cultures Goldsmiths

University of London

New Cross, London, SE14 6NW

Tel.: +44 (0)20 7919 7498

e-mail: a.andrews@gold.ac.uk

Secondary Supervisor

Dr. Marina Rova

Lecturer in Dance Movement Psychotherapy

Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies

Goldsmiths, University of London

New Cross, London, SE 14 6NW

Tel: +44 (0)20 7078 5016

e-mail: m.rova@gold.ac.uk

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Departmental Research Committee in the Department of Visual Cultures University of London. In reviewing the proposal, the Committee's task was to make sure that research participants are protected from harm.

Part 2: Screening Questions

Is there anything about your mental health history that you feel is relevant to share or discuss with me before you decide to participate in the project?

Do you have a physical or mental health condition that you think might affect your participation in this project?

If your answer to the previous question is yes, what measures do you have in place to enable you to participate safely in the project and where would you turn for support if you needed it?

Are you pregnant and do you need additional support to engage with the work?

In a few words, please describe your previous experience with dance movement improvisation practices.

Part 3: Certificate of Consent

Statement	Participant's initial
I have read the information presented in the Information Sheet about the project “ Embodied storytelling and the entanglements of distress: a practice-led research of mad experience in a time of crisis. ” or it has been read to me.	
I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this research, and received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.	
I understand that the themed guided scripts intended to facilitate my movement practice are not intended as a clinical intervention or therapy.	
I understand that I can choose to opt-out at any point of the creative tasks and embodied explorations.	
I understand that the weekly 1 hour online group debrief sessions will be recorded and that my decision to participate in these sessions implies my consent to be recorded.	
I understand that my participation in the group debrief sessions may be later used to inform the analysis of Fabienne Formosa’s PhD thesis.	
I understand that this project makes use of non-anonymised data and that I will be credited for my work and participation in the research.	
I understand that it is my responsibility to inform the researcher if I decide to make use of a pseudonym at the point of or after signing this consent sheet. I understand that whilst the researcher will make changes when possible, it cannot be guaranteed that it will be possible to make changes when material has already been published.	
I understand that the practice research serves three functions: 1) For me to produce solo movement material and to document it 2) For parts of the material to be used toward creating a final collaborative audio-visual piece. 3) For Fabienne to extract meaning from for the analysis and meaning-making of Fabienne’s PhD research.	

I am aware that I retain full authorship rights to the material I produce through the 6 week programme of this practice research.	
I have read the authorship and copyright guidelines and I understand that I will be credited as an author for the final collaborative audio-visual piece.	
I understand that whilst I retain authorship rights to my individual artwork produced and that I will be credited with authorship for the final collaborative audio-visual piece, the material will also be used for the researcher's written thesis and that Fabienne Formosa retains full authorship rights over the research project and her PhD.	
I understand that relevant sections of the research materials collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from Goldsmiths, University of London or from regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my responses.	
I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this research.	

Participant name	Consent taken by
Participant signature	Signature
Date	Date

Section C: “Long but Important E-mail”

Hello everyone,

I had a meeting with my supervisors earlier this week. Upon reflecting on the state of play of the project, it has led me to pause, rewind and go over some of the questions I have already asked you.

I understand that it seemed like the obvious next step - to produce a collective audio-visual piece from our solo material, given that it seems like it has been the more popular medium we each chose to document our practice in. However, I am very much with the silence and absences at this stage of the project. I am aware that the research was meant to come to completion over Easter break and we are now in May and only at the beginning of this collaborative process. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the strain many of us have been experiencing for various reasons including ill health and more environmental/ socio-political pressures, as well as other work commitments. I continue to think here with the logics of reciprocity as we move through this, aware that none of us are getting paid for our time and labour. Trusting that this project might, at the very least, offer each of us a space to tell our stories of pain, joy, dissent, a space to connect with one another, to share experiences, a space for nourishment and the possibility of, if not monetary, accumulating some cultural capital. Every task and question I have offered you I have done so with these questions in mind: What are you receiving in exchange for your time and contributions? Is this a fair exchange? Is this exploitative of our time and resources? As I spoke with my supervisors Alice and Marina, I became aware of some of my anxieties around this video editing process and the time demand involved, especially for those of us that lack the skills in this realm. Of course, a way to respond to this, as already discussed is to invite other artists with these skills to collaborate with us, but in response to this, my supervisors asked me *do you have to create an audio-visual piece?*

Which is why I come back to you with the same questions I asked you a few weeks ago. Do we want to create a collective audio-visual piece? Is anyone feeling intimidated by the software and video editing process or the time demand of this process? Do we want to pause here and come together again to consider other possibilities?

I leave you here with three:

1. Setting up a social media page, for e.g an instagram account for our embodied storytelling project that everyone can simply upload material to in all the various forms including text, audio, videos, drawings etc.
2. A website doing the same thing.. both of these options could become then living organisms where for e.g with an instagram page the audience could also upload their own videos responding to the theme using hashtags. A website could be something similar to this for e.g <http://www.toxicbios.eu/#/stories>
3. Setting up an exhibition... I'm not sure what the logistics of this would be given that most of us are in different locations!

I'm sure there are more!

May I kindly ask you to respond to this e-mail by Friday the 3rd of June? Please click “reply all” so everyone can see each other's responses. Let us know if you want to go ahead with the audio-visual piece, any of the above three options or sharing any other ideas you may have for our collaborative piece.

Of course, if everyone still wants the audio-visual piece, we shall go ahead with that but given the silence there I just want to make sure that this is *really* what we all want and if not, to explore what else it could be.

Warmest wishes,
Fabienne

Hey, Fabienne, I just saw everyone's replies and wanted to check in with you. How are you feeling about your project? I'm feeling a lot better than I was. I can't promise a lot, but maybe I can participate in the creation after all. I really like the idea of an audio-visual collaboration. Maybe a minute of video footage from each person's contribution, and perhaps some sound clips over the top. Could be taken from meetings or from videos. If we wanted to create an opportunity/invitation for further (and more open collaboration) we could create a blog or webpage that displays the video and welcomes other contributions. I like the idea of a space that's open to growth, as and when people feel inspired to add to it.

What do you reckon? Would you like to have a chat about it soon?



Sending lots of love.

Hi everyone,

Apologies for missing the deadline to reply... I wish I could dedicate more time and headspace to this project but I am really swamped with work at the moment. I am more than happy to send bits that I have recorded and for them to be used in whichever way, but I won't have time to contribute to editing... I could potentially do some simple posts on a social media/web page if that's what we decide to go for, but it wouldn't be anything of particularly great quality/have much thought behind it... I really wish that I could give more time and care to this beautiful project, but life has thrown lots of things my way since committing to it!

Thank you,

Nev

Hello all you lovely souls,

First of all again thank you Fabienne, this is such a great space and I'm happy to be a part of it (even if a small one). I'm currently working a lot because 1. Work is understaffed and 2. I'm trying to save up so that's been my reality. In terms of my participation. I'd be very happy for any material I've uploaded on slack to be used in a final video if that is the way we do end up going. I'm not too sure if I'll have time to learn about using that specific editing software because I'm not the most technically savvy person. So I may have a small part/no part when it comes to the actual editing but I'm very happy as I said for any of my material to be used by others editing if they seem fit:)

That's all from me,
Take in some sun,
Valia

Good morning all,

Thank you so much to Amanda, Priiya and Heidi for your responses so far.

I totally hear you and I really appreciate your thoughts. Heidi, I am sorry to hear of your ongoing health issues and very much hope that you will get some relief from the symptoms soon. I continue to feel with you and I am happy for your content to be included even though you don't have capacity to engage with the collaboration at this point in time. Feel free to tune in and out as you need to. Thank you to Amanda and Priiya for your clear responses, direction and offer of skill sharing. I also appreciate the time boundary you are setting Priiya, and relating to this move away from the digital space, as and when this is needed, as part of our self-care.

On a similar note to Heidi...

I have added some e-mail correspondence I had with Tammy before sending you this e-mail (see their channel on slack; shared with their consent) where they explain their current situation and contextualise their absence in the project. In summary, they are currently helping their parents relocate from Hong Kong to the UK due to the political situation there right now. This is leaving them in a time of uncertainty and disorientation, struggling to organise their time as they also have other ongoing work commitments. In response to this I have offered them to still be included in the project in the form of absence and silence. With their permission I have offered the possibility for some of the text they have shared previously after engaging with one of the scripts, the text explaining their current situation and any other writings they may offer reflecting the impact the political situation in Hong Kong is having on their life in the form of text that we may include in our collective piece together.

Valia and Nevena, how do we find you both and what are your thoughts on steps moving forward?

Warmly,
Fabienne

Heya, thanks Fabienne and everyone for sharing your thoughts and feelings. I am coming out of a long spell of unwellness and covid. I've spent weeks unable to work and am facing the daunting task of figuring out what changes I need to make to have functional health (which probably means moving, as part of my issue seems to be environmental). I also need to focus my energy on my PhD. As it stands, I don't know if that's even going to be manageable. As nothing about my life is predictable at the moment, I can't make any commitments. I very much would like something to be created from our experiences in the ways that people are suggesting, and I would be so happy to see my content included, however, I cannot do the work right now. Last night I danced for the first time in weeks. It felt wonderful! Then I got terribly dizzy with severe headache. My journey with movement feels very important right now. I'm not sure what I'm saying, but thanks Fabienne, because I am aware in a way I wouldn't have been had it not been for this process. I want to elaborate more, but have lost the energy right now 🧡

Hello everyone,

Hope the silences are windy and the skies are holding your clouds.

I have loved our process, our chats, our sharings and our bodies moving through the time and impulses Fabienne gave us. I do feel the nerves when I realise that all of our time and space is entirely digital. The possibility of having an audio visual anthology of our work really excites me. And I also know that my way of

life is less and less oriented towards staying virtually connected or working online, which makes it difficult to offer my time and energy on the project though I really wish to. Life is a complex amoeba!

I can offer my time and creative energy up until the beginning of July. I am well versed in audio/video editing and can work on things virtually as I will have access to good internet and a space to work up until then. After that I will turn into a hermit spirit, head underground and send warm fungi roots from below the layers of earth.

Warmly,
Priiya

Dear all,

I would be very happy to work on an audiovisual piece together. I feel we all have gathered enough material during the period of the research to make something interesting happen.

I feel to set up an Instagram / website/exhibition seems more time consuming and more of a commitment to me and I'm not able to put away extra time for this at the moment.

Looking forward to hear what other people's thoughts are,

Warmly,
Amanda

Hello Alice and Marina,

As advised in our last supervision I went back to the group and asked them the questions raised in our discussion. I am forwarding you the thread here so you can see for yourselves.

To be completely honest I am surprised that everyone's responses are a repetition of what each person has said previously. I was fully prepared for (what I had understood to be) the desired outcome to shift 1) By asking the questions again at a different time, aware that some people's circumstances have changed 2) By including your input and feedback, aware of introducing another power dynamic there.

I am grateful for going through this process and having everyone's responses summarised here. It was hard for me to show you concretely how or why I had understood the desired outcome to be an audio-visual piece because that decision was communicated via different mediums i.e weekly group debrief calls and e-mail correspondence, at different times so I was summarising on behalf of everyone when I was trying to give you the overall picture.

It is reassuring for me, as facilitator, given that my only job is to listen and reflect back what the group is saying, to have that reassurance that I wasn't steering the direction one way over another. As you will see in my opening e-mail, I did validate the earlier outcome and I did this because I wanted to show that I was listening - this is important to me. I wanted to open the space for a reconsideration, as advised, but I also did not want to undo the trust that I have built with the group over the time we have been relating for. I also chose to position myself with the group when I asked about time and resources because ultimately, I too am not being paid by goldsmiths for my research and my resources are finite too. Equally, yes my PhD is a form of cultural capital but I also want the outcome of this project to be a form of cultural capital for the artists.

It probably would have been better and easier to create an instagram page or a webpage and have everyone upload their material there but I must honour what the group wants. To me it is clear that the artists willing to give their time and energy to this collaborative piece want it to be an audio-visual piece.

I am checking-in with you here because I don't want to echo what I hear the group saying again and then go back on that again.

May I kindly ask if you could look over these e-mails and give your feedback/input here before I respond?

With thanks and best wishes,
Fabienne