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Lamenting the End of Time: Living, Dying and Grief in the Shadow of the Sixth Extinction

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Lamenting the End of Time

Living, Dying and Grief in the Shadow of the Sixth Extinction

Research submitted to the Faculty of Humanities,
University of the Witwatersrand,
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts by Research
by Chantal Nativel
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Course: DRAA8004A
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Declaration

I, the undersigned, Chantal Nativel, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by Research at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree at any other university.

I declare
I am aware that plagiarism (the use of another's work without prior permission and without due acknowledgement by citation of their source) is wrong. I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others according to the Faculty of Humanities.



Chantal Nativel
July 2020
Johannesburg, South Africa

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My supervisor Tamara Schulz for herding my whirling thoughts.
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Dedication

To the Anima Mundi, the living spiritual substance of Creation, the divine consciousness within all matter; and to my beloved parents for life and love.

Creative Layout

Students are advised to follow the Harvard style guide, including the use of Times New Roman typeface. As this is a creative research dissertation, I have chosen to harmonise its layout with the look-and-feel of my zine. I am therefore using Helvetica, a sans-serif cross-platform font. I am including in-text citations within the body text to ease flow of reading.

Trigger Warning

Sensitive content: This dissertation considers the possible end of time. It may be appropriate to have emotional support.

Abstract

This creative research enquiry was framed as a response to my singular personal existential struggle, eco-anxiety and grief in the face of the Sixth Extinction. The enquiry produced a mindful performative offering firstly in the form of a zine (digital and printed) entitled *ACT-i-ON: my random actions upon living, dying and grief in the 6th extinction*, a collection of narrative writings, photos and sketches as a lament. The zine was then transformed into a gallery of posters, and used as a script and background for an embodied lectern-lamentation. I used the methodologies of performance as research with auto-ethnography. The content gained form via journaling and documenting lived experience in a creatively expressive mode, including but not limited to narrative, poetic language, embodied practice and photography. My reflections drew on past trauma and grief as well as present anxiety in relation to the current milieu. I then shaped this documented experience into a 'ritual of lamentation' for the global suffering caused by humans to ourselves, and to all other sentient life on Earth, as well as my own personal grief. In this essay, I reflect on what this process meant. As a 'creative thought randomiser' or an empathetic chameleon who dashes off on anecdotal tangents, was I able to synthesise my lived experiences of wandering and wonderings into a narrative form and structure which was able to be shared with an audience? Was I able to lift or shift my own sense of unease and 'creative drought', to forge meaning while seeking my own place and significance in the world? The 'random anecdotes', and representations of mindful actions, have been an antidote, or healing balm for the malaise of this possible end of time. These performative rituals are offered as my own coping mechanisms to calibrate and re-calibrate myself, manage my general life anxiety, my eco-anxiety and grief. By seeking peace through centreing is it possible to find commonality – a conscious embodied-practice combined with mindful engagement and self-activism, which others may use to soothe themselves?

Contents

1. CHAPTER ONE: Journeying Inwards 8
    1. Introduction 9
    2. Background and Context to the Enquiry 17
    3. Auto-Ethnography 23
    4. Conceptual Lens 27
    5. Narrative Unfolding 30
    6. Data Distillation 39
2. CHAPTER TWO: Spiralling Outwards 58
    1. Reflections 59
    2. Conclusion 78
3. CITED WORKS 80
4. BIBLIOGRAPHY 96
5. APPENDICES 112

Figure 1: The printed zine at the gallery & theatre's entrance (Photo: Stacey Rozen) 15
Figure 2: Witnesses engaging with posters in the gallery before the presentation (Photo: Stacey Rozen) 15
Figure 3: The performer spiralling outwards during the embodied lectern-lamentation (Photo: Wolf Penny) 16
Figure 4: 2018 PaR exam (Photo: Lisa Petersen) 34
Figure 5: SPR: from mug to page 48
Figure 6: SPR: from page to gallery 49

1. CHAPTER ONE

Journeying Inwards

‘ … Grief is alive, wild, untamed and cannot be domesticated. ... We move in jangled, unsettled, and riotous ways when grief takes hold of us. It is truly an emotion that rises from the soul.’

(Weller, 2015)

Key Terms : action, auto-ethnography, breath, community, creativity, ecocide, eco-anxiety, eco-feminism, eco-grief, embodied lectern-lamentation, environmental arts, environmental humanities, grief, healing, lament, living systems, mindfulness, mindful embodiments also referred to as 'sometimes-practiced-rich-uals' (SPR), nature, performance, performance as research, person centred expressive arts, pollution, ritual, Sixth Extinction, spirals, submerged feminine, water, zine.

1. Introduction

This creative research enquiry is founded in seeking to re-enliven myself in response to personal grief compounded by eco-grief[1], through a creative endeavour.

In short, my malaise has been part personal, part global. Whilst I yearned for a modicum of creative expression and ease from the awkward body-mind aches of stagnation, all around was mounting evidence of the desecration and destruction of Earth's living systems and expressions of Life. As I grappled with personal grief and fear amidst the disconnection of modern urban life, the cacophonous suffering of sentient creatures at the hand of humans, and in mass die-offs from eco-calamities caused by humans, increased. The looming spectre of mass extinction chilled my bones.

The enquiry - How might the creation of a performative ritual of lamentation offer transcendence of suffering and a renewal of creativity in this shadow for the self and collective, was a response to what I have experienced as this overwhelming hopelessness in the shadow of the Sixth Extinction.

[1] '… a growing body of evidence demonstrates that climate change and its effects are linked to elevated rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress, and a host of negative emotions including anger, hopelessness, despair, and a feeling of loss. Researchers have dubbed these feelings "ecological grief".' (Cavanagh, 2019)

The investigation resulted in the creation of two mindful performative offerings, titled *ACT-i-ON: my random actions upon living, dying and grief in the 6th extinction* [2], the first was a 72 page zine (See Appendix 1), and second an embodied lectern-lamentation (a solo performance set in a ritualistic space of a theatre observed by witnesses. See Appendix 3) This will be expounded upon shortly.

In 2018, at the onset of crafting this endeavour, I wrote:

> For many years I have grieved – a low grade sadness and sense of hopelessness; I am in mourning for the state of the planet, and the state of humanity.
>
> There is no solution - I am disillusioned. Why bother, it is hopeless. The fish are all nearly dead. The land is poisoned. We have annihilated most everything, we drink and eat plastic. But yet I am deeply bothered. Should we not keep looking for solutions while we still have breath? Is there a way forward? Am I in acceptance or denial?

I further asked:

> Can a performative-lectern-lamentation with creative interactions help me / us envisage a future? Can it provide a space for mourning and the expression of grief for others? The gap is that no-one knows how to do this, and there is not a solution! Can we mourn what can never be healed … In modern society there are few places we're allowed to express our grief; can I give voice to my grief? Can I create a piece of theatre that is able to be informative and engaging around personal and planetary grief? Can this give me new impetus to Life? What can our own death teach us about how we are living Life? Can I create a performance which also has the possibility for the audience to have an embodied participative ritual to express their grief. (Nativel, 2018c)

[2] '… we have unleashed a mass extinction event, the sixth in roughly 540 million years, wherein many current life forms could be annihilated or at least committed to extinction by the end of this century.' (Ripple et al., 2017)

Setting the Compass to Lament

In refining the seeding process, I set the intention to find a way to live more fully or to 'live alive'. (Roth, 2014) I chose to not involve participants due to ethics processes regarding the possible triggering effect of the subject matter. For this reason I used practice or performance as research with auto-ethnographic methodologies in an attempt to a) discover if what I used for myself could be transferable to others, and b) examine and loosen the coils and springs evident in what I perceive as the spiral journeying of my life. An observation is that this spiralling motion is duplicated in the process of both the creation and reflections hereof.

By using auto-ethnographic methodology, a qualitative creative practice-based research, in which the researcher turns inwards to drawn on self as research material, I created something new, interpretative and performative, both in the writing and presentation with myself the central player. The offerings were evocative, and critical (Chenail et al., 2014) of what is, and was, current. Matchett, in her PhD *Breath-Body-Self: An exploration of the body as a site for generating images for performance making*, quotes Maréchal, saying auto ethnography '… involves self-observation and reflexive investigation" (2010:43) … and can be associated with narrative inquiry and autobiography (2010:43).' (Maréchal, 2010, cited in Matchett, 2016) I used narrative as a way to '… focus on a participant's narrative, or story ...' - mine and Earth's. It ' … include[d] art (an element of art-based research) … poetry, visual art, movement, or expressions through many different media.' (Dr. Rominger & Dr. Lane, 2018)

I combined auto-ethnography, with performance as research as defined by University of Cape Town's Professor Mark Fleishman, Head of the Centre for Theatre, Dance:

> ' … as a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events,

productions, projects, installations) levels, in search of a series of differences.' (Fleishman, 2012)

It occurred to me that my life could be described 'as a series of embodied repetitions' seeking a difference. The multiple configurations of it in the many roles I played as a producer for below-the-line marketing campaigns, pop-up store creation and management, brand and product launches, events, road shows and mall activations to multimedia, communication and industrial and corporate companies; as a transformational facilitator and coach or a public speaking trainer and adjudicator; when I operated as a writer and editor of scripts, newsletters, blogs, press releases or poetry, when I worked as an administrator, performer or director across sectors of the entertainment and edutainment arenas. Over more than three decades I had pursued many avenues of additional learning, undergone numerous personal 'development' courses, all of these with the purpose of seeking a difference. A difference in the way I felt in the world.

The intention of these repeated life motifs, my efforts to transcend or transform have always been to re-purpose myself, or self-healing; self-healing as an intention to develop (my bolded text):

> '… **a sense of personal wholeness** that involves physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of human experience...: Healing is the personal experience of **the transcendence of suffering**.' (Egnew, 2005)

I settled on a lament as the vehicle to convey my grief. The Oxford University Dictionary online, now *Lexico.com* defines lamentation as a '… passionate expression of grief or sorrow … ' (Oxford University Press, 2019b) where Eva Harasta and Brian Brock's *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion* explain that:

> ' … lament has a long association with the passionate expression of intimate and personal pain, … (also) … speaks of the cultural importance of expressing a common sorrow … ' (Harasta & Brock, 2009)

Frances Klopper in 'Lament, the Language for Our Times' uses 'Westermann's definition …: 'Lamentation is the language of suffering' … ' (Klopper, 2008)

articulating the inevitability of suffering and our necessity to express it. She names lament most aptly as ' … an existential wail …' (ibid)

I deliberated that by creating a lament, both a) the process of creation, and b) the 'doing of' the lament, that is the actual lament, that it might offer me the 'transcendence of suffering' or healing I sought, that this 'old bone' (myself) might undergo a renewal of Life through this rejuvenated meaning and purpose. Auto-ethnographically this would be firstly for me and by extension for others who are suffering similar grief and anxieties.

In reflecting on these processes, I found the question cumbersome, and deconstructed it into i) plain language and ii) a shortened form. This is how I understood my question:

i) How might creating (a lament), offer healing (transcendence of suffering) and a renewal of creativity, in the shadow of the Sixth Extinction, for me (and thereby for others too)?

ii) Could creating a lament heal and re-enliven or reinvigorate me whilst in the grip of anxiety, depression, and eco-grief, even during the unfolding of the Sixth Extinction?

Once more, in retrospect, the first sub question seemed to offer a more manageable investigative route: <u>what artistic form can contain the depth and breadth of such a huge existential condition - hence combining ritual, body and academic investigation?</u>

The Lament

The zine and the embodied lectern-lamentation were filtered through my subjective embodiment and carried my grief and anxieties, and were actions or activities in and of themselves, which assisted me in quelling some of these anxieties, and holding some of the grief. They also held evidence of other activities, or what came to be named 'mindful embodiments' or 'sometimes practiced rich-uals' (SPRs). These were mechanisms of data collection that I engaged in often, but not routinely, such as nature walks or photographic and audio journaling and even the ritual

process involved in the making of breakfast for the collective there. I call them rich-uals (a word play on rituals and riches) as I am enriched by them.

The zine spilled over and became a gallery of posters welcoming witnesses to an embodied performance. Here the zine's content became a script and backdrop. (See Figures 1, 2 and 3) Indeed, what artistic form could contain such an existential condition? I crossed the boundaries between theatre and ritual, stuck my toe into applied theatre, and drama therapy not for anyone else but myself. The quest was '…a form of intervention aiming to bring about personal change.' (Jones, 1996)

I struggled to define the lament in performance, which could be seen in multiple ways, evidenced by how I introduced it: 'Welcome to De(a)D Talks, ideas worth dreading, an exhibition, installation, presentation, performance, ritual, lament' (Nativel, 2019b) This looseness of definition continued during my oral with one examiner describing it as a 'ritual, performance, experiment, DE(a)D Talk, … presentation …' (Nativel, 2019c)

The invited witnesses entered a 'misted'[3] liminal space revealing neon spirals on the back wall. They were invited to sit on chairs and coloured ottomans on stage creating an intimate casually inclusive semi-circle. A toppled lectern, covered in black cloth lay on its side stage right, symbolically hinting at a lecture and simultaneously implying a coffin. Across the stage floor stretched an abstracted spiral outline of a crane created from white rope representing a labyrinth. Backdrop slides were projected from the stage floor with the projector also used for lighting effects when I passed through it. It was operated from the lighting box giving me, the performer, freedom of movement, and freeing both hands to hold a script. I made no attempt to memorize the script due to the short time frame and as I desired the informality of a poetry reading. I was costumed in black clothing, symbolic of my cultural tradition of mourning, and an honouring of the theatre tradition in which I was schooled of wearing theatre-blacks for exams, and worn by stage hands signifying the 'invisibility of the back stage worker' which I likened to

[3] A theatre smoke machine was used to create mist

being in shadow. Later I donned a white shirt as I moved towards community and heart, as purpose.

Below are images of the zine, the gallery and the performance space.



Figure 1: The printed zine at the gallery & theatre's entrance (Photo: Stacey Rozen)



Figure 2: Witnesses engaging with posters in the gallery before the presentation (Photo: Stacey Rozen)



Figure 3: The performer spiralling outwards during the embodied lectern-lamentation (Photo: Wolf Penny)

The entire creative research endeavour in all its messy spiralling, vortexes, and multiple outputs, partially succeeded in rejuvenating some marrow in my bones. My immediate impressions were that the creative processes gave me purpose and acted as an invigorator. However these answers tangle amongst each other given the seismic rumblings of the ecocidal[4] backdrop and my own personal and epigenetic foundations. No matter what I have achieved in this process I am still combing through the evidence trying to disentangle anxiety from creativity. Thus in answer to could creating a lament heal and re-enliven or reinvigorate me whilst in the grip of anxiety, depression, and eco-grief, even during the unfolding of the Sixth Extinction is yes, no and partially.

[4] Ecocide: 'destruction of the natural environment of an area, or very great damage to it' (Cambridge University Press, 2020)

2. Background and Context to the Enquiry

Planetary Backdrop – Casting Shadow

In 2013, in a New York Times online opinion piece, former soldier and Princeton scholar Roy Scranton posed (my bolded text):

> 'In the epoch of the Anthropocene[5]… What does human existence mean against 100,000 years of climate change? What does one life mean in the face of species death or the collapse of global civilization? **How do we make meaningful choices in the shadow of our probable end?**' (Scranton, 2013)

Since encountering Scranton's question and the start of this research, I am alerted to a rising mass awareness and activism around this global backdrop. The oft quoted 2018 UN's IPCC report urged 'rapid, … unprecedented changes' if, in the future, we are to have a 'sustainable and equitable society …' (IPCC Press Office, 2018) This is directly impacted by mass-biodiversity loss happening '… at a rate never seen before. .. eroding the systems that sustain life on earth...' (Watts, 2018).

Since this report's release a barrage of articles and reports have stressed the unlikely ability of humans to avert global extinction due to climate destruction with all its effects. Jem Bendell sounded the alarm in 2018 predicting 'near-term social collapse due to climate chaos …' (Meador, 2018), within a decade. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2019 hoped to build impetus for action to counter climate chaos's effects on the global economy (World Economic Forum, 2019) To further dash what is now termed 'hopium: irrational or unwarranted optimism' ("Hopium," 2009), in early 2019 Walter Strong, a CBC news writer quoted the UN environmental programme's advisor for the Arctic and Antarctic, Jan Dusik, indicating that the 'momentum of climate change will continue irrespective of the degree of ambition that we [show] today.' (Strong, 2019)

[5] 'Recent global environmental changes suggest that Earth may have entered a new human-dominated geological epoch, the Anthropocene.' (Lewis & Maslin, 2015)

Yet, the topic continued to be taboo, contentious and difficult to comprehend. José Luis de Vicente, curator of *'Després de la fi del món'* (*After the End of the World*) a future thinking exhibition held at Barcelona's Center of Contemporary Culture wondered why, given the all-consuming immensity of the global situation, it was not spoken about calling it 'the elephant in the room' and stating that knowing the science was not enough to galvanise people, because 'One must be able to feel its emotional impact, and find the language to speak about it.' (de Vicente quoted by Kabil, 2018). Finding language, and moving myself from the effect of the emotional impact into action has been a struggle that I too encountered in this research process.

Psychologist and economist Per Espen Stoknes's TEDGlobal talk, *How to transform apocalypse fatigue into action on global warming* offers five reasons for our not talking about it: distance, doom, dissonance, denial and identity, and suggests that 'So many of us are now suffering a kind of apocalypse fatigue, getting numb from too much collapse porn.' (Stoknes, 2017) My own experiences and responses during this research duplicate his list as I have oscillated between overwhelm and feeling at a 'safe-distance' from extreme weather, or where I have felt severe existential doom to feelings of exhilaration because I was on an adventure; I have multiple cognitive dissonances regarding the choices I make in my day to day living as I support industries that I believe to be part of the overall negative effect on the planet's wellbeing, that is I drive a car, I use electricity and so forth. Identity is examined more fully this section Condensing a Lifetime - Being in Shadow

Pierre Stalder, in reviewing psychologist George Marshall's book *Don't Even Think About It,* points to research that shows that *'*… problems like climate change so thoroughly confound human cognitive processes, people come to ignore them without realizing it, in a process called "disattention."' (Stalder, 2015) Marshall, like Stoknes, urges the use of personal story along with emotional language as a more empathetic way of broaching the subject.

Yet, Marshall also provides evidence that those who have been affected by climate breakdown disasters often take on a 'meta-silence' refusing to name the cause as the future is frighteningly unimaginable. Aggravating this are the findings of this study, 'Prediction-based neural mechanisms for shielding the self from existential threat', as reported on in the Guardian online, which claims human brains seem not to be able to process the concept of our own death:

> 'The scientists found that if a person's own face flashed up next to deathly words, their brain shut down its prediction system. It refused to link the self with death …' (Sample, 2019)

The construction of the lament was impacted by these communication, and existential, dilemmas, and in my combining personal and universal story.

During this research it has certainly felt to me that the doom-wards global fall has produced a possible tipping point with personal and planetary concern and grief launching global movements such as Extinction Rebellion, and spotlighting Greta Thunberg as a western icon for mass action. In January 2020 many thousand Australians countrywide, and 30 000 in Sydney alone, showed the effect of emotion on activism, collectively using their bodies as sites of agitation to oppose their government's stance on climate breakdown. Their discontent displayed in response to the cataclysmic fires that had decimated ancient forests, farm lands, homes and brought death to humans, millions of wild and domesticated non-humans even bringing some species to possible extinction.

At the World Economic Forum 2020, His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew warned that the world could not plead ignorance of the global living systems breakdown which ' … has less to do with Nature or the environment and more to do with the way ... we treat the world ...' (His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, 2020)

Eco-warriors are called fascists, as are those who deny that humans have created this planetary crisis, or that there is one. Irrespective of the intricacies of the cause, as author and speaker Charles Eisenstein articulates, it is the ' … top priority ... to protect and regenerate, ... restore and heal the ... living systems that maintain the conditions for life …' (Eisenstein, 2019b)

My response has been to what I experience as the desecration of the living systems that support Life, and the devastating effect on sentient Life and my entwined personal grief.

With Seven Billion+ I am NOT Alone

My research has shown I am not alone in suffering eco-anxiety, nor grappling with the existential quandary of making meaningful choices in the possible end of times.[6] From the University of Washington's Environmental Grief & Climate Anxiety course, where some ' ... feel it in our bones …' (Muhlstein, 2018), to Melbourne's *The Festival of Death and Dying* workshop, 'The Personal and The Environmental' with Sebastian Job (Banki, n.d.), which asked how grief and anxiety might be processed given the premise that personal and planetary deaths may be intertwined in and with each other. Climate activist Clover Hogan held a pertinent discussion with neuroscientist Kris De Meyer and climate psychologist Caroline Hickman in the United Kingdom called *Eco-Anxiety: Are We Doomed*?, where they addressed 'whether anxiety in relation to climate change is fuelling positive action, or polarization of opinion and inaction.' (ForceofNature, 2019) This cry for action and its potential effect was evident when Icelanders chose to hold an official funeral for a *deceased* (read melted) glacier. A plaque to future generations noted, '…This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it.' (Bowler, 2019) Greenlanders, and native Intuits whose daily traditional lives have been affected, are 'traumatised' (McDougall, 2019) and emulate the research on ecological grief.

[6] "Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, …, is one of many voices noting that we are now living in the 'end times' of late capitalism, which radically changes the ways in which we relate to narratives of progress and future (Berardi 2011a). For Berardi, our times are characterized by 'the cultural collapse of the most important mythology of capitalist modernity: that of "the future" and its associated myths of energy, expansion, and growth', (Berardi 2011b, non-paginated). We are 'post-future', bereft of the fantasy of a progressive and open future which reached its peak in the second half of the 20th century." (Baraitser, 2014)

Undoubtedly, I was, and am not, alone, and have been grateful for it in this overwhelming sense of mounting despair and grief. Climate coaching psychologist Megan Kennedy-Woodard wrote on climatepsychologists.com, echoing my sense of overwhelm:

> 'When we unpick our fears … about climate change… it can seem … existential … leave[ing] us feeling defeated before we start. ... You aren't alone. I have felt this desperateness too …' (Kennedy-Woodard, 2020)

It is against this backdrop that I sought to create a ritual of lamentation, which might help to ease some of this eco-anxiety and grief, for myself and others like Kennedy-Woodard, whose words bolstered me through the World Wide Web.

ReTURNing to Study – Attempting Re-enLIVEnment

In 2018, after a 30-year hiatus, I re-entered university without a research intention yet with the hope of finding new ways to tend to my river of pain, and desiring to re-animate my life. I wanted additional networks and a new personal narrative. In a process during orientation week I referred to myself in a drawing-poem as Dry Boned who searches, possibly for rebirth, under a Weeping Willow seeking water. In the performance as research (PaR) course in which I was enrolled, I described myself thus:

> '… I feel like I am an older bone … old and dry … polluted. …, a correlation …, between misogyny, … the suppressed feminine, … my deep disturbance with the state of our water, … rivers, … sea, the effect of it.' (Nativel, 2018b)

Soon thereafter we were asked what our research interest was. My intuitive response was '… → releasing body memory, and bodies of water and healing them' (Nativel, 2018a)

Decoding this response:

Since the human body is made up largely of water it could be called a body of water, and therefore was related to larger bodies of water (rivers and oceans) which were polluted. Additionally I saw water as the symbolic giver of life and representing unconscious emotion (Burger, 1998). I perceived a metaphoric parallel between body memory – epigenetic and personal experiences, or what Helen Nicholson in

Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre describes as the body archive or 'Foucault's … the stigmata of past experience' (Nicholson, 2005) polluting the body, mind and psyche of an individual (myself). My interest was in how we might release this memory pollution from the body and heal in ways that differed from those I had previously experienced.

Whilst dipping back into storyteller and Jungian psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estes' writings I found her account of the tragic story of La Llorna on point where she compares poisonous industrial river waste to the creative stagnation of a woman's life, which she describes as ' …the destruction of the fertile feminine' (Estés, 1994 p. 222).

Additionally, during this time we walked Rosie, our German Shepherd, along the plasticised local rivers, I experienced the Braamfontein Spruit and the Jukskei River as devastatingly polluted and in need of cleansing. Here I also reflected upon my 'polluted' internal and external states of an aging female body. For a number of years, I had endeavoured to do small clean-ups whilst strolling these water ways, with little effect. Often these waters run blackened with foaming sewerage; banks layered with years of built up debris, evidence of economic and social disparity of communities, mismanagement of resources, and our consumer society's demand for comfort and instant gratification creating runaway pollution. I escalated this to all waterways, and the deluge of plastic and other debris in the oceans.

I was so motivated by this that I applied to an all-female round-the-world research expedition looking at plastic contamination in the oceans, and the possible effects on women's bodies. I was selected to be one of 300 women chosen globally from over 10 000 applicants to sail and do research for one of the thirty legs. (See Patches of Light - Living Alive in Chapter 2 for significance.)

The source of this research enquiry was underway and themes were surfacing. Nicholson speaks of bodies being inscribed by 'Places and stories' quoting Kate Soper disclosing that this adds to our "'historical sedimentation' of selfhood" (Nicholson, 2005 p. 319) I was, and still am, layered with sediment. It is with this (hi)story that I approached the 2018 PaR exam.

Thus I had started on a research vortex for my 2018 PaR exam regarding water, women, myth, story, pollution, and personal grief. These themes impacted on this dissertation enquiry which then additionally encompassed the Sixth Extinction.

3. Auto-Ethnography

The Artistic Research in Africa Conference 2020 held at the University of the Witwatersrand recognised that ' … artistic research, with its emphasis on embodied knowledge and new forms of subjectivity represents multiple challenges for traditional academic hierarchies.'(Wits School of Arts, 2020) I attended it in the midst of grappling with the process of reflection on my overwhelming much-ness of multiple processes, SPR's and products. Chow and Wells recognise the:

> ' … problem common to most practice-as-research projects: if the 'thinking' immanent to practice exists only in the moment of practice, how can it be inscribed, set-down, transformed into 'knowledge'?' (Chow & Wells, 2013)

Director and theatre maker Phala O. Phala, when presenting his paper 'The Per(form)ance of Directing' emphasised that each body comes with experience and therefore a knowing or knowledge. He spoke of academia posing rhetorical questions as 'an itch we want to scratch' (Phala, 2020) but do not need the answer to. My inflaming question sat within this domain. He posited that in performance we have myriad other ways of being in the world, and reminded us that what is written is not always the truth. I am immersed in the subjective tides of my own body's felt and written truth, the paradoxes, turbulence, dualities, inconsistencies, complexities that I am aware of even more now that they have been microscopically scrutinised.

It was with this in mind that I observed a presentation and reflected on the presenter whose body emitted all the messages they wished to hide. What tacit meaning and or knowledge was conveyed in my performance? What of my embodied identity helped or hindered the conveying of the lament and what would I make of the process? These questions were left floating as I went to watch Italian

visual artist and musician Nicola Genovese's performance-dialogue 'A Novanta (90 degrees): A dissection of a set of gestures'. In the Q&A he spoke of performance as not only creating, but also a way of triggering, new knowledge. I asked if he was able to elucidate his process of academic reflection on his performances. His initial response was that he wanted to trigger conversation, and an audience member responded to my query asking, 'Should we? Is the reflection not the work?' Many in the room nodded, myself included leaving me deliberating the circular movement of creative research and my process. What legitimised and validates my processes? By whom and for whom? Is this not exactly what the conference was examining- (my) embodied knowledge and subjectivity represent multiple challenges for me and academia, because of the largeness of the question, because of the non-repeatability, because I am constantly transforming, learning and reflecting, because I am human.

Thus we grapple with auto-ethnographic reflection, an approach that '… acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist.' (Ellis et al., 2010)

Sarah Wall's 'Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography' in the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* eloquently reveals the struggle of auto-ethnographies; what is revealed, how much is critical? Just what of my '… highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding"' (Sparkes in Wall, 2008) were required? Wall continues:

> 'Ellis (1999) has acknowledged the vulnerability experienced by the autoethnographer in revealing him- or herself, of not being able to take back what has been said, of not having control over how readers will interpret what is said, and of feeling that his or her whole life is being critiqued.' (Ellis in Wall, 2008)

Indeed parts of this process feel like airing dirty laundry. When I heard dancer-psychologist Nobonke Von Tonder's keynote address at the 2018 *Drama for Life*

Conference referred to auto-ethnography as, 'the field where you find yourself – within any context – interesting enough to research as vital materialism.', it did not sound so revealing. The effect, she posited, was to 'produce new theory...' (Von Tonder, 2018), which sounded interesting. I have produced new knowledge, but not new theory. This ' … making myself the source of this knowledge, [has been] like standing at the edge of an abyss…' and may have more to do with my internal monologue of how '*all of this* [auto-ethnography] *can be about me*?' Yet, my supervisor reminded me during the oral that by sharing my grief of our dog Rosie's illness and death ' … it's about community as well, it's here when your beloved dog can stand in for the whales …' (Nativel, 2019c) Thus my story can be your story or theirs; my grief reflective for all who had lost a parent, a non-human companion, or who grieve loss of life via mass execution in factory farms or by mass extinction, just as I resonated with Bacon's auto-ethnographic reflections:

> '… My walking could be her walking or your walking or their walking… [the] words and image … a[n] … attempt to hold the experience, like an alchemical vessel.' (Bacon, 2010)

These are rebounding communal griefs as expressed in social media following the carnage of Australia's forest fires, and reminiscent of the losses experienced in California, Siberia and the Amazon. (I am only using fire as the example here.)

> 'None of us is protected from what lies ahead. Our wealth, status or distance from Australia won't save us. Every single living human being right now is bound and affected by this omnicide (the destruction of all life around us) and solastalgia (ecological grief for the worlds we are losing).' (Fedler, 2020)

The witnesses and I sat in community; I told stories, and my intention 'through narrative [was] ... to create a lived experience for the researcher and reader or listener.' (Dalrymple in Barnes, 2013) Josepha Sherman in *Storytelling. An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore* declares the 'gift of story is the bonding of a group. ... The shared experience softens the edges between individuals and brings everyone closer ...' (Sherman, 2008) The oral feedback pointed out that the way I had constructed and held the space was:

> ‘ … real and grounded … contained; [we were] … on the stage with you round like a spiral. There were times where I was able to easily look at the expressions of my fellow community members and I felt like I was part of, not separate from.’ (Nativel, 2019c)

Thus this was more than a ‘quest for self-understanding’ (Anderson in Dr. Lane, 2019) As stated, it was a desire for healing or transcendence of suffering, not only for me, but for the collective. Lane explains that the ‘The autoethnographer sees the universal through the particular’ and that those who come into contact with auto-ethnographic work, would be able to ‘generalize it to their experiences, provoking reflection and spurring knowledge development.’ (Lane, 2017). From feedback received from a witness via WhatsApp afterwards, ‘… it was so moving … brilliant. ... important to have humanity mirrored in its awfulness’, one can see that it brought a sense of the global picture to bear. In the oral an examiner commented that the flow I had been seeking was perhaps present, ‘maybe that's the river, the flow, the water, the experience, it's the looking up and seeing that there are others who resonate with your pain.‘ (Nativel, 2019c)

Psychotherapist Robert Romanyshyn remarks in *The Wounded Researcher: Levels of Transference in the Research Process*, ‘that research is filtered through our own experiences, and possibly directed by Soul.’ (Romanyshyn, 2006) Was the creative research ‘output’ what expressive arts psychotherapist Natalie Rogers and Estes had meant by a reawakening of the soul-life, the spiritual life within us? Crucially, this ‘ … Research …, put[s] one in service to those unfinished stories that weigh down upon us individually and collectively as the wait and weight of history …’ (Romanyshyn in Anderson, 2007) The cold grief that washes over me and others in the shadow of the Sixth Extinction certainly continues to weigh heavily.

4. Conceptual Lens

Eco-feminism, Stories and Me

Acclaimed scenographer, Es Devlin, suggests in *Abstract: The Art of Design* (Brian Oakes, 2017) that framing an object, the act of placing a boundary around it, creates the desire to break from the frame. In my attempt to find the form of this enquiry, I had a gallery's worth of conceptual frames.

Underlying the lament is the broad conceptual frame of eco-feminism - humans' disconnection with Earth which allows or results in us polluting and pillaging her merely as a resource. Embroiled in this is story '… tales are, in one of their oldest senses, a healing art.' (Estés, 1994) This enquiry is an amalgam of my stories.

During this research I came across Mary Mellor's definition of eco-feminism, a '… movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women.' (Gyorgy, 2018) This melded with my feelings and explained the destruction wrought on Life through a frame I was relating strongly to. I had drawn parallels with the feminine as symbolised by water, and then extended this to nature, or rather Mother Nature, and the earth or Mother Earth.

As researcher, I was influenced by my own complicated relationship with Nature; a dislocation from, and desire to be in it; feeling that I excluded myself from the feminine or Mother Earth by refusing to bear children into a life of strife, and as such creating a partial non-identification with the feminine, but also not being able to identify as male.

As a former actor and applied theatre practioner I was also interested in this as story, personal and global; how we were communicating with each other, how story influenced us and the potentiality of changing our current global actions through experiencing different stories. The story of extinction seems non-transformable, as if it were reflected in my cyclic or personal spiralling narrative. As a species we seem to be heading, non-transformatively, in a straight line, off the cliff. Former environmentalist Paul Kingsnorth, in his essay, 'A Storm Blown from

Paradise', suggests 'Mass extinction and climate change represent the collateral damage of linear progress.' (Kingsnorth, 2018)

All around globally installed narratives of man's intellect over Nature's cycles of life and death were evident. *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* calls this narrative a dangerous 'myth of progress' (Kingsnorth & Hine, 2009), story-teller and psychologist Sharon Blackie, names it the 'myth of more' (*The Mythic Imagination / Sharon Blackie / TEDxStormontSalon*, 2018), news site Truthout writer, Justin McBrien labels it 'eco-genocidal accumulation' (McBrien, 2019), and Joanna Macy in the *Post-Doom Conversation* series names it the 'devouring industrial growth system'. (*Joanna Macy Post-Doom*, 2020) Eisenstein explains in a podcast *Why We Think Only the Measurable is Real* that 'conceptual reductionism … [or] … the cult of quantity' (Eisenstein, 2019c) is blind to anything that is non-measurable, such as relationships, beauty, sacredness, or community and because they are ignored or unseen they decay.

These myths have fed my personal narratives of survival and self-worth; there was a sense of never quite enough, not enough work done no matter the non-stop labour, nor enough money earned, additionally being un-aligned to the ethics of certain companies who employed me created further internal schisms and wore body and spirit down.

Grief Studies

Grief studies added nuance – reconnection after loss and disconnection, influenced by Joanna Macy's *The Work That Reconnects*, 'drawn from deep ecology, living systems theory, and spiritual traditions'. (*Joanna Macy & Her Work*, n.d.) In 2019, I attended a workshop facilitated by Skye Mandozay who describes The Work thus:

> ' … an attempt to address the crisis of perception, otherwise known as 'the delusion of a separate self', that is believed to be at the core of the ecological, social, and economic troubles we are currently facing. In this way, it aims to help facilitate the realization of what Thich Nhat Hanh calls 'Interbeing.' (Mandozay, 2019)

Participating in this workshop was a significant marker of being in the company of others as deeply grief stricken as myself and being allowed to express it. The importance of community and its effect were empowering.

Additionally, author and developer of Soul-Centered Psychotherapy Francis Weller's 5 Gates of Grief guided me to further understand that grief should be held in community and that potentially the river of pain was the unconscious longing for connection to Nature. (Rabke, 2019) At the 2014 *Minnesota Men's Conference* he spoke of the enormity of the grief we feel and carry alone in our disconnection from Earth. (*Francis Weller*, 2013)

Lament and Ritual

Intertwined in this was lament (as defined in the introduction) - the expression of the feelings, emotions, thoughts and responses to the stories of losses, mourning, and bereavement. These I attempted to contain or express through my embodied rituals (swimming, walking, making breakfast, etc. which will be explained more fully in this section) which gave a semblance of 'control' over the losses. Norton and Gino explain that 'perceived control - underlies the effectiveness of rituals in alleviating grief.' (Norton & Gino, 2014) Richard Schechner, theorist and professor of Performance Studies wrote from a performance studies perspective which I found aligned to the repetitions of PaR. My 'Rituals [were] performative: they [were] acts done; and [my] performance ….[was] ritualized: …' (*Performance Studies*, 2012) Both in the constructing of the zine and embodied lectern-lamentation I used ritual and prayer as described by Sarah Kerr in her PhD *Dreams, Rituals, And The Creation Of Sacred Objects: An Inquiry Into A Contemporary Western Shamanic Initiation*:

> 'Rituals use prayer and symbolic action to invoke the creative life forces of the cosmos (however you define them) to act on behalf of a particular intention.' (Kerr, 2012)

Person Centred Expressive Arts

Encircling all of these were what Rogers calls Person Centred Expressive Arts where I desired to 'tap the source' so that I might ' … open … to a universal energy force'. (Rogers, 1993) This was done by using multiple methods of creation (photography, writing, mindful embodiments, etc.) in search of a way to bring me to an 'inner core or essence which is our life energy.' (ibid)

Roger's book *The Creative Connection* offered processes to inspire a rediscovery of my 'innate creative ability.' (ibid p.1) where she placed emphasis on integration, not an end product nor it's excellence or professional aesthetics, as an entry to healing or 'wholeness'. She stated that 'What is creative is frequently therapeutic. What is therapeutic is frequently a creative process.' (ibid) I used expressive arts (EA) to access ' … the emotional, intuitive aspects of [myself] in various media' as a means to 'foster[s] emotional healing, resolves inner conflict and awakens individual creativity…' (ibid)

Whilst I am not a therapist I utilised mixed or multiple media to explore my enquiry. I adopted a person-centred facilitation stance with myself, that of holding 'an empathetic, open, honest congruent and caring' attitude. Further I grappled deeply with seeing myself as having 'worth, dignity and the capacity for self-direction … to trust in an inherent impulse towards growth …' (ibid p.3) as a therapist might work with me.

5. Narrative Unfolding

Condensing a Lifetime - Being in Shadow

What follows are autobiographical snapshots of the central player, myself, in this auto-ethnographic journey. I request that you the reader keep your eye on my repetitive searching for reinvention, the spiralling towards action, the still points and

stagnations and the re-seeking of balance within myself. I speculate that this difficulty to find peaceful still points, or a sense of control over personal circumstances, is part of my existential predicament which is reflected in the global background.

I offer my most recent public-face profile: This sea-fearing land lubber dons multiple maverick guises: part creative – actor, director, scribbler; part organiser, producer; part 'wholing-facilitator'. Or, I can indicate a diverse background in the performing, and healing arts; call myself eclectic, speak of a freelancer's life as mostly serendipitous or governed by random action, but this is not yet adequate detail as a foundation for the research journey.

My background in the performing and healing arts was prompted by a childhood desire to alleviate my, and other people's 'suffering'. Although I could not articulate it at the time I sensed performance could lift people's spirits through laughter or by allowing them to express emotion, or by seeing it expressed. (At university I discovered this was called catharsis[7]; and it also explains why I was drawn to applying drama and theatre in the workplace.) Performance allowed me voice, expression and play, and I pursued it relentlessly, eventually studying drama at university and working professionally as an actor for many years. The skills of performance buffered me against the multiple demands of life because of its chameleonesque qualities, and I branched into the healing arts, facilitation using drama, and producing events. This route was not linear or sequential rather it continued to twist and turn responding to emotional, intellectual and primarily economic needs of looking for extra 'strings to my bow'.

Hence my sense of my life is that it has been underscored with rhythms of movement and stagnation, my emotional life often at odds, feeling unfulfilled and un-accomplished, with an undercurrent 'river of pain' that I had ascribed to childhood events. Thus ran the parallel thrust of my calling to the 'healing arts' as a

[7] 'Catharsis: The process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.' (Oxford University Press, 2020)

practitioner of a variety of modalities. My five year old's intention held firm - *how to alleviate my and other's suffering*; how to move through the world with more ease and purpose and less pain or interior un-ease. The 'healing arts' therefore co-joined much of what I had learnt as an actor; that bodies carry story.

I had witnessed that our stories are held all over our bodies, and how when shared, we might transcend our suffering. In Burt Hellinger's constellation work, I witnessed systemic entanglement and people's versions of family myths that trapped or anesthetised them; as a facilitator of the blindfolded embodied contemplative practice of Frank Natale's trance dance, participants awakening to their body's / unconscious mind's stories to find liberation; for years as an actor I told other people's stories, and through massage, reflexology, reiki and energetic work I held people's bodies as they reworked their deep tales. In different rituals, I have explored the nub of some of my narratives whilst vision questing in the wilderness, or days involving long dances without food or water, and in communion with nature on plant journeys. As will be described later in this paper, my body revealed story during the creation of both the 2018 PaR exam, and in my dissertation research journey of creating this lament. During this research in Germany although I felt my body failed me in the studio, or I it; it certainly shouted out stories of my losses, hopes and dreams.

Over many decades I continued primarily as a freelancer bounding from one mode of work, or being, to another searching for economic stability and emotional and intellectual purpose, none seeming to present simultaneously. What was constant was I could only name who I was by the activity at hand. I have found it difficult to define myself. I am still grappling with these constantly changing internal and external currents. Are these feelings of being at the whim of great cosmic currents a consequence of childhood wounding, and have they merely been exacerbated by the planetary background? Veronique Mead M.D. defines trauma as (my bolded text):

> 'An experience … that **we perceive as overwhelming**. It may feel inescapable and it occurs outside of our control. At some level conscious or unconscious

> trauma feels life threatening even if it does not actually put our lives in danger.' (Mead MD, 2018 p.24)

Psychiatrist Bessel Van Der Kolk points out that 'Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies (Kolk, 2014 p97). This might explain why my 'past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort … [and my body] constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs ...' (ibid)

Microcosmically my small world has always felt under threat; in the macrocosm all Life is under threat. Our present global situation mimics that of the 'threat of non-being.' (Wildman, 1994) expressed by the twentieth century Existentialists. If the world, as we know it, is near its end, then everything, not only research, lacks meaning. This search for meaning and purpose and a sense of non-control has been part of my general condition since I was a young child and has been exacerbated by my awareness of the present global conditions.

Suffice it to say over time I moved further and further away from creative endeavours and more towards paying bills, further away from play and closer to despair. Estes suggests in *Women Who Run With The Wolves* (my bolded text):

> 'It is play, not properness, that is the central artery, the core, the brain stem of creative life. The impulse to play is an instinct. No play, no creative life.' (Estés, 1994 p.171)

So it was that in 2018 the object of research had come to another frustrating dead-end in her life maze. Estes again accurately described my internal life at that time:

> 'The most common effect of pollution in women's creative life is loss of vitality … when the creative life dies because we are not tending to the health of the river … we feel loss of energy … tired. We become … poisoned by pollution … and stagnation of our riches. Everything feels tainted, unclear, and toxic.' (ibid p. 224)

Aligning Performance as Research and Life

Research Methods 2018

> 'I hope you will go out and let stories, that is life, happen to you, and that you will work with these stories from your life - your life - not someone else's life - water them with your blood and tears and your laughter till they bloom, till you yourself burst into bloom.… That is the work. The only work' (ibid p.346)

This quote lit the path of constructing the 2018 PaR exam, the creative research proposal, the zine and the performative presentation or embodied lectern-lamentation.

The 2018 PaR as an Indicator for Pursuing Future Work

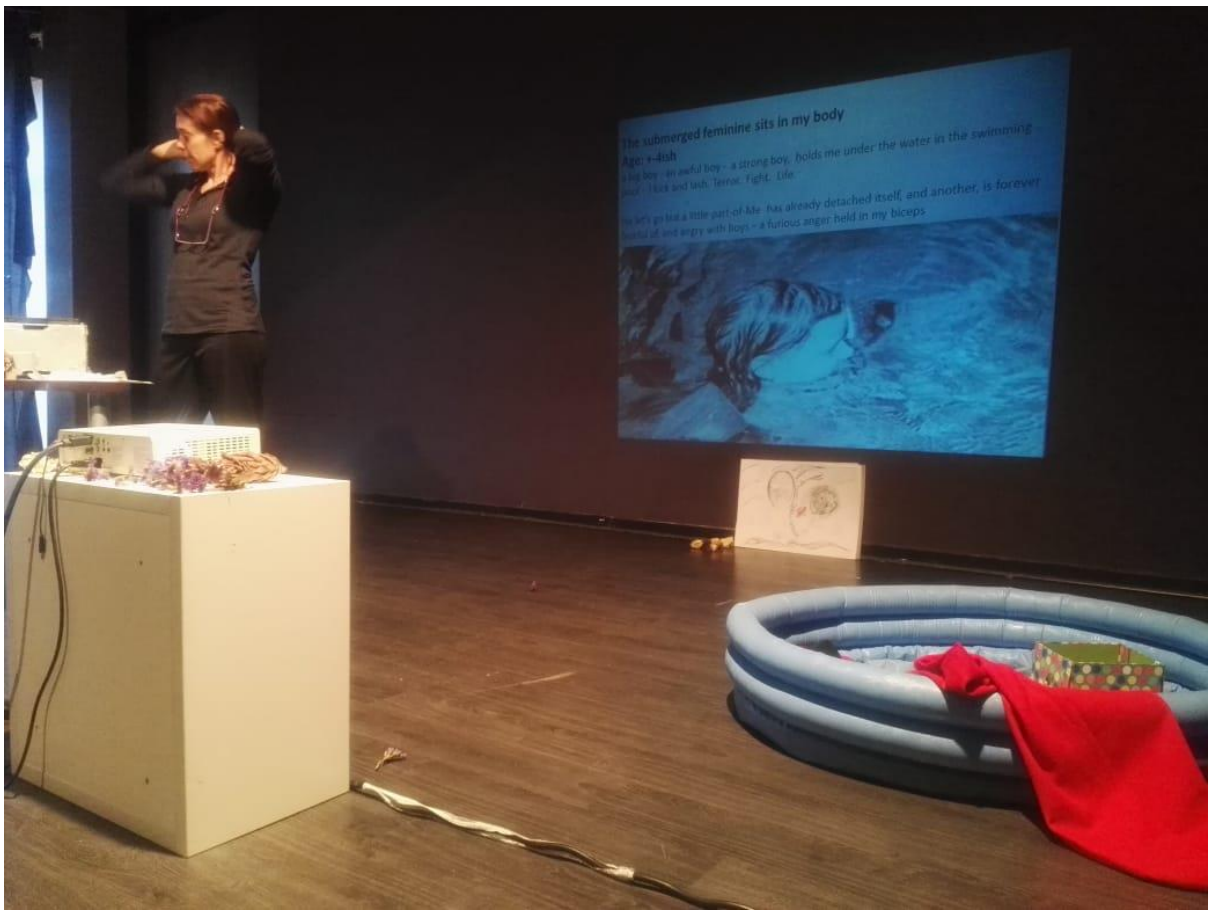


Figure 4: 2018 PaR exam (Photo: Lisa Petersen)

Stage left - A waterless blow-up pool to contain the submerged feminine, and symbolising plastic pollution and consumerism.

Elements of grief - Scattered dried flowers from my mother's funeral; a sketch-poem of my mother's death against the back wall.

The PaR was an amalgamation of my personal stories around what I started to explore as my submerged feminine, a theme I carried over to my initial presentation for this dissertation. As I had found no definition at that time I described it thus:

> an archetype borne by the Othering and subjugation of the feminine by the 'myth of progress' (Kingsnorth & Hine, 2009) I see it as the result of the 'destruction of the fertile feminine' (Estés, 1994) which not only is a sign of the death of the creative life of a woman, but all the internalized oppressions and beliefs, which create anxiety, grief and stuck-ness. The gendering of water as a feminine element, with the underlying thematic of pollution creates the submerged feminine. (Nativel, 2019a)

Praxis met intention in the form of a formal presentation injected with performative elements. I made parallels of what was, and had, happened internally for myself - my 'gnawing interior discomfort' and with what was happening on Mother Earth. It was a reflective journey, weaving together some of my personal embodiments of certain archetypes, and grief. Sub stories articulated through poems, photographs and stories commented on my physical and emotional journey, from the present and past. The blue of the slides background stretched across the back wall as if the witnesses could see through a water window. The ending was un-choreographed allowing me to respond to the full presentational performance intuitively.

The Significance of this Performance

The performance was enlivening and I believed I might have some further tales to articulate. I was drawn to exploring performance again with the intention of creating awareness of the global ecocidal story. I considered the frame might work for other performative endeavours I might create. Viewing this with regard to the dissertation there are clear repetitions of themes, presentation style and my own grief. So too

are there similarities of anxiety in the creation of the offering, in the achievement of communicating something I deemed important, and interestingly, in a sense soon after the event of life returning much the same to how it was before.

Thus I was on a relentless research path tracking my responses to anxiety, trauma and what I was witnessing around me, rivers of pollution and growing global grief. I was bobbing metaphorically in a personal sea of plastic pollution which mirrored the real world's demise, that of the consequence of the Anthropocene where humans have caused the deaths of innumerable species, the probable death knoll of our civilization and irreparable damage to our planet. I was in overwhelming grief, compounded by my mother's death (2018) and Rosie, our non-human companion's cancer diagnosis. The magnitude of the global situation, and my losses emphasised Scranton's - *How do we make meaningful choices in the shadow of our probable end?* The pollution was symbolic of death and dying. Grief and trauma immobilised me and my old existential quandary - *what is the point of it all*, and *how do we carry on* – played on repeat, in my head.

In my life there have been many times when I have felt called to the grave, days where I have felt ghoulish, only partially animated and alive. I have experienced soul-loss and a definite loss of creativity and vitality. With the benefit of hindsight Estes' reminder is even more poignant for me; that the Latin 'creare' means 'to produce, to make (life)' and 'Like La Llorona, we have to drag the river for our soul-life, for our creative lives.' (Estés, 1994 pp.231 - 232). The making and telling of personal story seems to be a means for me to *make life*. Just as Estes links soul-life to creative life, in *The Creative Connection*, Natalie Rogers connects spirituality to creativity:

> '…creativity is a life-force energy that flows like a river through each of us. Dam it up and we become physically ill, blocked and physically stressed. (Rogers, 1993 p.187)

It is through using expressive arts that Rogers posits we can infuse flow in the river again, thus 'Reawakening our creativity leads us to the spiritual path.' (ibid p.187)

The PaR had given me a taste for performance again; I had been re-spirited via lamenting my mother's death, and calling all witnesses present to hold all suffering sentient creatures in their hearts. Could another creative enterprise help me further transcend my river of pain? Could I find reawakened life? What might I create or produce?

Live Alive

People such as myself who swing between 'stuck-ness' and a sense that we must do something, anything to 'make meaningful choices in the shadow of our probable end', can be guided by Holocaust survivor Viktor E Frankl as we attempt to create purpose or meaning for ourselves '(1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something…; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering.' (*Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy*, n.d.)

Yet taking action and making meaningful choices was increasingly difficult for the last many years especially whilst I slipped down the information rabbit hole regarding climate breakdown, dying systems and mass die-offs. I chanced across, and resonated with, a definition of healing by author Geenen Roth (my bolded text):

> 'The purpose of healing is to be awake. And to **live while you are alive** instead of **dying while** you are **alive** ... Healing is a process.' (Roth, 2014)

Eisenstein wrote back to this non-aliveness as the consequence of the loss of the 'interconnectedness of all things. To not feel that, is to be not fully alive. It is to live in poverty.' (Eisenstein, 2018) This desire to *live alive* has been a daily challenge for me against the backdrop of the Sixth Extinction.

I must note that there is a movement criticizing the use of this term. McBrien vociferously states that ' … to call it the "Sixth extinction event" is to make what is an active, organized eradication sound like some kind of passive accident.' (McBrien, 2019) He goes on describe it as 'the First Extermination Event' (ibid) resulting from

the process ' … by which capital has pushed the Earth to the brink of the Necrocene, the age of the new necrotic death.' (ibid)

I emphasise my responses to this 'necrotic' world have been through my subjective lenses[8], my embodied identity holding my personal griefs of the loss of my parents, my non-human companion, my creativity, vitality and purpose and what I experience as planetary grief regarding extinction events and disregard for life. I cannot separate these overpowering griefs from each other. They are enmeshed. As such I see the demise of our planet, and all struggling sentient life on her, mirrored in my singular personal existential struggle. Whatever we may name current events I witness them as 'the great unraveling'[9] (Work That Reconnects Network, 2012) of the living and societal systems, and I am often grief stricken when confronted by the extreme and far flung suffering that has been unleashed on so many, not only as mass extinction events unfold, but the daily violence's of our societies to human and non-humans alike. I am also acutely aware that as I grieve I contribute in multiple ways to the problems and as such am plagued by cognitive dissonances.[10]

[8] I note that I am seeped in western and apartheid privilege, drenched in formal education, colonialist and patriarchal structures. I have a 'fortunate' position presently where I can have anxiety about the future from my desk, and I am not presently suffering from famine or war or extreme weather events.

[9] 'The Great Unraveling is the story told by scientists, journalists, and activists who have not been bought off or intimidated by the forces of the Industrial Growth Society. Drawing attention to the disasters caused by Business As Usual, their accounts give evidence of the on-going derangement and collapse of biological, ecological, economic, and social systems.' (*The Work That Reconnects / Practices*, 2017)

[10] The inherent contradictions between the on-going grief and the complicity in the destruction of what I am grieving for are not, I imagine, uniquely mine but felt by many of us trapped in the cycle of consumption, contribution to destruction, etc.

6. Data Distillation

Post my proposal, I applied and was accepted to a 'body-based art making programme' (*Placement Programme*, 2019) in Germany. The purpose was to immerse myself in movement and performance for the creation of the lament.

My implicit naïve wish, specifically there, was that the research would culminate in some marvellous one-woman show that my unconscious mind conjured and presented to me fully witty, pithy, concise and mesmerizing; this, strangely, was not to be. The experience was exasperating on multiple levels, and did not match my perception of 'new possibilities' (ibid) of performance for myself [11]. Additionally the constant communal space, with eventually up to 70 people, was a stretch for a crowd phobic hermit.

The crowds however did not scare the gnawing MA spectre breathing its pungent breath on me – *you must make a performance, what is performance, why don't you like improvisation? Why don't you like contact improv? How come you no longer want to perform?* And my usual - *what is research, is this research, what exactly is creative research, what is a Master's,* and the show stopping *what's the point?*

I was confused too; the countryside brimmed with life, apparent peace and no creeping extinctions to my tourist's eye. Research in late 2019 disproved my perception, 'Alarming' loss of insects … recorded' in Germany. (Briggs, 2019) I was angered by the failure of my research objective, and with the accumulation of personal space anxieties, aging-aches and disappointment, each day was an exercise in re-resourcing myself with sanity via mindful embodiments. I was still in malaise.

[11] I was trained as an actor at Wits University from 1983 – 1987 and worked as a professional actor for much of my adult life.

Sometimes-Practiced-RICH-uals

Jane Bacons' journal article 'Sitting/Walking/Practice: Reflections on a Woman's creative process' so aptly describes my transition from the expectation of coming away from Germany with a performance to finding something else, something I could not name until afterwards:

> 'Pause, notice…Now the body is different – less able, less willing, less, just less. And there is something there that wasn't there before, ... Anyway, she feels different to me. The processes of invocation are different now. No longer dancing in the studio, now walking in this place …' (Bacon, 2010)

My sanity was preserved in Germany by 'walking in this place' and the practices I named as SPRs. Looking back over researching grief, and being thrust before the looming Sixth Extinction, with its consequential eco-anxiety and grief, I note other SPRs such as contemplative mindfulness practices, swimming, run-walks, dance, home-rituals, photos and crafts work have also kept me afloat in the past. However I needed to mindfully summons them, during the research and in all the years before. This is what I interpret as summoning the creative forces of the universe in ritual. When I am actively mindful, or actively mindfully moving, I am able to shift some of my 'suffering'.

Over decades when I have embraced these SPRs searching for my 'transcendence of suffering' (Egnew, 2005), the easier it has been to continue with daily life. My intention to 'live alive' (Roth, 2014) requires mindful action (even if that means sitting in stillness and silence). It is, once again, only in hindsight that I can recognise this. It is in reflection that I recall a 17-module course, draft titled *Life skills 101: the forgotten manual,* I penned in 2017. Due to certain unforeseen happenings it remained, ironically, a forgotten manual. As I write this I note I must change the name! Humour aside, the reason I resurrect this is two–fold:

i) It is an example of my particular life cycles and spirals. Herewith an excerpt:

> 'In this time of sensory and information force-feeding we respond with overwhelm or numbing – neither might be the most useful. Awareness,

or being mindful, can help us have some control on how we act in the world.' (Nativel, 2017)

What followed were lessons in breathing techniques, body consciousness, vocal support and expression, and awareness of internal feelings and external spatial orientation.

ii) SPRs are more than a list of to-do's mentioned above. Embedded in the doing are skills that I have learnt throughout the entirety of my life; in drama school (breathing techniques, body consciousness, vocal support and expression); as a movement specialist and actor (body awareness - internal feelings and external spatial orientation); skills accumulated from studying various healing techniques, meditation, acting, constellation and systems work (centreing the mind, extending the mind into the field, being present).

I called on all these whilst making breakfast, or walking in the fields grappling with fear of rape and murder[12], or joyfully seeking cranes or crooning to cows. They brought more quiet to my mind, more ease to my body, and helped me stay focused on immediate tasks without projecting myself into the future. They helped me navigate what was at times a very claustrophobic and maddening atmosphere.

These actions provide a partial answer to the research pursuit - *might the creation of a lament ease my suffering and spark creativity*. Action is the cure to anxiety (climatepsychologists.com, 2020) These SPRs were mechanisms which I called on constantly. This is certainly a powerful re-finding, a re-remembering, in my research.

Creating Creative Components

Returning deflated from Germany, I attempted to distil the chaotic sprawl of data into a cohesive artist form to *invoke those creative cosmic life forces.*

[12] No matter where I travel my caution and fear tendrils are always on the lookout for danger.

I selected seemingly random samples from hours of experiences distilled in audio recordings, journaling, narrative writing, reflective-walk notes and photos taken before and during my trip in an attempt to herd this data into an organised assemblage to craft a performance.

I started a number of scripts, embedded with theory, climate change knock-knock jokes, canned laughter, and masks of Donald Trump, Greta Thunberg and Jair Bolsonaro. I was inserting facts regarding how runaway temperatures impact on suicide rates and how hormones in water are subversively asserting the feminine.

Additionally there were symbols I wished to weave in such as cranes, trees, and spirals. I had fallen in love with the trumpeting call of the 'common crane (Grus grus), also known as the Eurasian crane' (Wikipedia, 2020) on my first morning's walk in Germany, learning later of their many layered symbolism, one of which is creative resurrection and longevity (Ted Andrews, 2003); while trees, symbolising family and unconscious connection, as in the root systems and mycelial networks of community, and the Tree of Life were eventually not used.

I was making correlations between my mind saving nature walks 'performed' by me in the fields, the slow motion walking I executed and explored in studio, and the parallel 'memories'[13] of WW2 and growing knowledge of a re-emergence of fascism in this part of Germany.

Having found that my anxiety dropped during, and for a short time after a walk-run, (it is hard to be worried about the demise of the entire planet when one is attempting to merely put one foot in front of another without tripping), I continued exploring the spiral movement of walking and running whilst setting an intention to love Earth with each footfall. I also used these rituals of movement to ask for

[13] A series of mental images came to me whilst in Germany, in various locations - the woods (bloodied soldiers), the pantry (hiding frightened civilians), the loft (sniper's hideaways and dissidents' bodies hanging from rafters), whilst walking in cobbled streets of an invading army: walking four abreast (page 38 zine)

guidance from the Anima Mundi[14] as an invocation. During one run-walk my unconscious delivered the phrase *we spiral into this world, we spiral out of this world*, and on another the visual image of a crane in the form of a labyrinth. These are tangible examples of a resurgence of creative activity during the process. However my vision was still generally clouded as to how I was going to corral all the seemingly disparate elements into a lament.

Rogers had emphasised that the loosening of creativity came from the process. 'Learning to enjoy the process without worrying about the product is the secret to discovering the childhood pleasure in creating.' (Rogers, 1993) I realised that I had lost the creative thrust while bogged in details and deadlines of the framing document, the complicated script, and the fear that without a skilled team of theatre makers, which was financially not possible, I would produce very little of worth. Additionally I had not re-gained a desire to perform post my experience in Germany. I needed a radical change to quell the high levels of anxiety when I realised that I had a partial solution - the rich-uals pointed to mindful processes like crafting to make the research journey more enjoyable.

> I emailed a friend:
>
> 'Here's how to construct a dissertation - when all is said and done, what's the point if I am not being loving to myself, what's the point of searching for the creative when I'm in terror of the results. Just for today, I am going to be loving to myself and breathe deeply and invite parts of me to make something which is singularly me, I might have nothing new to add to the research of the world, but perhaps it'll give some respite to someone somewhere.' (C. Nativel, personal communication, September 30, 2019)

I needed what had become my antidote – ritual and mindful focused creation, and to be love in action in my world.

[14] Definition of Anima Mundi 'a vital force or principle conceived of as permeating the world' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019)

After deliberating I decided to no longer do a performance as a ritual of lament, but instead create a mixed media book to fulfil this objective. I still had no idea how the content might arrange itself, but I wanted to combine photographs, poetry and prose presented in a performative artist book[15], hand bound and printed on handmade paper.

What is evident in this decision is my spiral to and from creative ideas. The form of creating the lament echoes the spiral movement that seems to be signals from my unconscious to conscious mind, or the forming of idea clouds that evaporated and reconstituted slightly changed later on. The process almost looks neat viewed from nearing the conclusion. I am reminded of Clifford Geertz cited by Denis Dutton who describes my sense of surviving this creative process and being mostly lost, but somehow finding a way out of the maze.

> 'It is necessary, then, to be satisfied with swirls, confluxions, and inconstant connections; …. There is no general story to be told, …. Or if there is, no one, certainly no one wandering into the middle of them …, is in a position to construct them, neither at the time nor later. What we can construct, if we keep notes and survive, are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced-together patternings, after the fact.' (Dutton, 1998)

[15] The Artist Book as a 'Performative' Act

"Artists' books are related to forms of conventional books, either through their design, format, materiality, or function. The artist's book as a whole manifests and visualizes a conceptual context, which is based upon the artistic intention of the respective artist, evincing this as an autonomous work of art. The artist's book develops—as a published, printed, and multiplied stand-alone artwork—through a process of artistic conceptualization that could not be brought to expression in this way using any other artistic form. The artist's book is not the carrier of the artistic message but rather the medium." (Thurmann-Jajes, 2017)

Lamenting via a Zine

'Rituals … open a liminal space, a space that bridges the worlds …' (Kerr, 2012) This liminality of 'transition, waiting, and not knowing' (*What Is A Liminal Space?*, 2016) was how I ritualistically worked with the data each day whilst constructing the zine - holding the intention, breathing, asking that the end offering would serve Earth, and following my impulses. Kerr adds that great rituals engross all parts of our being. For two weeks I immersed myself in a more controllable mindful creative endeavour while still honouring the intention of a lament. Bacon's experience describes my own:

> 'Here is a space and place where I can be present with the ebbs and flows, with the processes of my creative spirit, to a giving over to my embodied felt and imaged experience.' (Bacon, 2010)

This process was a place of peace. As Kennedy-Woodard attests to it, it is action that assists us to manage our feelings about climate grief, and I was creating something so that others would know they were not alone.

At this point I sided with Rogers et al. who state in the journal article 'Person-centered expressive arts therapy: A theoretical encounter', that the process of expressive arts is one:

' … of discovering ourselves through any art form that comes from an emotional fullness. It is not about creating a beautiful picture, a perfect poem ... ' (Rogers et al., 2012)

Indeed it begged the question: what was my qualification in creating a book with poetry, prose and photographs? In the same article by his daughter Natalie, Carl Rogers is cited as defining the creative process as:

> 'the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other' (ibid p. 350).

The zine (a novel relational object) took shape from my unique perspectives of my personal encounters in the world. From Carl Rogers' point of view ' … the artists' criteria for evaluating the 'product' was in deciding if what was created was both satisfying and expressed part of themself.' (ibid) By this criterion and in reflection, if

I removed all thoughts of deadlines, exams and academic standards, the process of creating a lament was both enlivening and healing, it was generally calming, enjoyable and packed with purpose and focus.

Unfortunately the process was part of a Masters and as such I had an inner voice interrogating my qualifications. In *Creative research methods in the social sciences: A practical guide* (Kara, 2015), Helen Kara offers two opposing view on arts-based research regarding the quality and artistic merit of the creative offering. Ashland University Trustees' Distinguished Professor Jane Piirto wonders 'Why is it not necessary for those who write poetry in qualitative research …, to have studied poetry?' (Piirto, 2002) In the opposing camp Kara spotlights Katrina Douglas who uses arts-based methodologies for mental health and believes there should be open access to anyone wishing to express themselves.

I am between these two positions, whilst I have had three poems published in *SIRIUS an anthology* (Fox, 2014) I have no academic literary background. Piirto clarifies that one must not mix the arts with the arts being used for 'personal expression, as autotherapy…' (Piirto, 2002)

My offering clearly leaned towards this in light of my quest for personal healing.

Constructing the Zine – Creatively Practiced Randomness

I had no blueprint to guide what specific content went in other than the overall intention of creating a lament. I was in a process that I considered un-structured or random, and was happily immersed combining visual images with words, or allowing words alone to form their own visual patterns on the page. I dropped the idea of chapters - life, death, grief - as many pages touched more than one of these aspects. I did away with chronological order, moved pages, stopped moving pages, was happy with no apparent order, and then moved them again, inserting the theory only near the end of the process as it was fundamentally an academic document.

These side steps, this jumping, back-tracking and these circular motions, this is my embodied dance. Gina Shmukler's used a similar structure in her production *The Line*. She based this on the '(non) structure of trauma: Non-chronological, repetitive, circular feeling of getting to core, with flashbacks, dreams, and hallucinations.' (Shmukler, 2018)

I seized her explanation and entwined it with Fleishman's PaR descriptor in 2018 as I felt it was perfectly reflective of my story and the way in which I traverse old ground, get lost in its caverns, and seek the light once more. This cycle, evident in the structuring of my creative offerings is also evident in my process of reflection where it feels as if I am forever in feedback loops. Is this process part of my generalised anxiety which is exacerbated by eco-anxiety? Is this part of my sense of being out of control, at the whim of cosmic forces? A note to myself during reflection attests to this internal dialogue:

> It [i]s increasingly apparent too that I am in much the same cycle as ever before. I always feel as if I have no control over my life, no matter what I do to seek balance, healing, steady the compass. Writing this reflection feels the same. It is like the sea, unfathomable, a vastness tries to engulf me. I claw at the surface, I drown, I sink to the silt. I am lost, I am anxious.

Impulses to Order

Since I had no experience of book making or design programmes I used PowerPoint as it was fairly easy for me to edit, and construct the 'pages'. The process became increasingly specific through countless edits. Gay Morris' article in *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* reiterates Levi-Strauss who points out that ' … the impulse in the artist is intrinsically towards ordering and organisation to the parts.' (Levi-Strauss in Morris, 2013)

I include figure 5 as an example of a creative process which began from painting a mug as an SPR. The mug was then photographed; a collage was made of images of different sides of the mug. Computer effects were applied. The image was later edited.



Figure 5: SPR: from mug to page

I painted a mug for myself with multiple embedded messages

- reminder of life (BREATH)
- a call to creativity (CREATE-I'V)
- the words *A leopards spots* and a paw print – incorporating my father's reminder *a leopard never changes its spots*, and a reminder of a real leopard I encountered on a vision quest
- not seen here is a crane created from an accidental drop of paint (with apologies to all cranes)

My practice:

The process of painting and creating was unconscious with the ideas being fleshed out whilst painting. I realised I was not able to talk and paint at the same time as I was in an intrapersonal conversation and making spontaneous decisions. My thoughts were concerned with abstraction (how I could convey ideas) and mindfulness. I was aware of my body, stance, levels of relaxation and tension, my breathing. I felt calm, centred.

I noted to the friend who had offered to observe my process that I often write or draw with my non-dominant hand to access my unconscious more easily. I was not doing it here as I wanted the mug to look 'presentable' and have less fine motor control of my non-dominant hand. I noted too that I generally mixed words into sketches and paintings, partly as a commentary and quite possibly as I did not trust the visual metaphors I drew due to my lack of drawing skill. I enjoyed the tactile experiences, and this mixed media expression led me to naming myself in the moment - an eclectic human being who is a randomizer.

Figure 6 below is an edited version of the same page closer to the completion of the zine. I had included a page solely with the leopard's story. The title plays on breath as inspiration. (Note: this page was not used in the embodied presentation as a slide, but was in the gallery.)



Figure 6: SPR: from page to gallery

The following are thoughts that have surfaced from the reflection process:

Perhaps what I was experiencing was my artistic process? What if the mayhem and anxiety I perceived as I started 'attempting to distil' the data

was an unconscious mind process sifting through the available data. However since the data is embodied experiences and processes, perhaps I sensed the internal data distillation as anxiety. It is only near the end by looking at the whole and not feeling the parts that I am able to call this into question.

In further excavation of this reflection, I dipped back into Julia Cameron's *The Artists Way: A Course in Discovering & Recovering Your Creative Self* which I diligently worked through in around 1995. Her belief that ' … creativity is our true nature …' (Cameron, 1995) essentially agrees with Estes and Rogers. In my fundamental non-trust of self, and the world as an un-safe place, perhaps I had not 'learned to get out of the way and let that creative force work through me …' (ibid) *What resists persists* is a phrase I learnt somewhere, sometime. Was I resisting the very energy I invoked? Is it in an attempt to control life that I fixate on outcome; that I rail against the mysteries of life wanting certainty, surety?

Perhaps Foucault suggests the answer when describing that scientists probe the parts whilst artists ' … understand the parts only in terms of the whole.' (Morris, 2013) The parts were generated by what was essentially The *Creative Connection,* that is using one kind of artistic activity to spark another. I include physical activity (movement and breathing with intention of centreing) as a creative activity since ideas were sometimes sparked by movement.

I was both practicing the antidote, and it contained examples of the antidote. In balancing economics, I went from a handcrafted book to a digital zine.

Spiralling Back to Performance

As the zine was near completion I discovered that changing my creative output from a performance to a zine meant I had changed the examination criteria and ironically I was still required to present the work appropriately to examiners. Peculiarly this was almost a relief as it felt that the content required more than the zine, it spilled and stretched beyond the pages, it wanted crane cries, it wanted community and contact and witnessing and even more ritual. As Weller articulates:

> ‘Ritual is able to hold the long-discarded shards of our stories and make them whole again. It has the strength and elasticity to contain what we cannot contain on our own, what we cannot face in solitude.’ (Weller, 2015 p. 82)

Kara suggests one uses mixed methods research ‘ … when the research question is particularly complex.’ (Kara, 2020) I had been warned that the scope of the question was too large for a Masters, and this was potentially a means of grappling with its largesse.

For me, a presentation was an embodied performance resembling the 2018 PaR. This additional second format addressed the first sub question, what artistic form can contain the depth and breadth of such a huge existential condition - hence combining ritual, body and academic investigation? I was discovering one could not adequately achieve it in a zine alone. I also took comfort in Jennifer Duffy’s conference paper ‘The International Theatre Festival: Gaps, Interruptions and Unpredictable Crossovers’ that references Carter:

> ‘ “Creative research, respecting the materiality of thought – its localisation in the act of invention – has a different object. It studies complexity and it defends complex systems of communication against over simplification. It explores the irreducible heterogeneity of cultural identity, the always unfinished process of making and remaking ourselves through our symbolic forms” ’ (Carter in Duffy, 2013)

Whilst I was struggling with the form in which to contain the grief, the oscillation from performance to zine to performance, provided me with both understanding more fully the application of using one expressive artistic form to spark another, and the visual art aspect of creating the zine soothed my brain and anxiety.

Research comparing people doing art (which I label the practice of making the zine) to those only making a cognitive evaluation of an art exhibition, showed the brains of those doing the activities benefitted most via the:

> ‘ … default mode network [which is] … associated with a variety of functions, such as reflecting on one's emotional state, empathy, and imagining the future..’ (Davis, 2019)

Art making benefited the participants by strengthening their brains and stress coping capacity. These findings are echoed in Phil Jones’ *Drama as Therapy: Theatre as Living* where he cites:

> ‘Muller-Thalheim sees ’inspiration, changes, new combinations, new actions’ (1975, 164) as inherent to much creativity, and claims that these are central to health …
>
> This lies in the healing value of creative expression and the value of playfulness as a way of creating new insights. In addition he suggests that expressing problematic material and emotions through the arts changes the relationship to the problem of feelings.’ (Jones, 1996)

This is significant in light of the overall purpose of the question. In placing myself in processes that allowed artistic immersion there was a significant reduction of anxiety. Even though I was aware and still immersed in the awfulness of loss of life, the task of creation kept me buoyant.

What performance would, (and did, allow), was the sharing of grief with others in a formalised context via ritual being witnessed.

Historically the more I have embraced ritual, self-created or societal, in searching for my ‘transcendence of suffering’ (Egnew, 2005), the more manageable life felt. Schechner says that ‘Rituals emphasize efficacy: healing …, initiating …, burying …, teaching ...’ (Ingold, 2002) While ritual might be active, Harasta and Brock suggest (their italics) ‘… lament is not an action, but a *response to* and an *expression of* human suffering.’ (Harasta & Brock, 2009) In combing ideas of Schechner, Harasta, Brock and Kerr’s invocation of ‘creative life forces of the cosmos’ (Kerr, 2012) this lament, in its various expressions, held at its core a desire to ‘… open a liminal space … that bridges the worlds’ (ibid); and that these performative rituals of writing or actions or mindfulness were:

> ' … designed to be witnessed - by other people, by nature, or by Spirit (Driver, 1998). …, [because] the best ritual engages our whole being: heart, soul, body, and mind.' (ibid)

Schechner adds to this that the 'shadow of a sacrificial victim lies behind even the most celebratory of ritual actions.' (Ingold, 2002) The performance was an auto-ethnographic, public, gut-spilling, and a ritual offering to Earth. As a sacrificial lamb, I bore my soul, appealing to the cosmos to assist the terrible circumstances we are in. This was an act of submission and relinquishment.

My performance was given additional meaning because it was shared. David Kessler's online essay 'Our Experience of Grief is Unique as a Fingerprint' describes a universal need ' … for someone [else] to be fully present to the magnitude of [our] loss ...' (Kessler, 2019) since it is a survival mechanism binding us together. This was also a heightened experience because it was theatrical, thus ' … set[ting it] apart from everyday reality, which at the same time has a vital function in reflecting upon and reacting to that reality.' (Jones, 1996)

Process

Returning to performance I became clearer on the flow of the script / zine's pages and re-ordered the sequence. I aimed at theatrical impact at the beginning with a story introduction - *shall I tell the story of* - and wove this into the idea of spiralling in and out of the world, followed by the invocation to the Anima Mundi. Thereafter I went for the emotional impact of clustering a number of similar entries on non-human animals and the harms perpetrated on them from our dislocated Othering[16].

Additionally given the content, I wished to finish with coming back into heart, breath, movement and community as ways to navigate this difficult territory, ways that I had rediscovered were helpful.

This performance 'order' was kept for all reiterations. I created the gallery so that people could interact differently with each 'page', larger and on eye level, than

[16] 'Othering: Placing a person or a group outside and/or in opposition to what is considered to be the norm' (Harris & White, 2013)

in an A5 book. The zine had thus been transformed into a gallery of posters, and used as a script and background for an embodied performance.

In many ways the 'performance' was semi-improvised. It certainly was not meticulously crafted for stage nor a rehearsed piece, with one read through on stage without a full technical. Germany had made some impression.

Intuition verses Randomness

I had come to the title: *ACT-i-ON: my random actions upon living, dying and grief in the 6th extinction,* whilst in the thick of creating the zine, it's abstract and making sense of my process for the framing document. In the abstract I described myself as a 'creative thought randomiser who dashes off on anecdotal tangents.' The zine might have been meticulous in the way I had attempted to construct it; the endless editing and reformatting, but it came together out of a loose sifting of all the gathered data, which I saw as random, as unplanned. The Oxford University Dictionary defines the adjective random as ' ... events as random, … do not seem to follow a definite plan or pattern.' Whilst the informal usage is 'Odd, unusual, or unexpected.' (Oxford University Press, 2019c)

I interjected the word a few times throughout the performance on the backdrop to a) indicate events were not necessarily related, b) allow a breathing space for the witnesses to re-centre themselves, and c) as a reminder of my sense of unplanned action and responses.

In the oral, the singular sticking point for the examiners, was a query regarding my use of this word random as it was felt that the choice of this word was 'a throw away, a copout, a way to step out and leave us.' (Nativel, 2019c) Additionally the observation was made that 'It felt like a connective tissue but you told me it was random'. My answer at the time was directed mainly at the correlation of how it all came together echoing the sense of trauma's non-order.

There may well have been years of thought, decisions and ability or muscle memory of skills through which I was filtering information, but it was not a step by step plan,

nor did I know what the end products would look like, other than be laments. Whilst in the process it felt random. I have sought to show that the history of my life might have intentions, but not meticulous plans. My life feels like it unfolds almost accidently. Internally it feels that I walk a dangerous edge between being pre-active and re-active. In wanting to control the uncontrollable I am hyper-alert. This is one of the reasons that I am a good producer – I am primed for disaster and therefore try to minimise risk wherever possible. The fairly constant desire to up skill myself has been me seeking to better myself, to be grounded in practice and gain some sense of economic control, and, or, a desire to make internal peace with parts of myself. I am always looking for commonality, threads that bind together. I seek, and sort for similarity.

As I reflect, I make statements and then ponder the truth. For example I might say *few long term plans are made*. This feels truthful, however I can counter it. I have completed many short and long terms goals in my life; many courses I have completed have been over one year, and this MA is a two year plan. Last year (2019) I planned two extensive overseas journeys well in advance. Is this merely hindsight? In my working life I jump at opportunity where and when I can and thus the majority of my life has been unplanned.

I must question again if this anxiety, this seeming randomness, the sense of overwhelm, the swamped bogged down looping tangents are exacerbated by the eco-anxiety? A friend recently observed that I have not always been as fearful as I am presently. Is this the same generalised anxiety of trying to control my unstable economic capacity, or the fact that I live in a country riddled with femicide, rape and crime? Did all this start before my father's death a decade ago, or is it the consequence of coming face to face with mortality? Is it because I watched the terrible process of my mother's dementia and I fear my own demise in all its many possible forms, and then to top it all the sky might actually fall on our heads?

Duality exists. There are parts of the process of creating the lament that are riddled with fear and unease and a sense of randomness, and there are some that were peaceful and healing, these being the mindful activities. Perhaps, as I have stated earlier, it is due to struggling with labelling, categorising who I am at any

given point, the struggle with naming myself which is often attached to what I am busy with. If, on the day I settled on the title and wrote the abstract, I had been thinking that my superpower was chameleon-ism, might the tone have shifted? Playback theatre practioner Jo Salas expresses that:

> 'Life while it is happening to us can seem random and undirected…. When we weave our experience into stories, we find meaning in what we have undergone. ' (Salas, 2013)

Perhaps my life is paradoxically both - random and ordered. Just as the creating of the lament did, and did not, alleviate my suffering. There are random events, and there is some thread, that connects my life. The thread was reiterated by the pages spiralin spiralout, and remind, the thread is community and Nature and our inter-beingness, or inter-dependency. This paradox or duality is the same as life and death itself.

What does it mean that I cannot answer the question neatly, succinctly, in an orderly manner? Was this impulse from performance to zine and then circling back again, an action which might be called un-planned? When I think 'random' is it actually my creative process of shift and change? I still cannot answer this, yet I do know that the zine, in the after-light of performance, was unable to hold its spilling, creeping, begging-for-amalgamation content in quite the same way the performance was able. Hence the presentation, which was merely meant to be a way to present the zine, became a full blown performative experience, much like the original format I had envisaged.

Both a friend, and my supervisor, have separately wondered why it is that I do not see this process as the intuitive creative-self making choices. Simply answered I have generally mistrusted my decision making, torn betwixt and between, seeing all possibilities. Essentially this habitual second guessing is part of my submerged feminine polluted by wounds to the pre-verbal and pre-school self, where *joie de vivre* and expansive expression, had adverse effects. The upside consequence is I have developed deep empathy.

This reflective essay has not changed my mind that my life is ordered, and my process not random. I most certainly seek order, I am undoubtedly still learning

about my creative processes, and hope that the world keeps turning long enough for me to create more for myself, to test this.

If *ACT-i-ON* were to be performed again, I would however replace most of the 'random's' on the backdrop, with words such as breathe, move or reach-out.

2. CHAPTER TWO

Spiralling Outwards

we spiral into this world; we spiral out of this world

walk and spiral

inhale

exhale

gentle twists and body turns and yearns like ferns unfurl back to heart you art but

one of whole remembering these parts of self that melt no matter what you felt

vibration

heart pulses

celebrate creation finding our way back towards recovering what is extinct in us

we spiral into this world; we spiral out of this world

(Nativel, 2019b)

1. Reflections

Rephrasing the Question for the Purposes of the Effect of the Outcomes

Did the creation, did the creating, did the doing … DID the creation of a performative lament offer healing (transcendence of suffering) and renewal (of creativity), (in the shadow of the Sixth Extinction), for myself, and if so, for others too?

Did it? As stated in the introduction there are three answers to one question:

Did it offer healing and creative enlivenment?

First answer = NO

Second answer = YES

Third answer = PARTIALLY

These answers spiral in and out of each other, like springs that are compressed only to shoot me upwards from the tension, so nearing the end of the reflective process, I am unable to make a clear yes, no, or partial summation.

This task seemed clear. Follow the method of creation used in the 2018 PaR exam. Expand the content, track and report on 'me' in a global circumstance. Do 'something', and reflect on it. As described the application however was not simple[17].

I can though, now write as statements the three questions posed in the abstract:

1. Yes, I was able to synthesise my lived experiences of wandering and wonderings into a narrative form and structure which was able to be shared with an audience
2. Yes, I was able to lift or shift my own sense of unease and 'creative drought', to forge meaning while seeking my own place and significance in the world

[17] Process timeline: PaR process - June 2018 | dissertation proposal - March 2019 | Germany - June to July 2019 | creating offerings - July to Nov 2019 | zine presentation in digital, printed and performed formats - 8 Nov 2019 | Caribbean trip - late Nov 2019 | reflection and write up - Dec 2019 to Feb 2020

3. Yes, by seeking peace through centreing it was and is possible to find commonality – a conscious embodied-practice combined with mindful engagement and self-activism, which others may use to soothe themselves

In what way did creating a lament offer healing and renewal whilst I undertook the processes of:
- gathering data (rich-uals)
- distilling the data into the lament via a zine
- delivering or presenting the lament in an embodied form

All of the following offered healing and renewal: by action, by doing, by focus, by rich-uals, by reaching out into community, by processes, by deep breathing, by moving, by extending myself, by looking for the sacred and spiritual in all things.

What are the rich-uals? I touched on them here describing them as a way of being learnt from myriad techniques. I can briefly suggest what has worked for me as a loose method

Start with intention

Move to breath awareness – the deeper the better, then body awareness – the more relaxed the better

Be active in contemplative mindful way: walks, runs, swimming, dancing, and just moving with the above in mind

Journal: photographic, audio and narrative

Craft or make art: no matter your skill level, paint, draw, make things

Create and partake in rituals: anything from lighting a candle, to repeating a mantra, or a repeated activity like making breakfast for 1 to 100 – the preparation, the making, the serving, the clearing, all done with intention and focus

Be in nature, walk barefoot on a small patch of earth, or plant something

There are so many more possibilities and I do not wish to trivialise this by attempting to gather years of techniques in a few lines and pretend that anxiety, personal or eco are easily rubbed away like this.

This investigation centred and focused my energy, time and thought on how I was going to make a ritualised performative lament, seeking what I thought would be the content, and how it would be both a ritual and lament. I did not focus on a book of testable, repeatable processes, nor sets of instructions.

Yet, someone else suffering from eco-anxiety and grief, could apply either my SPRs or, by making their own lament, alone or in community, find some consolation in being mindful, active, centred and connected.

This is the essence of auto-ethnography, that what I have used for myself is transferrable to another. In the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* edited by Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith it is pointed out that no matter the diversity of auto-ethnographic research, how it is sought, formatted or presented, the toward and away relationship between investigation and memory, or the personal to the collective, we look to ' … extract meaning from experience rather than depict experience exactly as it was lived "' (Bochner in Denzin et al., 2008)

A silent query has emerged. If I am unable to quantify the amount of healing or re-enlivenment that I may have experienced, am I required to comment on the outcomes of the process, not only the processes themselves?

This lament was a tangible effort to do something to mark grief, an existential scream guided by Frankl as previously quoted to *create work* by *experiencing something*, and by *the attitude I took towards unavoidable suffering*.

Did it Offer Healing and Creative Enlivenment? NO

The Ever-Present Shadow

Let us tackle the No; the shadow of the Sixth Extinction has not abated, nor my eco-grief. The ecological crisis on the planet has escalated during the time of research. This investigation brought the shadow closer, made it darker, colder. Perhaps this is

due to global events causing knock-on effects, an actual compounding interest of carbon accumulation, living systems die-off, multiple floods, droughts, famines, sea rise and warming, etc.; or perhaps it is because I have only seen the world through this particular, non-rosy looking-glass.

Investigating the living systems breakdown has been an overdose of the red pill from the 1990s film *The Matrix*; one can never un-see, un-know again. The reality of the undoing of the living systems of Earth is evident if I open myself to the flood of information from emails or news feeds or listen to friends scattered around the globe. It is there when I look at the rivers, there when pulling up samples from the seabed of Antigua on an anti-plastic research mission, and there if I am very quiet and just listen to my heart. My innocence is long gone.

It is apparent from this gloriously ungrammatical WhatsApp message to a friend on my return from my Caribbean excursion, that even after this empowering experience, my vision was bleak.

> [09:48, 12/19/2019] Chantal Nativel: IF U NOT FEELING STRONG _ DON'T READ _ TRIGGER ALERT _ VERY DEPRO
> i think i don't want to write about the effects of the trip. because I'm as depressed, grief stricken as i have been for a long time. all i can see, again, is the doom, and its added to by the state of this country (even if there are s**** things going on elsewhere) but I'm back to utter doom. the oceans are beyond shocking - I'm in ecoside [*sic*] overwhelm again- and it's not really because of the trip. it's just that i had time to just sit with everything - even though there is still enormous beauty and the few birds and little shows of life around
> [09:58, 12/19/2019] Chantal Nativel: I'm sitting with it though - because in essence - that's the reflection on my Master's process. if I'm busy - I'm fab. if i sit and look , I'm down. i shared an article yesterday and I'll have to read again , but its [*sic*] kind of like the denial - in my own little bubble, i can still land up eating food that comes in plastic because i justify / value that im buying 50% discounted food - so im preaching one thing and my values

> belie that action- my value is still for me to survive in a capitalist soc where the money i have left is weighted against what i can buy with it. im still driving a car - because i say its unsafe for me to use the public transport- but there are many who cant do anything different. i just did 2 huge plane trips. i cant function with out electricity…(Nativel, 2019d)

The enquiry was not to test if I could be fully healed. The title was not – *How to be miraculously happy in the shadow of the 6th extinction*. My anxiety has not dissipated; my base state, my wiring, is epigenetically prone to hyper-alertness. The sediment that sits in my cells is always, still, on the lookout for danger. Danger reaches toward me from tension with the body corporate, or driving out into Johannesburg's streets, or going to sleep hoping we are not attacked; it is not knowing how I shall sustain myself financially. This is much the same as it has always been, and now, the world for other reasons, is truly an even more dangerous place. When might an extreme weather occurrence happen to us, or famine, or war. I do not even need to raise my glance for there to be anxiety present, and indeed, wrestling with a paper such as this, my anxiety escalates. My *I am not clever enough* still lurks, my *will I be a good girl and complete the task at hand properly* is still alive in me. I filter the world through lenses that say the end of the world is coming soon, (and for so many animals, human and non-human this last year has been the end of their world via floods, fires, famines, etc.); but I do now have a clearer understanding that focused action and activity help keep the emotion at bay or at least assist in managing it better.

The very intention to investigate the question, and the journey of research, which was, in the main deeply painful and frustrating, was also empowering. Was this because of the methods used? The expressive arts focus on the process, not the outcome. As such it spotlights the efficacy of performance as research as an active process-driven research methodology, incorporating physical, emotional, mental and spiritual components. Rogers, when referring to addressing the crises of the times commented that 'The expressive arts are potent processes for understanding

and communicating our feelings and thoughts on these issues.' (Rogers, 1993 p. xvi)

Did it Offer Healing and Creative Enlivenment? YES

Accomplishments

There are aspects that have undergone a rejuvenation of creativity; I have accomplished, for myself some more than ordinary feats.

The Universe Applauds Action

In the early 2000's, on one of the many self-actualisation workshops I threw myself into to attempt to heal the river of pain, I encountered the phrase – *the universe applauds action*. I believe that it has validity in my process.

Very significantly, I have moved myself, quite literally into a place of action. The task of researching, the task of composing the endeavour, all had purpose. Purpose has driven me to get up and do, be proactive, even as I still read, see, hear the ever growing litany of devastation around the world, having a task to accomplish, gave and gives me focus and purpose. As soon as I was busy my emotions did not override me. This is much the same as when I am working, I can manage anxiety better. When I am actively mindful, or actively mindfully moving, I am able to shift some of my suffering.

What I need to reiterate is that there have been many times previously in my life where I have found Life, where Roth might say I have 'live(d) alive' (Roth, 2014), where I have rebirthed myself, where the river has felt less like being swirled in a gyre and more like a gentle brook. Many of these times of healing have been through exerting depth-charging processes on myself, much like the Master's. This is not new knowledge for me, it is a rediscovery, and I see that there has been a synthesis of many years of knowledge. My definition of finding Life with a capital L means being un-anxiously engaged in activities which I find purpose-filled; activities that engender joy.

I have endeavoured to habituate the need to be active as a way to calm the vagus nerve[18]. I have been more dedicated to making the effort, as a literal life-buoy for myself, to dedicate a few minutes a day, and one or two short run-walks a week to helping quell the aches and pains of age, and ease the nerves.

It has been a reminder that no matter what processes I have undergone or pursued during my adult life - vision quests, self-development through body and mind re-programming courses and techniques, through healing or studying - there is no ultimate panacea to end suffering. It is a reminder to *acknowledge what is*. Again, a term I have used and taught. I must bow to the greater intelligence of this universe, and see things as they are, only then can I find my peace, my place, and make a difference.

Dreaming Big Dreams (for me)

I ventured into Master's hoping for a watering of dry bones, a re-enlivenment. With little to no understanding of what a Master's actually required, or what research might be (yes, it is hard to reveal this), I jumped off the cliff and have been buffeted by gales ever since. Yet, I am still tethered to the process, just as I was to the yacht so we did not slip into the sea. I have not drowned yet. Even though I am resistant to write this, this action and intention of pursuing the Master's holds all consequent effects.

I raised my hand and said yes please to Life, and so aligned a number of adventures that are the consequence of seeking research. I dreamed them. I removed myself from my comforts, my circles, and placed myself into unfamiliar territories and frontiers where I faced some of my greatest fears.

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[18] 'When parasympathetic function is working adequately, vagal stimulation primarily sends parasympathetic signaling allowing for slower heart rates, and better digestion. On the flip side, when vagal stimulation is overridden with sympathetic signaling, you start to feel nervous, get butterflies in your stomach, sweaty palms, and feel like your heart is going to fly out of your chest when giving a presentation to a large audience. The importance of the vagus nerve in the polyvagal theory according to Alvares et al, is in "promoting engagement, or disengagement with an individual's social environment"' (Sadowski, 2017)

Which adventures? Going to Germany for a month; going on a research yacht in the Caribbean. These journeys extended my personal circles across the globe simultaneously increasing my carbon footprint, and guilt.

I received some financial support for the ticket to Germany from my department, and was delighted by spontaneous crowd funding by Facebook friends who contributed partially to the Caribbean trip. Both these financial contributions were votes of confidence for me; they showed that there were people who believed in me, thought I was worth the investment, and saw me as having the capacity to champion a cause. Perhaps it is because of the significance of money in my survivalist state, yet this show of financial support had a marked influence on my sense of worth or confidence. On the flip side it echoes that I am still undoubtedly entrenched in the measurement of worth by industrial output which sees money tied to worth.

The hugeness of the expense of contributing to the Caribbean trip is outweighed by the fact that I volunteered myself to board a small floating vessel in the ocean, and I was, and always have been utterly terrified of the sea. Whilst I bobbed and sometimes clung on for dear life on the yacht, I was able to feel satisfaction that I had done something extraordinary in the face of my fear (this may be the biggest achievement).

Patches of Light - Living Alive

My intention was to *live alive*. Living, as a fully engaged person on a mission to complete a Master's has inadvertently opened me to particular activities these last few years that I would not have done otherwise. The effect of which is that I am so deeply grateful for this life, and might even be, when all is written, for this overarching Master's process. I believe that I have lived these two years alive, with purpose, giving it everything (even though it was meant to be part time), and I am no longer meeting each day feeling as if I am one of the already-dead. Instead of wondering how I might lessen suffering and potentially avert more disaster, I now have avenues to follow, and a body of work I can add to.

Even in this place and time, this space of knowing, there has been healing. Even here there been a renewal, a resurfacing of my 'fertile feminine' (Estés, 1994), a resurgence of my creative spirit, my capacity to see myself as a creative being, contributing to the world in a meaningful way. I able to say I am a creative being. Has that made me feel better in the general way that I move in the world? Yes. Has it allowed me to feel that I have some value to contribute? Yes.

As I write I look over my screen to a card stuck on the wall filled with different coloured ink and handwriting. The messages are from my yacht crew. We spent five intense days in an unstable, confined space, sharing our lives, cooking, cleaning, collecting samples and envisioning ways forward to combat the scourge of global plastic pollution. I had reached out to everyone many weeks before we met to make connections, yet I was surprised at how many of my companions appreciated this act of friendship. My MA journey was briefly shared, on board, along with a few pages of the zine. We had shared photos and stories of our non-human companions, which is why I chose to read there/here for them as light folded into dark one night. On looking up I was met with a circle of tears. After a beach clean-up I wrote a poem which they felt captured the enormity of the experience, and I wrote a descriptive ditty for each of them on our departure. Herewith a sample of some of their farewell messages which strike deep in my heart as I seemed to do in theirs; it is as if I read them anew (names withheld):

> ♥ My existential soul searching poetic inspiration! I can't wait to see what art you produce next. You are a source of life-giving energy. Thank you
>
> ♥ Amazing! talented, kind, tuned in, deep, making us feel. I loved meeting you & I hope you connect fully with what a creative force you are
>
> ♥ Empathetic and deep, you have the power to take people to a new place. And move the planet to a renewed state.
>
> ♥ You're so true to yourself & so creative & poetic. Never, ever doubt that you have impact, You do incredible things!
>
> ♥You are a deep, loving, motivating + magical poet…

In the context of answering if there was a resurgence of creativity, these comments, from women who themselves are making differences in their own particular communities, have greatly impacted me.

Something for Me is Something for All

I created something for myself. Over the years I have produced work for many people across numerous sectors but not since my Honours' have I created something purely for myself. In fact I created three creative expressions.

- a zine
- a poster gallery
- an embodied lectern-lamentation

These pushed my boundaries of lateral thought. All these have the capacity to develop further.

I have a method of making a zine; and I have a zine that reaches out to some who are grieving, for them to be aware that they are not alone in grappling with loss, bereavement and living in pain. It is too a means of awareness of what is taking place in the world. One of the examiners commented that they could:

> 'think of three other people that I would like to send this to once it is published, who will feel less alone because they're also in this space.' (Nativel, 2019c)

I have an embodied lectern-lamentation that can be performed anywhere. My desire that I might come through the process with a one woman show, materialised. It was a circuitous route to a script that happened when I had given up the desire to have one, and now I even have an alternative method of creating a script. The presentation stood alone as an engaging piece of theatre and can be used as is, or extended or built upon into something more or other. The work was well received, with my examiners urging me to take it to people, and a witness saying: Well done, it was a truly remarkable piece of theatric [*sic*] art! You can be very proud.

The posters can be used separately or as backdrops. Creating the gallery has been a motivation for making more art, for continuing to track my thoughts and emotions both by writing, sketching and photographs. Apart from the longing that I have had for years to return to crafting, I now feel that I could gain much ease of heart if I continue to draw occasionally, to mix words and sketches, irrespective of my technique or level of skill, as a method of expression.

The importance of the creative work (zine, gallery, and performance) is that it spans from the intrapersonal (my feelings of loss bereavement, anger and sadness continue regardless in the shadow) into the interpersonal; our holographic universe, me as a fractal of the whole, me as part of Oneness or the interbeing-ness of all things. Jessica Pierce in Psychology Today states that:

> ' … ecological grieving is a hidden plague …
> We can, through collective mourning, create a political community and let the mourning move us to action. What would healthy eco-grieving look like? Not letting the grief and despair become crippling and channeling the grief into action.' (Pierce, 2019)

I too have discovered that this work aligns to the fascinating and expansive research areas of environmental arts or humanities, and feminist environmental philosophy, in both defining the reach and direction of this work. Christian Kull's blog 'What are the environmental humanities?' defines it as ' ...an approache(s) to understanding and thinking about the environment ... us(ing) narrative, argumentation, or other means to communicate human ideas, feelings, and experiences …' (Kull, 2017) Additionally, with respect to the enormous field of feminist environment philosophy with its ' ... diversity of positions on the interconnections among women, nonhuman animals and nature ...' (Warren, 2015) I would like to think that this work has explored some "women-nature connections" , a description ably whittled by Karen J Warren in her essay Feminist Environmental Philosophy. (ibid)

Did it Offer Healing and Creative Enlivenment? PARTIALLY

Bittersweet Remembering

Daniel cites:

> ‘ “Matthew Fox …, “The grief in the human heart needs to be attended to by rituals and practices that, when practiced, will lessen anger and allow creativity to flow anew.” The idea of “flowing anew” is exactly what rituals are designed to support.’ (Daniel, 2018)

Whilst I did flow anew, I liken this to a dried brook needing the ground water to be replenished. The performance itself left a bitter-sweetness for me. I had swirled from wanting to perform again, to not wanting anything to do with performance, to having to present my zine, and thus any engagement would require some level of performative interaction. In a clumsy message to a close friend the day following the presentation I noted that I felt:

> [11:05, 11/9/2019] Chantal Nativel: Really good.
> Can't really believe it was such a mission.
> So much editing of that book/zine and then more into backdrop and the framing doc…
> What it did very clearly remind me is how very comfortable being on stage can be for me.
> And that was with one read through without sound or lights...
> [11:09, 11/9/2019] Chantal Nativel: Thanks …. Didn't mean I was over qualified, just it's a feeling that arises when I'm in that space, like tread workshops where I feel almost on autopilot.... Like I'm being driven by something bigger than me

This was not a new revelation, but it was another powerful reminder, a re-membering of aspects of my Self, parts of my creative being that had been long turned away and supressed, a coming back to self, the coiling back towards centre after soul loss. The reasons for the suppression were to some extent economic, not for lack of love, and so I reconnected with a deep passion for this style of communication, of communion with others, of a deep centred-ness.

Gillie Bolton's *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development* (Bolton, 2010) indicates that reflection of events from multiple points of view give a rigorous examination of cause and effect, and are enhanced by reflexivity. Another realisation occurred around my heels-dug-in resistance to performance while in Germany, and hence on my return. During this reflection I asked myself - What did I forget? (I have edited to retain another's anonymity)

> … dancing with … a centred performer with gravitas, focus – their energy pulled me into their performance – like a life-line thrown to me to enter the performance space – where I could deeply drench myself - so now I realise I didn't reject performance, I rejected how I wanted to perform, with whom and how and what my content was.. - how the performers' grounded energy infused me, I quite literally felt like I was fed oxygen - and the correlation was we need to connect with others for life

I could say that the dry boned Being who had thrown her creativity into the murky river had in a sense sold herself up it. The prostitute archetype, the survivalist, the one entwined in the 'myth of more' (*The Mythic Imagination | Sharon Blackie | TEDxStormontSalon*, 2018), who needed to fit into social structures of class and age, did so at great cost to self. My creativity was relinquished for a roof over my head, 'But there is no Creativity Patrol or Soul Police to intervene if we insist on starving our own souls' (Estés, 1994) This Faustian pact, is not new to me, I have thrashed about in its murk for years, as do many performers and artists I know. This narrative of separate-hood is one of the prime examples of our disconnection with our nature spirit; we are severed from our innate and unique contribution to this world, our gift back to Nature. I desire to hold this remembering as I move forward, to seek a way that I may honour and use this ability in service to Nature.

Additionally

On Drama being Applied

John Somers' journal article 'Story, Intertextuality and Drama in Education' states that story 'acts as the placenta that connects our inner world to the world outside'

(Somers, 2002); and Linda English believes, 'We, are the story - the only story.'(English, 2005) as stated in her journal article 'Story, Archetype and Healing'. At the beginning of human communication, there was story highlighted by the origin of the word from *comunicacion* (Old French) and from Latin *communicatio*(n-) meaning to share.(Oxford University Press, 2019a) I have always wanted to share stories. My pull to work in applied theatre before it was given academic terminology was part of this desire to use drama and theatre as a way to transform emotion. So my return to the field of Applied Drama was aligned with my childhood desires and most of my adult working life, using story and drama as a tool for healing. Indeed story surrounds us; we are immersed in it, or it in us.

I wish to add this short exploration around story because it had significant and conscious influence on the creation of the performance. My return to university was to a department which teaches activism through drama. Here I did some research into the neurology of storytelling with regard to my interest in public speaking and story (I am a high school adjudicator). The findings apply as much to how certain pieces were written for the zine and 'performed' or read for the presentation a) because I have training as an actor, and I write poetry, more for how it sounds when I read it, than the actual construction of the words, and b) because the neurology of story and storytelling impacted the construction, and the structure dropped most exposition; poems or writing or photos just followed on. The stories did not necessarily link logically thus making the witnesses work a little to follow, or make their own meaning.

Science now supports what the field of drama, including Drama In Education and Theatre In Education has always known. Says Peter Schroeder in his blog 'The Neuroscience Of Storytelling Will Make You Rethink The Way You Create', 'It took neurology several centuries to validate what the prehistoric cave painters of Indonesia already knew: Storytelling makes for effective communication.' (Schroeder, 2018) He continues that research shows 'that our brains are hardwired for relational and analogical reasoning …' (Ibid)

Interactive Work

The performance was also a potent reminder of my love of interactive or group work. I had omitted the workshop route with this dissertation, as stated in the introduction. I hold some regret that I did not pursue this avenue since I believed that receiving ethics clearance for such would be extremely difficult due to the nature of the topic. The reference to tread workshop in an above message refers to a time when I ran workshops under the title of TREAD[19]. It is a global statement about my love of training, facilitation and workshop environments. A life passion has been working with people privately and in corporations, often using drama as a tool to coach people to operate from an aligned internal place.

Effects on Witnesses

From one witness' point of view; the lament fitted 'immersive theatre, theatre of healing movements which are prominent and emerging.' I spoke directly to the witnesses, whom I named thus, as I did not intend a traditional performance or piece of theatre, and as discussed grief requires witnessing and community. The presentation was additionally a piece of educational theatre and activism as described in Christopher Odhiambo Joseph's chapter in Hazel Barnes (ed) *Arts Activism, Education, and Therapies: Transforming Communities Across Africa:*

> ' … critical awareness on the part of an individual as a result of encountering new information, ideas, or knowledge. Thus the acquisition of education envisages transformation in the individual who receives it; education involves development of consciousness in individuals.' (Barnes, 2013)

An example of this is a witness saying they had stopped eating tuna after listening to the story of the tuna fish that was cut up while alive. (*'the tuna lies on bloodied wooden slats')* Odhiambo continues that:

> 'Activism is the practice of using action to achieve a result…. The main objective is to create visibility, to project an issue and make visible in the world. .. to provoke debate around the issue.' (ibid)

[19] T.R.E.A.D : Trans Radiant Experiential Attunement Dynamic

It did have impact and in another instance it made an examiner think differently about the use of the word *live-stock* as mentioned in the oral exam:

> 'You did something very interesting about livestock in the performance and the divorce of those two …, the first time that I thought about it … to reiterate … how far away we've come from source' (Nativel, 2019c)

My embodiment ' … the way the self is realised by and through the body' (Jones, 1996), its gestures, vocal delivery, expression, my conscious and its unconscious signals were the 'primary means by which communication occurs between self and other.' (ibid), and I experienced them in the present, with the witnesses too experiencing them in real time. I ran, I walked, I navigated the spiral, I centred myself, I breathed deeply.

Nicholson looks at the theory of creativity in the context of applied drama and says the idea of the creative individual has shifted from the Romantic idea of an inspired genius, to someone who is spontaneous, with flexible and divergent cognitive capacity. (Nicholson, 2005) It may still feel uncomfortable for me to identify as such, but if I view this from the researcher perspective, I can identify these capacities as evident. So too can I say I created art when considering Lynn Dalrymple in Barnes (ed) citing Janson that ' … imagination, creativity, originality, and performance skills [are]… the key theoretical underpinnings of dramatic art' when looking to define her question what is art.' (Barnes, 2013)

Indeed this was art that was beneficial because (Jones' italics):

> 'Life experiences are given *added validity* by depicting them dramatically with and in front of others. …[and]
>
> An individual's dramatic work is *recognised and understood* by others. The feeling and experience they depict are empathised with and responded to by others.' (Jones, 1996)

I do not know what happened to many of the people after they left the theatre, but immediately post performance, thought and conversation were abundant. As I left the stage, some walked the spiral crane themselves, (could we call it then an

interactive-installation?), whilst others sat talking, not wanting to leave the community of theatre that held them. My intention to not only create a lament but a means for others to not feel alone, was achieved. We are still connected, even though we rail against the backdrop of mass extinction, cruelty, grief, fear, reactivity. An examiner said they had 'come away feeling a lot less alone from that space, it's a huge gift, a huge gift' (Nativel, 2019c) Blackie cautions being swallowed by our own grief, suggesting we:

> ' … recognise our wounds and … focus on coming back to our bodies … reclaim our deep connection to the land and its non-human inhabitants. This is how we heal.' (Blackie, 2017)

This process helped me come back into my body; it resonated with others in community.

Community

The work of Macy and Weller, death doulas', the good death movement, death cafes, to name some, and the honour of being with my parents at their deaths have opened doors to other possible avenue of 'work' around grief, a topic I feel I have the capacity to hold.

More importantly, and most definitely a resounding tick for *has there been healing*, is the welcome realisation, that what I have pathologised as my own river of pain, I now see flows to, and contains, universal waters; that I am submerged in the same grief as millions of others, and in that I am not alone – both in eco grief and in doing what I can to seek another future and change our narrative. I found a community of people, who stretch far and wide geographically, who are aligned in their concern for plastic pollutants, or for harm towards other sentient beings, or Earth as a living body with systems. These people are not expressing themselves the same way I do or following the exact same path, but there is camaraderie in a common cause of wanting to live differently, and in harmony with the planet. I have met them by physically travelling to the Caribbean and meeting women from around the globe, I met them on The Work That Reconnects workshop, we have met online whereby I

am informed, or am informing others about issues spurring conversation and creating dialogue in my community; and through the act of returning to university I have been blessed by a kindred spirit who has been a life line in this process. I am motivated to reach into communities and slowly build this purpose. I am motivated again to take up workshops where people can be in community and express their living, their dying, and their grief. The healing balm lies potentially in joining to others to create a transformed society, a tipping point. I am once more called to be a change inciter; ACT-i-ON, ACT-i-AM, ACT-i-VATOR.

Breathing Forward Step by Step

Jessica Pierce's article 'Ecological Mourning Is a Unique Form of Grief' suggests grief assists us because ' ... the very fact of experiencing loss affirms our connectedness to the land and to other beings.(Pierce, 2019) Eisenstein, in a podcast discussion with death care specialist Julie Esterly titled, *Julie Esterly: Mystery of Life, Death, and Earth* (E43) refers to ritual as ' … a prayer, that invites the worlds to be in alignment with the story that the ritual comes from, we can ask what kind of prayer are we making …' (Eisenstein, n.d.) Further in his essay 'Every Act a Symbol' he expands ritual as 'a way that humans and other beings hold their reality together' just as my SPRs have held my reality together. He evidences everyday activities as examples of 'manipulation of symbols in a prescribed manner or sequence in order to maintain relationships with the social and material world, just as… ' ceremony, he adds, is ' … a special kind of ritual ... done in the knowledge that one is in the presence of the sacred ... where one might give attention to the manner in which one is operating.'(Eisenstein, 2019a)

I am operating with a belief system that the universe is an intelligent conscious Being; that Earth is itself a living body with systems, just as mine is. (It feels both arrogant, and obvious, to say this.) With this in mind he continues that if we were to align with this way of operating in the world then we would ask questions such as *what does the river want*? I might have asked - *what does Earth want?* - as opposed to me setting off to do a Master's dissertation around creating a lament. This was more about not knowing what to do than knowing - perhaps this is a way in

to answering the question - the re-enlivenment, the actual being obligated to do something for the Master's, has led me to reflexively ask, *what does Earth want*? I am called to try a different way of being in the world, not the survivalist martyr sacrificed to the mechanisms of labour and the industrial complex, but to an intuitive way of communicating, or at least appealing to the non-human world to lead me forward.

Dreaming a New Future - Community and Action

Is the impact of this research sustainable for me, or a kick-starter for anything else? Under a possible pseudonym, in the blog post 'Fierce Love', Velcrow Ripper writes spiritual activism ' … comes from the heart, not just the head, activism that is compassionate, positive, kind, fierce and transformative.' (Ripper, 2009) They suggest it is an 'upwardly spiraling [*sic*] cycle of increasing awareness, connection, compassion, involvement, capacity, and back to increasing awareness.' (Ibid) It is my desire that I am thrust in an upward spiral to reconnect with Earth, and all beings in a more fiercely engaged way. As Weller painfully expresses in *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief:*

> 'We cannot escape these times; … It is now that our apprenticeship is most called upon. We are asked to stand alongside these difficult and painful visitations, these epiphanies of lamentation.' (Weller, 2015 p.98)

Just as I have had to sort through this process of creativity where Estes reminds us that 'Creativity is the ability to respond to all that goes on around us, to choose from the hundreds of possibilities …' and to fashion this into ' … a unique response …' (Estés, 1994)

I find this from John Seed et al's *Thinking Like a Mountain,* most fitting:

> *'*… rituals prepare us and provide us with a larger context for action. … when we realize we are acting not just from our own opinions or beliefs, but on behalf of a larger Self - the Earth - with the authority of more than four billion years of our planet's evolution behind us, then we are filled with new determination, courage and perseverance, less limited by self-doubt, narrow

self-interest and discouragement. The apathy from which we suffer, the sense of paralysis, is a product of our shrivelled sense of self.' (Seed et al., 2007)

2. Conclusion

This journey might look like a circle, but it has felt like a maze in trying to find the best expression for my lament, and so perhaps, it has been a labyrinth[20] all along. In this very moment, I am filled with a resonating gratitude for the many fold accomplishments that are attached to this Master's process. I take knowing back into the world: knowing of a process that can help others, knowing that I am able to call myself a creator, that I have touched and made a difference in the lives of some people even though I have been on the most self-focused journey. I look forward to being able to share the zine with others, and to grow and present the performance.

I still have fear: I am fearful of criticism, of still being found not good enough, not well read enough, not well written enough, not well researched enough; and yet in my waking doing life, where my whole is greater than all its parts, I say yes.

I align myself with craftivist Stacey Rozen's comment, 'I am … a creator ...[I] express my creation in differing media forms depending on my creative impulse.' (S. Rozen, personal communication, October 18, 2019), or as @brendendurell on twitter suggests, 'You don't create art, you are art expressing itself. You're just giving substance to an energy that has always lived within you.' (innerlightwarrior, 2019)

[20]'A labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The Labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world. Labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools.' (*The Labyrinth: Walking Your Spiritual Journey*, n.d.)

In examination I see that whilst I have to mindfully dredge my rivers, put myself under pressure to produce, to make Life, lest I become bogged down in the process of dormancy, I must also acknowledge that my creativity has grown from the composting of grief, loss, bereavement and struggle of birthing. Is this not the cycle of life and death, the very natural cycle of the cosmos?

In late February 2020 I shared a memory on Facebook of how ten years before I had set out as a small figure in a large, hot, dry overgrown hostile terrain, on a vision quest, it read:

> 10 years and a few days since I went trampling about in the Groot Donkerhoek fynbos for 4 days with only water and a leopard's shadow and spoor for company.
> I'm nearing the end of another quest for clearer vision[21], grace willing, in a few weeks
> Spirals of life where everything and nothing have changed
> The world is vast, the planet amazing, I send love, I am deeply grateful for this life, for those who have supported, loved, laughted [*sic*] and cried with me (Nativel, 2020)

[21] This Masters process

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5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

ACT-i-ON ezine NATIVEL final (pdf) as separate document

Appendix 2:

ACT-i-ON invitation (jpeg) on dvd

Appendix 3:

ACT-i-ON lectern-lamentation (video) on dvd

Appendix 4:

ACT-i-ON running behind witnesses (video) on dvd

Appendix 5:

Example of wall spiral from lectern-lamentation (jpeg) on dvd