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Living with Loss: An Enquiry into the Expression of Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Art Practice.

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Abstract

In a secular society, religion no longer dictates the manner in which death and dying is rationalized, nor sets the precedence for observances of grief; how individuals grieve has changed. This thesis formulates two central hypotheses: that a new phenomenon is emerging of the contemporary cenotaph in art, erected either as physical manifestations or digitally on the Internet; that encapsulated within these cenotaphs is a wealth of information concerning the deceased and aspects of artists' unique grieving processes - the symptoms of loss and trauma are actualized in their work. Artists are reconfiguring religious forms of commemoration and producing secular variants.

The aims of this research are threefold: to investigate ways in which artists are forging new approaches to the portrayal of grief and mourning; to explore how these have arisen in an increasingly secular society; to explore through my own practice in response to loss, how art might assume new forms and meanings in a contemporary context.

The research aims are investigated through interdisciplinary means including practice-led research, a corpus of wide-ranging artists and artworks, a new methodological approach and theoretical discourses in grief and mourning. The core artists studied are Hannah Wilke, Jo Spence, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Zoe Leonard and Sheridan Horn.

Wilke's and Spence's work is reviewed as the documentation of grief and mourning rather than as feminist polemic. Practice-led research consists of three sculptural expositions. *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* was produced to explore how loss registers both overtly and covertly in practitioners' work. It revealed artists embodying experience in materialized forms by mimicking the symptoms of loss, grief and trauma. *D(e)ad* comprised organic matter 'performed' by continuously changing state, actualizing grieving processes. This work was compared to the cenotaphs by Gonzalez-Torres and Leonard and the historical *vanitas*, itself currently re-emerging as contemporary cenotaph. *Grief Shadow* represented the dynamic process of grief and mourning in a static work rather than through changes of state. Counterpoint references include the digital cenotaphs of Briony Campbell's *The Dad Project* (2009) and the new social phenomenon of extreme embalming.

In a society without customary guidelines for grief and mourning, cenotaphs in art are crucial in offering alternative forms of discursive and commemorative practice.

Dedicated to David Cheeseman.

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Chapter One

1.1) Introduction. 1.2) Key terms: loss, grief, mourning, cenotaph and memorial. 1.3) Living with dying. 1.4) Rationale for the selection of artists.

1.1   Introduction

> *The way to the goal seems chaotic and interminable at first, and only gradually do the signs increase that it is leading anywhere. The way is not straight but appears to go round in circles. More accurate knowledge has proved it to go in spirals: the dream motifs always return after certain intervals to definite forms, whose characteristic it is to define a centre [...]. The development of these symbols is the equivalent of a healing process.*

Carl Jung: *Psychology and Alchemy*, (1953/2010: 28-29).

Individuation, a term used by Carl Jung to describe the process of self-development or self-realization, is a dynamic process, which continues to evolve across an individual's lifespan. As new experiences and challenges are encountered during one's life they must be reconfigured and accommodated within the self. Jung believed that individuation involved an ongoing interchange between such opposites as psyche and soma, consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death and the personal and collective (Schmidt, n.d.). The quote above refers to the importance of symbolic motifs as relayed in dream sequences. In Jungian analysis, the interpretation of symbolic meanings and metaphors in dreams is seen as a crucial aspect of therapy because it provides a hidden source of information which offers the potential for personal transformation and healing (Carotenuto, 1979).

Beyond its context, the quotation might equally be a description of the grieving process with loss 'defin[ing] a centre'. The grieving process is cyclic (Humphrey and Zimpfer, 2008: 3, 5, 49 and 149); as C. S. Lewis recognized, when writing about the death of his wife in *A Grief Observed*, 'One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles or dare I hope I am on a spiral?' (Lewis, 1966: 49). It is the recursive nature of this activity which gradually allows the psyche of the bereft to resolve and assimilate their overwhelming loss(es). Alternatively, Jung's words could also be defining a creative process such as that of making art. Surely the creation of art is essentially yet another form of individuation?

When considering the relationship between the analyst and analysand in psychoanalytic practice, Jung perceived that 'The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed' (Jung, 1933/2001: 49-50). This potential for personal transformation may occur not only for the artist through the process of making art but also on its reception, for the spectator. Since artworks are embodied forms of knowledge, the 'alchemical' reaction which takes place between the artwork and the viewer may occur long after the artist has died. Furthermore, this catalytic relationship is not necessarily a one-way process. It is through the dynamic exchange taking place between the artwork and its audience that new meanings emerge and evolve. This raises some interesting questions concerning the artists in my corpus - I am keen to ascertain the ways in which artists today are navigating and materializing deeply personal loss(es) such as trauma, grief and mourning. Do these artists' representations evidence some form of cathartic release or personal healing? How are these artists reconfiguring historical metanarratives and theoretical concepts (particularly regarding human suffering) in the formulation of their lived experiences?

The artworks selected in this study can be seen as having evolved through specific historical lineage(s). My main aim in this study is to investigate the ways in which artists are generating new secular forms of memorialization in response to sociocultural influences and Christian theology (in terms of arts symbiotic legacy as a mediator of religious canons especially through historically established genres). For instance, taking the concept that artworks are potentially repositories for embedded knowledge, alchemy and healing owe their origins to the Christian cult of saints.

In the Middle Ages the corpse of a martyr or saint was seen as a precious thaumaturgic relic. The Christian belief that saints coexisted on earth and in a celestial dimension made them powerful spiritual mediators. If the faithful could get close enough to these holy remains, then they may be afforded a posthumous miracle - probably in the form of curative healing (Finucane, 1977: 39). Consequently, upon death, a prospective saint's corpse could be harvested for samples that were considered inessential in terms of the immortal body, such as hair, finger nails, teeth and blood, thus providing portable relics (Angenendt, 2011: 22). Each specimen or fragment taken from a holy body, however small still contained the entire summation of that saint's powers (Krueger, 2011: 8). The complete skeleton or incorruptible corpse of an established saint was believed to emanate a divine force field so that objects placed close to them would absorb this power. This included the oil from burning lamps, accumulated dirt or dust within the shrine,

water or wine that had flowed over the saint's remains, or personal items placed nearby. It was claimed that this transference of divine power provided 'contact' relics. More importantly, this healing energy also enveloped the hopeful pilgrims themselves as they prayed, looked at, touched or kissed the saint's tomb or desiccated body (Finucane, 1977: 26; Angenendt, 2011: 23).

Contemporary artists gather body matter much as relics were gathered in the Christian tradition of a reliquary. The similarity between contemporary and devotional practice rests not only upon a shared subject matter but also encompasses presentational forms and modes of viewing. For instance, the way in which contemporary artists present body waste is reminiscent of the presentation of reliquaries which are intimately packaged to the point of being fetishized (Nagel, 2011: 211-222). It is these intimate and fetishized sets of viewing techniques that provide sensate interactions with the onlooker. Artists use bodily fluids and products (blood, menstrual blood, urine, faeces, saliva, tears, hair, nails and bones) or cut the body or deploy decaying matter as a way of exploring abject, taboo and transgressive boundaries.

At the end of the eighteenth century, "secular relics" began to proliferate. Unlike the Christian cult of saints' relics venerated by the masses, these relics were cherished by a few people or an individual who loved the benefactor (Lutz, 2015). As seen in Britain during the Victorian era, secular relics also had the potential to be fetishized:

> *Bodies left behind traces of themselves, shreds that could then become material for memories. Such vestiges might be found in objects the body had touched as it advanced through existence: clothing worn, letters written, utensils handled. The hands may have formed matter into a work of art, or a more ordinary possession, depositing some mark of its maker. More concretely, the body itself or its parts functioned for the Victorians as mementos: the snippet of hair made into jewelry or even a bone or desiccated organ kept in a special container. Less tangibly, the body – its presence, then absence – could be felt in spaces it had inhabited, such as rooms, houses, or spots in nature.*
>
> (Deborah Lutz, 2015: 1)

Secular relics (fragments of the deceased or contact relics) could imbue the quintessence of the love between the deceased and a survivor(s), hold memories, evoke stories, educe an aura or materialize narratives of a body (Lutz, 2015: 2). Historically, artists were tasked with the intimate act of generating posthumous portraits of the dead either by taking a direct cast of the deceased's face and/or hands or capturing their likeness in drawings, paintings and miniatures. However, these types of memorialization could only be

acquired by those who could afford them. Relics fashioned into items of jewellery may be worn next to the skin, held in the hand or traced by the eye. Objects used by the deceased when alive or clothing worn by them can be touched or breathed in as evocative reminders of their presence. This is especially so if the objects are associated with a loved one, but even if they are not as Deborah Lutz observes when contemplating Victorian relics. 'Poignant, humorous and even absurd, these objects still glimmer with meaning after the many years that have passed; they teem with a past still profoundly relevant, thus attesting to the ability of materiality to stay animated and consequential' (Lutz, 2015: 13).

Secular relics provide indexical traces, metaphorical stand-ins or symbolic markers for the absence of a loved one. 'They then become transitional objects between the past and the future and have the function of allowing us the time we need for commemoration of what has gone, and for adjustment towards what is to come' (Lee, 1994: 33). Similarly, contemporary artists are utilizing objects and media not only to evoke the deceased but also to narrate their own embodied experiences of loss, trauma, grief and mourning. In this thesis I explore the ways in which artists are articulating the loss of the self in the other. Materialized expressions of loss in relation to death, dying and bereavement is a primary concern and arguments regarding these issues will appear in every chapter. I utilize my own art practice as a means to interrogate and develop a deeper understanding of these matters.

Concerning my research topic, there are very few books in the visual arts written specifically about this subject. Instead, information is scattered amongst artists' monographs and cited within compiled texts. Exceptions to this are texts produced by Roland Barthes (1980/2000) (please see section 2.10) and Peggy Phelan. In *Mourning Sex* (1997), Phelan uses 'performative writing' to represent the traumatized body as it exists simultaneously in sexual, political, psychological and cultural contexts. Fact, fiction and theory are combined to create intertextual dialogues concerning the registration of loss and mourning in life. In the introduction of *Mourning Sex*, Phelan states that 'The enactment of invocation and disappearance undertaken by performance and theatre is precisely the corporeality itself. At once a consolidated fleshy form and an eroding, decomposing formlessness, the body beckons us and resists our attempts to remake it. The resistant beckoning was the lure for this writing, a writing toward and against bodies who die' (Phelan, 1997: 4). The notion of the body at the point of death turning from a subject into an object or that performances effectively 'live' and 'die' is

relevant. Lutz observes that the relic endlessly re-enacts or encapsulates this poignancy of the body becoming object at death (Lutz, 2015; 8). This idea of encapsulating 'living' and 'dying' within an art work or oscillating liminality is explored in each of the artists' work selected in this corpus.

Mary O'Neill's Ph.D. thesis *Ephemeral Art: Mourning and Loss,* tracked five contemporary artists' responses to premature death. She analyses the contradictions that arise from the preservation of ephemeral art by galleries. The artists studied are from a variety of cultures. Ephemeral artworks are seen as relating directly to the process of mourning and inculcating four characteristics 'time, communicative act, inherent vice and directive intent' (O'Neill, 2007: i). Whereas O'Neill establishes an overview of these types of work, I refer to a specific group of transient works which are indebted to the historical *vanitas* but formulate part of a new phenomenon which is occurring that of the personalised cenotaph. In this way I build on the groundwork that she has established, and additionally my aim is to discover if there are new approaches which artists are adopting as grief and mourning practices.

Another relevant Ph.D. thesis is by Davina Kirkpatrick (2017). Her investigation centres on the narration of her personal journey following the deaths of her mother and partner. Kirkpatrick deploys a variety of techniques including art based practice, participatory projects, stories, rituals, auto-ethnographic writing, theoretical study, conversations and interviews. She adopts a multidisciplinary approach and utilizes herself as an anthropological case study in order to discover a 'restorative space of mourning' (Kirkpatrick, 2017: 2). Kirkpatrick's approach is more autobiographical whereas my goal is to map the ways in which artists materializations of grief and mourning are indicators of wider sociological shifts in mourning practices. Unlike O'Neill and Kirkpatrick, I also include artists who produced artworks whilst living with dying as well as in response to bereavement. A rationale for why I decided to widen the scope in this way is given below.

1.2   Key terms: loss, grief, mourning, cenotaph, and memorial

A loss is one that is considered by the individual(s) affected to be a negative event resulting in deprivation. Loss comes in many forms but for the purposes of categorisation is labelled either tangible or symbolic. Tangible loss refers to that of material objects such as the death of a loved one, the amputation of a limb or stolen goods. 'Symbolic losses

are psychosocial in nature - related to the psychological aspects of a person's social interactions' (Rando, 1991: 12). Symbolic loss includes social death, bullying, harassment, rape or redundancy. In my thesis, loss is seen in terms of *irrevocable loss* such as the death of a loved one or living with chronic/terminal illness. In addition to this, loss is also acknowledged as having an accumulative effect with the individual having to assimilate losses located in the past, present and future (Rando, 1986: 15-17). For example, a person who is terminally ill may experience loss in terms of their bodily functions, privacy (intrusive medical interventions), daily routines (frequent visits to medical facilities), sexual attractiveness, libido and future plans. They also have to accommodate past losses (previous health scares, financial debt, bereavement, divorce). This creates a layered synergistic effect which may escalate and become overwhelming. However, suffering might paradoxically also offer opportunities for reframing one's experience and develop personal growth, self-compassion, mindfulness[1] and healing. In my thesis narratives of loss are considered in terms of a ripple effect centred on the individual but moving outwards concentrically to encompass family, community and sociocultural implications.

Grief and mourning are closely related but should not be deployed in place of one another. They are *not* interchangeable. Grief is regarded primarily as a psychological or intrapersonal expression in reaction to major loss, but one which also encompasses spiritual, behavioural and somatic elements (Weinstein, 2008: 3; Fireman, 2011)[2]. Mourning is the social or interpersonal expression of significant loss framed within

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[1] The closeness of death means that one is forced to meditate on the fundamental nature of life which can create a state of sensate mindfulness whereby time collapses into the infinity of the present moment. Philip Gould, in his book *When I Die, Lessons from the Death Zone,* which he wrote whilst dying from oesophageal cancer, observed:

> *This surge of understanding takes you into a different state of being. All of us tend to think in terms of linear time. One thing follows another. But this is only one form of time's many complexities. I can no longer think like that.*
> *What good is it to me to think in terms of conventional time? Six months or nine months no longer exist for me. So I am trying to make sense of the world not through time but through emotion, through relationships, through feeling.*
> *I am looking at the world through this great collection of emotions and relationships and progressions and changes. All at once. This is what is happening for me now. When I try to push forward in terms of conventional time, to look ahead, to count the minutes or the hours or the days, sooner rather than later I hit a solid rock: I am dead on the other side of this.*
> *I think instead in terms of other, richer conceptions of progression - relationships, emotional connection, spiritual understanding, the sense of God, the sense of divinity. There is no future for me now so I am flowing back and this here, now, is the place for everything. Here now is where I live, where all these ideas and feelings circle on themselves.*

(Gould, 2012: 134).

[2] See also under the heading 'Grief, Loss and Bereavement' (Encyclopedia.com, 2003).

prevailing religious and sociocultural contexts. Mourning also includes adapting to challenges and changes that major loss incurs. In other words, it is an outward expression of grief. Mourning is 'a more encompassing phenomenon' (Fireman, 2011). Both of these processes can overlap, which is probably why they are mistakenly seen as being synonymous. However, it is equally important to remember that because artworks are conduits of human embodiment, they can convey aspects of both grief and mourning processes simultaneously.

Works produced by visual practitioners as expressions of grief and mourning are referred to in this thesis as contemporary cenotaphs or as memorials. A cenotaph is a monument which honours a person or group of individuals whose remains are interred or located elsewhere. The word cenotaph means 'empty tomb'[3]. A memorial[4] is a structure built to preserve the memory of the dead or a particular event such as a disaster or victory. The difference between these two words is that a cenotaph *only honours the dead*. A cenotaph is a memorial but not all memorials are cenotaphs. In Ancient Greek scripts specific cenotaphs are referenced but unfortunately none of them have survived. Examples of cenotaphs in existence include those honouring Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) located inside the Basilica di Santa Croce in Florence. Today cenotaphs are synonymous with national war memorials but I will be using this term in its original form to describe a structure honouring a dead person. Although increasingly the terms cenotaph and memorial are being used interchangeably, in this thesis I intend to preserve the original distinction in meaning. This nuanced approach makes for greater clarity and precision when discussing artworks especially so in the context of grief and mourning. An artwork may combine both the functions of honouring a dead person and/or a group of people as well as encapsulating wider social phenomena.

1.3   Living with dying

It is important to acknowledge that the *irrevocable loss(es)* suffered by artists in this thesis

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[3] Cenotaph means 'empty tomb' from the Latin *cenotaphium* and from the Greek, *kenos* 'empty' + *taphos* 'tomb'.

[4] The English term *memorial* originated in the fourteenth century from the Latin *memoriale* and *memorialis* a reminder/belonging to remembrance.

are inextricably bound up with the process of living with dying. The visual practitioners in my corpus have either lived with chronic and/or terminal illness themselves and/or witnessed a loved one living with dying. Death is not a single event; lesser deaths permeate our existence in the form of mutability and loss. With the increase in life expectancy due to medical and technological advancement, for many individuals dying has become a long and protracted process[5] (BBC News, 2010). This experience of the body oscillating between periods of health and sickness was imaginatively referred to by Susan Sontag as holding a dual passport that allows one to travel between 'the kingdom of the well' and 'the kingdom of the sick' (Sontag, 1978/1991: 3). Arthur Frank prefers to use the term 'remission society' for all those people who like himself are living with an incurable illness or condition, but pass in society as being well. As he notes, these people are often invisible and he further develops Sontag's metaphor: those in remission belong neither to the kingdom of the well or the sick, but have a 'permanent visa status' which is subject to ongoing renewal (Frank 1995: 9).

For those living with dying, the body can become painful, vulnerable, uncontrollable, disordered and stigmatized; it is liable to exude and excrete pus, blood, vomit, urine, diarrhoea, tears and other odorous secretions (Waskul and van der Riet, 2002: 487). The body's boundaries are subject to endless violations and invasive procedures by others; its appearance alters due to conditions such as the loss of hair and nails, and loss of appetite, tumours, surgical amputation, suppurating wounds and fungating lesions. The catastrophically ill body is a site for unpleasant experiences and cruel suffering. Socially acceptable norms become very difficult to uphold. Chronic illness can reduce a patient to an infantile state, because bodily functions such as urination or defecation cannot always be controlled. The symbolic puncturing of social codes of behaviour can for those who witness these acts make them 'contaminated' by association (Waskul and van der Riet, 2002: 499).

At the beginning of life, the process of pregnancy and birth produces predictable sequential patterns which can be monitored and observed. Similarly, the dying process also produces recognizable chronological patterns. The concept of charting an

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[5] As Guy Brown observes, there is an alarming rise in new neurodegenerative diseases such as frontal lobe dementia, Pick's and Lewy body disease occurring because individuals are living longer. In the future a significant majority of people will suffer from either some form of dementia, disability or cognitive impairment as they reach old age. Brown advocates that life and death should be viewed as an analogue process or an ongoing continuum in which there are 'different degrees and ways of being alive and dead' (Brown, 2008: 5, 132).

individual's health status over time as they approach death is known as a dying trajectory[6]. This can be plotted on a graph. As James Hallenbeck observes - 'Individuals will, of course, vary in their personal dying trajectories; however, it is remarkable how similar dying trajectories can be for patients with similar disease processes' (Hallenbeck, 2003: 17). Whatever a person's illness there is a general pattern of symptoms at the very end of life (Hagberg, 2013). When someone is approaching death, they become progressively weary and need to sleep for increasingly longer periods of time. At some point the person slips into a coma from which they do not wake. Their breathing patterns will change until eventually their breathing becomes gentler and stops (Mannix, 2017: 19-21, 152-153). The final breath is an exhalation.

Living with dying is a transformative experience ranging from spiritual or personal enlightenment and/or a forced acceptance of fear, suffering, loss of control and isolation. These types of encounter inevitably change the way in which someone perceives themselves and affects their relationships with others. The knowledge that death is close makes the individual question what life means for them.

For the seriously ill and dying, the body becomes a site for significant loss and trauma. Illness often induces a state of lethargy in the sufferer. Under these circumstances it is quite remarkable that anyone would even contemplate producing a work of creativity. Frank has claimed that a patient who 'turns illness into story' is no longer a passive victim of fate; the 'wounded storytellers' creatively enable their illness to become '…the common bond of suffering that joins bodies in their shared vulnerability' (Frank 1995: xi). By opening up a dialogue with others, a communal network of support can be established.

Traditionally, artworks associated with grief and mourning have circulated around post death bereavement and memorialization. However, grief and mourning is also experienced by those who are themselves dying. By including artists in my corpus who have produced artworks pre-mortem I will be able to problematize previous chronological models of grief and mourning and thus produce a more nuanced account.

1.4 Rationale for the selection of artists

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[6] The term dying trajectory was coined by Glaser and Strauss. They refer to a dying trajectory as having two outstanding properties *duration* and *shape* which can be plotted on a graph. They noted that patterns of death include 'abrupt'/sudden death, 'deferment', 'lingering' and 'vacillates slowly'/ vascillating (Glaser and Strauss, 1968).

Suffering, death, and redemption are common themes in art covering a vast and complex terrain. For millennia, artists have mediated and ameliorated human suffering through the production of artefacts, mementos, and memorials. Rituals associated with death, dying, and remembrance are equally materialized in artistic forms of expression. The diversity of these themes means that it is not possible to map them as a singular, chronological history because they constitute many histories. When researching a topic it is assumed that moving from a general broad-based approach to a specific in-depth study will narrow the field of research and yet this is rarely the case. No matter how concise the topic, there will always be more avenues to explore and more questions to answer. Though narrowing the scope of my study to focus on the expressions of grief and mourning in contemporary art practice may have reduced the terrain considerably, it obviously still covers an expansive area. Artists today are reworking historically established themes, genres and practices for current audiences. They are generating posthumous portraits, monuments and shrines, expressions of living with dying and ritualized practices associated with death, dying and memorialization. It is also important to recognize that there is a multitude of artistic expressions and reflections concerning these topics. Fine art is a massive domain in its own right, historically encompassing architecture, music, painting, poetry and sculpture. Today the fine arts include many additional forms such as film, photography, lens-based media, performance, installation and participatory practice. In order to produce a concise and comprehensive study, I decided to focus on a select group of visual practitioners working within defined perimeters.

As previously mentioned, I deliberately selected artists who had produced artworks while living with dying themselves as well as artists like me who created works in response to personal bereavement. The term used to describe pre-mortem grief is 'anticipatory grief'. Grief is not simply experienced as anticipated loss, but for losses that have already happened or are unfolding in the present. Therese Rando thinks that anticipatory grief is an unsuitable term for this theory because it implies grieving for future loss through death rather than grieving for ongoing associative losses (Rando, 1986: 12-14). Post-mortem grief enables the survivor to achieve a sense of closure and acceptance which is rare in anticipatory grief because resolution cannot be achieved as long as an individual is alive and there is still hope of recovery. Vanderlyn Pine comments, 'Moreover, it is unrealistic to say that once you know that someone is going to die you begin the process of anticipatory grief and that when that person dies,

anticipatory grief ends and normal grief begins. Fixed starting and stopping points are not present in these processes. At issue here is the connotation that grief is segmented, whereas, in reality, this is not the case' (Pine, 1986: 40-41). The artists that I have selected provide an arching synopsis for debate concerning these matters.

The choice of practitioners in my corpus is also influenced by my need to formulate a critical and dialogical framework within which I could develop practice-led research and theoretical investigation. Consequently, all the artists included in this thesis have commonalities with my own art practice. For example, their works are all figurative and they utilize the same media, processes, genre and themes as I do. In addition, the artists' works contained within this thesis are informed by culturally embedded Christian ideologies and rituals of grief and mourning. The detailed examination of a body of works by specific artists provides case studies and allows me to generate an understanding of complex issues centred on the individual, group, community and culture. This topic of research is important because from the perspective of fine art theory and practice, information concerning loss, grief and mourning is widely dispersed. Whilst critics' insights into the subject are relevant, they currently lack unity and these diverse viewpoints need to be assembled, compared and analysed. By bringing disparate pieces of information together, researchers (art history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, visual practitioners and the caring professions) should gain clarity into the unique ways in which artists are tackling difficult experiences.

In the next chapter, I outline the corpus and undertake a literature review of the artists and their work.

Chapter Two

Literature reviews; research aims, objectives and questions; thesis structure

2.1) Presentation of the corpus. 2.2) Literature review of the key artists and works cited: Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) and Jo Spence (1934-1992). 2.3) Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) and Zoe Leonard (b.1961). 2.4) Theoretical frameworks: an overview of critical discourses surrounding grief and mourning. 2.5) Research aims, objectives and questions. 2.6) Methodological frameworks. 2.7) The four concepts. 2.8) Methods. 2.9) Statement of ethics. 2.10) Death in the photographic image. 2.11) Thesis structure.

2.1 Presentation of the corpus

In this research I have chosen to take on a wide range of artworks and artists as a dynamic yet challenging corpus. The reason for this is not only due to the diversity of artists, but their use of media, time frames and the sociocultural contexts which they span. For the purpose of clarity, my corpus and critical literature are presented in thematic groups. The study comprises five key artists divided into two groups:

- Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) and Jo Spence (1934-1992) who produced work whilst living with loss and mortality as cancer patients.

- Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996), Zoe Leonard (b.1961) and Sheridan Horn (b.1960) who each materialized their loss, grief and mourning in response to the death of a loved one.

The artworks and artists referenced are from either Europe or America.

2.2 Literature review of the key artists and works cited: Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) and Jo Spence (1934-1992)

Wilke and Spence were in the vanguard when it came to confronting the representational crisis of how to portray cancer during an era when this subject was considered taboo.

Their frank and forthright approach has produced a remarkable body of work, especially considering that it was produced under such difficult and compromising circumstances[7]. These two artists offer a valuable insight into the medicalization of death and dying in Western society through their materializations of loss, grief and mourning.

Hannah Wilke was an American, feminist artist who questioned hierarchal forms of domination and control. Her work centred on the female body which she used to challenge sociocultural attitudes towards gender and racial subjugation, stereotyping and objectification. She gained critical acclaim in the 1960s through her sculptural works which referenced the vagina. Her vulvae artworks produced in a range of media, colour and sizes throughout her career are a signature aspect of her oeuvre along with 'performalist' self-portrait photographs. In the 1970s she became a performance artist, documenting her works via video and photographs presented as a composite series. She also referenced erotic female figures such as caryatids, Venus and herself as a femme fatale in order to destabilize cultural constructions of beauty, gender politics and sexual desire. Wilke's use of fragile sculptural materials combined with her self-expression via performance art (another transient art form) demonstrate the artist's lifelong exploration of the multiple and mutating nature of identity, illness and mortality.

For the purposes of this study I will be focusing on a selection of works namely:

- *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art* (1974), Hannah Wilke

- *S.O.S. Starification Object Series, An Adult Game of Mastication* (1974-1975), Hannah Wilke

- *So Help Me Hannah Series*: *Portrait of the Artist with her Mother, Selma Butter*. From the *So Help Me Hannah Series* (1978-1981), Hannah Wilke

- *Intra-Venus Series* (1991-1992), Hannah Wilke with Donald Goddard

- *Intra-Venus Tapes* (1990-1993), Hannah Wilke and Donald Goddard.

The provocative nature of works such as *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art* (1974) and

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[7] Wilke was diagnosed with lymphoma in 1987 and died on the 28th January 1993 (Wilke, n.d.).

Spence contracted breast cancer in 1982 and subsequently recovered from this (despite a relapse 18 months after a lumpectomy). She was diagnosed with breast cancer again, plus leukaemia on Christmas Eve in 1990 - she died on the 24th June 1992 (Spence, 1995: 25-26).

Starification Object Series, An Adult Game of Mastication (1974-1975) has solicited criticism. In particular this is evidenced in the feminist readings produced by Lucy Lippard, Sandy Flitterman and Judith Barry. Writing in the 1970s, these critics argued that Wilke's sexualized self-portraits were narcissistic in tone. Lippard wrote that Wilke's 'confusion of her roles as beautiful women and artist, as flirt and feminist, has resulted at times in politically ambiguous manifestations that have exposed her to criticism on a personal as well as an artistic level' (Lippard, 1976: 126; Frueh, 1996: 146). Flitterman and Barry remarked 'In objectifying herself as she does, in assuming the conventions associated with a stripper…Wilke…does not make her own position clear…. It seems her work ends up reinforcing what it intends to subvert' (Jones, 1998: 171-172). Critics such as Joanna Frueh and Amelia Jones refuted such damning indictments. They argued that Wilke's erotized posing actually exposed the constructs of the patriarchal gaze. By adopting poses associated with a "low" cultural context (i.e. those of glamour models, pinups or those found within pornography), she reframed them within a "high" cultural setting (that of fine art), so that this imagery became denaturalized. Wilke's inversion of normative practices of sociocultural viewing also challenged entrenched patriarchal representations of the nude in art. Whilst Wilke's photographs are immediately reminiscent of the pornographic or striptease industries (i.e. "low" cultural forms), they reference and destabilize the "high" culture of fine art (Frueh, 1996: 141-154; Jones, 1995: 4-13; 1998: 151-195).

The *Intra-Venus* series is seen by many as a stunning rejoinder to those critics who accused her of narcissistic posturing. In this, her final body of work, Wilke documented her declining health whilst undergoing treatment for lymphoma with the help of her partner Donald Goddard. The works that I will discuss are examples of Wilke's sustained exploration of feminine embodiment concerning theories of gender, sexuality and illness. When viewed in chronological order these particular works offer an opportunity for a recursive and yet progressively more challenging discourse concerning feminist theory (Frueh, 1996; Jones 1998; Skelly 2007; Tembeck, 2008; Princenthal, 2010). Although the steadily burgeoning feminist critiques of Wilke's work are undeniably important, they are nevertheless limited in their scope, with analyses tending to circulate around Western female identity politics. Frueh's exposition *Hannah Wilke*: *The Assertion of Erotic Will*, for example, discusses the artist's iconographic self-display as Venus in order to challenge 'patriarchy's containment of female possibility' (Frueh, 1996: 152). In a similar way, Jones' erudite analysis explores the polemics of Wilke's narcissistic art practice and

affirms her subversive tactics as a legitimate method of destabilizing the male patriarchal gaze. My intention is to produce new readings of Wilke's work by exploring them as contemporary representations of loss, grief and mourning. This is not to say that Wilke's materializations of loss and grief do not inculcate cultural constructions of femininity - they obviously do, this being an inherent aspect of her oeuvre. *In Mas(k/t)ectomies: Losing a Breast (and Hair) in Hannah Wilke's Body Art* (2007), Julia Skelly examines how Wilke's representations of actual bodily loss combined with her use of pose and props, reveals femininity as a performative act/masquerade.

This thesis explores Wilke's appropriation and manipulation of cultural constructs in order to describe the autobiographical disruptions within her life. This is a theme which I return to with each of the visual practitioners studied.

Like Wilke, the socialist British photographer Jo Spence was an ardent feminist. Spence firmly endorsed the feminist doctrine that 'the personal is political' (Spence, 1986b: 83). On being diagnosed with breast cancer, she set about analysing her predicament by adopting the stance of an investigative journalist undertaking 'a research project on the politics of cancer' (Spence, 1986b: 151). Spence's working methods were eclectic and included photography, personal journals, texts, writing and collage. She also produced a programme of self-help techniques. This occurred as a direct result of discovering that her local NHS hospital had inadequate counselling services. The general policy at this time was to treat recently diagnosed patients suffering from severe anxiety and depression with drugs (Dennett, 2011: 234). For her self-styled counselling programme she used dialectical script, mirrors, self-dialogue and role-play adapting ideas and methods produced by a range of writers, psychologists and film producers. From her investigative work in this area she developed a collaborative method of self-healing called Photo Therapy. The term "Photo Therapy" was coined in North America in the 1970's, by David Krauss, Doug Stewart, Joel Walker and Judy Weiser, and referred to the use of photographs in counselling or psychotherapy sessions between a professional therapist and their client. For Spence, the theories that she developed through Photo Therapy originated in neither photography nor psychotherapy, but through radical sociology, film and theatre (Spence *et al*, 2005: 334). As an activist, she also challenged various forms of hierarchal dominance and control such as patriarchal, institutional, racial, gender issues and class. Spence believed that self-knowledge, ideas, social and political criticism should be shared with as wide an audience as possible (Spence *et al*, 2005: 336). Consequently she converted part of her personal archive concerning her struggle with breast cancer into

a portable exhibition for the purposes of education entitled *The Picture of Health*? (1982-1986). This exhibition consisted of laminated photographs and text that created a personal montage from her diagnosis to recovery, including her abandonment of Western medicine for Chinese medicine which incorporates a holistic approach. This made her rethink her lifestyle to accommodate a healthy diet, exercise and meditation programme.

The following works by Spence will be analysed as documents of loss, grief and mourning:

- *The Property of Jo Spence* (1982), Jo Spence/Terry Dennett from *The Picture of Health?* (1982-1986)
- *15ᵗʰ October, 1984* (1984), Jo Spence/Terry Dennett from *The Cancer Project*
- *Marked up for Amputation* (1982), Jo Spence/Terry Dennett from *The Cancer Project*
- *Untitled* (self-portrait), Jo Spence/Rosy Martin from *The Picture of Health?* (1982-1986)
- *Narratives of Dis-ease*: *Excise, Exiled, Expected, Expunged* and *Included* (1990). Jo Spence - Self-Portraits taken by Tim Sheard
- *Untitled* (1992). Posthumously inscribed 'Jo Spence on a "good day" shortly before her death, photographing visitors to her room at the Marie Curie Hospice, Hampstead', Jo Spence/Terry Dennett
- *Metamorphosis* (1991-1992), Jo Spence/Terry Dennett.

Spence's dialogic approach which combined writing with the use of a camera as diary, therapeutic tool and mode of expression has provided a rich seam of information for research purposes. Her experiences of living with cancer appeared in the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* in 1986 (Spence *et al*, 2005: 262-305) and in books *Putting Myself in The Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (Spence, 1986b), posthumously in *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (Spence, 1995) and *Jo Spence: Beyond the Perfect Image, Photography, Subjectivity, Antagonism* (Spence *et al*, 2005). These sources document in detail her autopathography.

Literature about Wilke and Spence is located in several domains: photographic,

social science/medicine and fine art. Articles about Spence's work have appeared in *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*. Terry Dennett for instance, who was Spence's former partner and collaborator, outlined her pioneering dialectical self-help techniques (Dennett, 2011). Similarly, in *Photo Images: Jo Spence's Narratives of Living with Illness*, Susan Bell provides an exposition on how photographic images can 'enrich social science understandings of people's experiences of illness'. The author analyses three of Spence's photographs in terms of pictorial framing techniques, relationships between medical practitioner and patient, a cursory discussion about the politics of cancer and a descriptive account of Spence on her deathbed. The images are seen as offering insights into Spence's illness narrative and as a means to potentially open up discussions 'about relations of gender, power and medicine' (Bell, 2002: 5, 24). Ken Plummer states: 'Sociology turned its attention to the photograph more seriously in the 1970s' and that Robert Akeret developed a method for understanding photographic images called 'photoanalysis'. He posited that a photograph can be 'read' by asking oneself questions about it. Akeret's mode of questioning 'provides psychological interpretations rather than cultural ones' (Plummer, 2005: 61, 65-66). In a similar way, Bell 'reads' the photographs combining her findings with Spence's written accounts in order to produce psychological and social insights. Bell's analysis is cursory, but nevertheless her article does open up the possibilities of producing a radical investigation, tracking Spence's *navigation of embodied loss, trauma and grief* across a series of photographs taken from the onset of her illness until her untimely death. This study will encompass a broad spectrum of Spence's work commenting upon her use of recurring motifs, metaphors and revision of cultural themes/constructs; the intention is to uncover new readings that reveal patterns not only of her personal mediation of grief and trauma, but also wider sociological shifts in mourning practices.

Wilke and Spence are linked in terms of their autopathographies, the production of self-portrait photographs, time frames and feminist activism and this has resulted in their work being analysed together in several publications (Isaak, 2003; Avrahami, 2007; Tembeck, 2008). In *The Invading body: Reading Illness Autobiographies* (2007) Einat Avrahami explores Spence and Wilke's work 'as sites where cultural narratives intersect with the ways illness is phenomenologically experienced' (Avrahami, 2007: 4). Selected works by Spence are critiqued in terms of photographic production and audience reception, especially with reference to indexicality, coded messages and temporality. Personal and socio-political meanings, mainly centred upon patient and doctor relations,

are teased out. Her analysis of the 'metonymic mark' drawn on to Spence's breast by her doctor in *Marked up for Amputation* (1982) is astute, but she does not track this iconic 'x' and its possible significance in Spence's later works. Equally pertinent are her conjectures about Spence's final self-portrait taken in hospital and *Metamorphosis* 1991-1992 (a collaborative work produced posthumously by Terry Dennett), both of which I will refer to in more detail in Chapter Three (Avrahami, 2007: 97-128).

Avrahami's chapter entitled *Hannah Wilke: Performing Grief* does not, contrary to its title, discuss Wilke's materialization of loss, grief and mourning. Instead, she argues against Amelia Jones and Jo Anna Isaak's assertion that Wilke's final works are part of a continuous narcissistic self-display which spans her entire career. She asserts that Wilke's later works are not narcissistic because they are problematized by her cancerous body (Avrahami, 2007: 129-133). It is the inclusion of indexical marks of sickness and debilitation which allows Wilke and Spence to 'negotiate the boundaries between the culturally legitimate and the culturally refused'. She cites Ariela Shavid, a breast cancer survivor who has produced a series of self-portraits in *Beauty is a Promise of Happiness,* (1996) and Art Myers portraits as masking the index of trauma in survivors. This negates the fact that sickness even occurred. If the aim of these works is to allow the survivor to 'attain social reintegration and inclusion' she notes that they actively nullify discussions about enduring bodily effects and anxieties about possible recurrence in the future (Avrahami, 2007: 140-147). Having already critiqued Spence's final deathbed self-portrait and posthumous work produced with Dennett, this chapter offers Avrahami the opportunity to compare and contrast Spence and Wilke's representation of medicalized death and dying. However, she prefers to analyse their representation of illness rather than death. These artists' representations of death and dying are significant because they formulate memories which are an integral aspect of the grief and mourning process. Medicalized death and dying is a phenomenon that is currently unfolding in Western societies. However, neither of these artists' works have been historically sited with regard to art representations of domestic death and dying such as the Christian concept *ars moriendi* (the art of dying well). Comparisons between historical and contemporary art representations as cultural constructs of domestic death and dying would have evidenced some new ways in which grief and mourning is currently being materialized and assimilated both on an individual and collective basis.

In *Exposed Wounds: The Photographic Autopathographies of Hannah Wilke and Jo Spence*, Tamar Tembeck tracks representations of their woundedness (physical,

psychological and symbolic) across the breadth of their works. She perceives that autopathographic images such as those produced by Wilke and Spence 'are often invested with a transformative power that is reminiscent of traditional acting forms, such as talismans and ex-votos' (Tembeck, 2008: 100). In order to prove this hypothesis, Tembeck covers a broad spectrum of Wilke and Spence's work and in doing so reveals the potential for further investigation especially in relation to loss, grief and mourning. She writes 'In the history of art, the exposure of diseased bodies has consistently borne the mark of the abject' […] (Tembeck, 2008: 87). Whilst this observation is insightful Tembeck fails to expand on it in not comparing Wilke and Spence's representations of illness with historically situated images of the abject body. Loss and grief are mentioned in relation to Wilke's *Portrait of the Artist with Her Mother, Selma Butter* (1978-1981). She observes that 'Representing her mother's physical wounds before she died might have helped Wilke to resolve anticipated mourning' (Tembeck, 2008: 90). Although her reasoning is persuasive[8], she does not investigate *how* or *why* the very act of taking photographs may seem to provide a 'cure' or help to ameliorate grief. She concentrates instead on the pathographic images *themselves* as objects for potential healing. The importance of Wilke's personal losses when producing this work, such as breaking up with Claes Oldenburg and the precariousness of her mother's ill health are pertinent. However, despite this article being an interrogation into 'exposed wounds' Tembeck surprisingly does not make a single reference to any psychological or sociological literature with regard to the grieving process(es).

Tembeck observes that Wilke's *Intra-Venus* performalist self-portrait series shows 'the "biographical disruption" often effected by illness' (Tembeck, 2008: 92). This is a salient point but rather than produce a rigorous analysis of Wilke's self-encounter with her own narrative disruption, she explores instead the work's 'transformative potential' for both Wilke and the viewer (Tembeck, 2008: 93-94). A new approach would be to analyse these works instead as materializations of "biographical disruption" including ongoing and associative losses, embodied trauma and grief. Tembeck, like Avrahami, comments on the iconic 'x' drawn onto Spence's breast and then goes onto track its significance in later works. Although both authors have highlighted relevant aspects regarding Spence's symbolic trope, her reiterative use of this motif can be expanded on

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[8] 'By her own account, Wilke took thousands of photographs of her ailing mother in the hope of (emotionally) curing both mother and daughter'. Hannah Wilke interviewed in Cassandra Langer's, The Art of Healing, *Ms.*, January/February 1989, pp. 132-133, cited in (Tembeck, 2008: 90).

further as evidencing the materialization of her grieving process.

There has been a significant contribution to studies in analysing Wilke and Spence's work from a feminist standpoint and as autopathographies. However, there is a gap in this body of knowledge in terms of discussing them as lived experiences albeit in symbolic form, of the artists' grief and mourning processes. My aim is to explore aspects of these artists' grieving processes as embodied within their works. Spence provides evidence of her ideas, emotional states and search for productive solutions in interviews, journals and articles which is invaluable for the purposes of my research, because it allows for cross referencing to be formulated between her thinking and image making. In order to evidence this hypothesis, I will be looking across a broad spectrum of works so as to establish recurring patterns, motifs, metaphors and hiatuses all of which articulate the artists' negotiations with loss and death. The literature review has evidenced that although authors have meticulously tracked and analysed Wilke and Spence's works from a variety of different angles, they have not as yet been explored *specifically* as objects of grief and mourning. Wilke and Spence both reference explicit cultural perspectives and art historical links in their work through themes, materials, processes and production. So as to realize the full discursive potential of Wilke's and Spence's representations, it is important to contextualize their works within both current and past artistic milieux. In doing this, my aim is to reveal the particularity of these artists' individual concerns regarding loss, suffering and grief.

2.3 Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996) and Zoe Leonard (b.1961)

Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Zoe Leonard have produced works in response to the death of a loved one. I have put these two artists together because they have each created contemporary memorial works, rooted in the *vanitas*. A commonality that exists within their tribute works is the artist's use of actual objects such as sweets and fruit. Each practitioner has appropriated traditional still life items, and reworked them to 'act' as metaphors for the fragility of the human body (death and dying).

The art practice of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, a Cuban-American artist, eludes typecasting because he synthesized a variety of forms and movements including minimalism, post-minimalism, political activism and conceptualism. He produced sculptural works, installations and exhibited his work on billboards. His practice

incorporated process-based and/or performative artworks which required spectator involvement in order to activate the latent meanings embodied within them. Audience participation included the act of dancing in close proximity with a stranger or the removal of a sweet(s) or a paper sheet(s) as gifts/souvenirs. He was a quietly, subversive artist, who used his art practice as a means to question established cultural constructs and hegemonic subjugation. Both he and his partner Ross Laycock died prematurely of AIDS related illnesses and part of his oeuvre criticizes homophobia and laments the death and devastation caused by the HIV/AIDs pandemic.

Gonzalez-Torres recognized that an art work operates as an emergent and evolving system so that aspects like context, space and time can radically alter its meaning. He underscored this observation by adopting the nomenclature *"Untitled"* for each of his compositions followed by parentheses containing a personally significant reference. His visual idiolect is distinctive, incorporating objects such as piles of sweets, stacks of paper, jigsaw puzzles and beaded curtains. Same-sex love and desire is intimated by the juxtaposition of paired objects including mirrors, wall clocks with their hands set at the same time and strings of illuminated light bulbs. I explore two works created by Gonzalez-Torres as homages to the death of his partner Ross Laycock in 1991 and his father who died three weeks later:

- *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A*) (1991), Felix Gonzalez-Torres

- *"Untitled" (Throat)* (1991), Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

There is a steadily growing body of literature produced by art critics and writers exploring Gonzalez-Torres' legacy. Authors of monographs invariably home in on his innovative relational practice. Russell Ferguson refers to it as 'reciprocal participation', Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term 'relational aesthetics' and Lisa Corrin uses the expression 'self-questioning monuments' (Ferguson, 1994: 29; Bourriaud, 2002; Corrin, 2000). In literature about Gonzalez-Torres' oeuvre there is no dissent whatsoever amongst critics about the artist's intentions or outcomes. It is commonly agreed that his work offers an opportunity for social encounters to take place between that of the artist's lived experiences and corresponding viewer engagement(s). This conclusion is reached from a range of different nexus points which tend to circulate around Gonzalez-Torres' avant-garde creation of liminal spaces that operate simultaneously in both physical and conceptual terms. Corrin notes that 'It was in these charged, peripheral and parenthetical

spaces that Gonzalez-Torres laid the cornerstone of his art. To him, they were paradoxical, irresolvable, yet eloquent slippages to navigate or, indeed, to infiltrate' (Corrin, 2000: 8). Likewise, Amada Cruz says 'his work provides only clues and gaps that encourage viewers to construct meaning. His is an art of blank spaces and things left unsaid' (Cruz, 1994: 14)[9]. The inherent ephemerality which exists in many of Gonzalez-Torres works has been linked by critics to personal and collective expressions of grief and mourning. Themes such as loss, memory and memorialization are commonly recognized as being a significant part of his output (Ferguson, 1994: 29, 33-34; Cruz, 1994: 17-18; Spector, 2007: 44, 81, 113, 122, 129). Nancy Spector describes his paper stacks and candy spills as "antimonuments" and the dispersal of these types of work, both physically and conceptually between private and public domains, as revealing 'profound mutability' (Spector, 2007: 58-59, 62).

Gonzalez-Torres created his first paper stacks and candy spill works in direct response to the impending death of Ross Laycock. They re-enact ongoing loss as a means of letting go. In divulging his feelings before and after their creation provides insight into his means of coping with personal loss. Critics have not yet theorized these works with reference to the psychological or sociological literature surrounding grief and mourning; it is precisely these types of resonances that I will analyse in Gonzalez-Torres' work.

The candy spill works offer a multisensory experience (Cherry, n.d.). For Pen Dalton the sweets evoke 'emotional, pleasurable, often childlike associations' (Dalton, 2004: 23). The act of consuming the seductive temptation of a sweet also symbolises erotic pleasure, which Gonzalez-Torres was acutely aware of[10]. Jim Mooney and Mary O'Neill likened the act of ingesting offerings to that of transubstantiation (Mooney, 2004: 37-38; O'Neill, 2007: 115-117). Robert Storr suggests that they are secular equivalents referring to 'esthetic [*sic*] transubstantiation' (Storr, 1996). The evocation of the human

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[9] Further examples: Russell Ferguson - 'One of the most important things that Felix Gonzalez-Torres accomplishes in his work is the clearing of a meaningful space in the present for memories of the past' (Ferguson, 1994: 25). Nancy Spector equates the artist's work with a concept formulated by Michel Foucault known as heterotopia. In her book she analyses his oeuvre 'in the spirit of Foucault's heterotopia' examining it 'as a single space in which several conceivably incongruous sites and moments in time are juxtaposed, layered, and even fused…'(Spector, 2007: 28-29).

[10] Gonzalez-Torres stated:
 It's a metaphor. I'm not pretending it to be anything other than this- I'm not splashing lead on the floor. I'm giving you this sugary thing; you put it in your mouth and you suck on someone else's body. And in this way, my work becomes part of so many other people's bodies. It's very hot. For just a few seconds, I have put something sweet in someone's mouth and that is very sexy (Gonzalez-Torres cited in Spector, 2007: 147 and 150).

life cycle (childhood, social and sexual intercourse, disease, death and loss) via a sweet food substance is an area which I will explore further. Gonzalez-Torres' allusion to moments in life deemed 'sweet'- from a kind gesture to a term of endearment - heightens the sense of personal and collective loss.

Unsurprisingly, critics quickly established a link between Gonzalez-Torres' work and the *vanitas*[11]. Laura Bravo recognized the discursive potential of comparing them, and in *Félix González Torres: The Fleeting Life of Flesh and Objects*, matches shared themes: the passing of the living world, its people and contents. Bravo identifies Gonzalez-Torres' revision of symbolic elements that resemble those of *vanitas* painting, notably 'glints of precious metals, portraits of the artist [*sic*] loved ones, and representations of lost times in posters, billboards, and in other multiplied objects' (Bravo, n.d.). A parallel is drawn between Gonzalez-Torres' utilization of a blue or gold palette in some of his candy spill works to that of the 'ephemeral treasures' displayed in Baroque painting. However, there is a further dimension: viewers may actually 'taste such mouthwatering [*sic*] delights'. Bravo never uses terms like 'grief' or 'mourning' in her critique, but does see Gonzalez-Torres' works as contemporary versions of the historical concepts *memento mori* and *ars moriendi*. However, she fails to expand on this succinct observation. Her critique would have gained much from a more rigorous analysis of the mechanisms by which sixteenth to eighteenth centuries *vanitas* painting conveys meaning. She does not, for instance, explore the compositional positioning of symbolic objects to subliminally create a sense of unease or the evocation of loss through aesthetic rendering. Whereas *vanitas* painting was originally rooted in the representation of Christian doctrine and conformed to established codes, contemporary artists are reworking this genre in order to express their own personal somatic and psychological experiences of living with loss. Contemporary art is revising the formal codes and aesthetic tropes of the *vanitas* tradition; the language of one artistic tradition is being refracted into the idiolects of an artist's practice. The ramifications of reconfiguring (if not to say "individualizing") the *vanitas* tradition are many. Far from a purely formal or aesthetic exercise, these revisions hint at the wider cultural and philosophical mutations

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[11] Robert Storr posits that the 'planned impermanence' of Gonzalez-Torres' contemporary *vanitas* works draws attention to the 'metamorphosis' of objects, especially those artworks situated in the immediate environs, as well as the gallery itself (Storr, 1996). Arthur Coleman Danto, considers the twin ticking clocks in *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991) as being symbolic of death (and thus the *vanitas*), because one of the clocks at some point will metaphorically 'die'. In effect, this mimics the phrase from the traditional wedding rite: 'till death do us part' (Danto, 2003: 138-139).

characterising artists' current understanding and navigation between the fields of art and mourning. My intention therefore, is to analyse some of the ways in which artists currently borrow from and modify archetypes from an older tradition to comment on their unique experiences of loss and grief.

Literature regarding *"Untitled" (Throat)* (1991) is only referenced obliquely. Nancy Spector cited it in *Case Study Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Untitled (Public Opinion) Permanence Through Change* as an example of the challenge for curators in exhibiting and preserving the integrity of particular contemporary artworks[12]. In a press release the work was referred to as 'convey[ing] such emotions as vulnerability and melancholy' (Fondation Beyeler, 2010). This object sculpture along with others was cited by Darren Hudson Hick as possibly not being recognized as an artwork if seen outside a gallery space (Hick, 2012: 34). Because of the cursory attention that *"Untitled" (Throat)* (1991) has received from critics, I have decided to analyse it further.

Zoe Leonard works primarily in photography and sculpture. She was an ardent political activist during the AIDS pandemic (1980s-1990s) being a member of ACT UP and 'Fierce Pussy', a lesbian feminist art collective (Leonard and Blume, 1997: 12). Working with analogue photography, her subject matter includes aerial surveillance and gender politics. She also explores urban globalization by meticulously tracking her own vanishing neighbourhood in New York via the documentation of shop front window displays. Leonard is 'interested in, the way we live an interior and exterior life, simultaneously and continuously' (Leonard and Lebovici, 2012: 14). As manifested through her exploration of the interplay between reality and subjective experience. For

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[12] Jon Ippolito discussing *"Untitled" (Throat)* (1991) by Gonzalez-Torres stated:

When the exhibition toured abroad, we went to the drugstore, bought the latest Luden's honey-lemon candy, same type, but they look completely different. They have a clear cellophane wrapping with white lettering on it - a totally different look from the original. Yet, in some ways, migration - choosing the up-to-date standard - seemed to connect to the relevance of this work for Felix. His father died of throat cancer, and this was the only type of candy that helped him feel any better. We posited some potential allegiance to the brand of Luden's honey lemons over the physical look of the piece. Was that right? I'm not sure. Beyond that, an even more radical possible strategy of reinterpretation would be to use inhalers, patches, Claritin, or a new drug that didn't exist in Felix's time but is the functional equivalent of what cough drops were in 1991.

Felix's work doesn't favor one strategy over another, but instead forces museums into an awkward position of having to determine what the meaning is in a way that hanging a painting on a white wall doesn't.

An excerpt from "Preserving the Immaterial: A Conference on Variable Media," which took place at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, on March 30-31, 2001 (Spector, 2003).

the purposes of this thesis I analyse a sculptural work that she executed in direct response to the AIDS-related death of her friend, the artist David Wojnarowicz. It is entitled:

- *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997), Zoe Leonard.

Critical analysis of this work is piecemeal and is located mainly in exhibition catalogues/ press releases and magazines (Sorkin, 2008). One such catalogue is *Vanitas: Meditations on Life and Death in Contemporary Art,* (2000) by John Ravenal which accompanied a group show of fourteen international artists and included *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991) by Gonzalez-Torres. This exhibition focused on sculpture and installation works as alternative representations of *vanitas* from pictorial ones. Revenal makes cursory links between *vanitas* symbols and artists' current reconfigurations of them. He cites Leonard's use of actual fruit as a metaphor for the wounded body (disease, injury and ageing). The production of *Strange Fruit* involved Leonard sewing back together eviscerated fruit skins. Ravenal notes that 'Leonard likens the fragile containers to "repositories of grief," comparing them to relics, eulogies and monuments'. He also observed that 'The activity of mending the torn fruit skins with needle and thread soon suggested itself as an analogue for repairing relationships and lives, especially at a time, when death was so present in the artist's own life' (Ravenal, 2000: 16). These are pertinent observations. However, this analysis has the potential to go much further. Historical *vanitas* painting evolved as a means of representing somatic experiences of loss, grief and mourning using sophisticated visual techniques. A more nuanced analysis of the ways in which Leonard's work resonates with the historical *vanitas* tradition would throw into relief the mechanisms by which she has conceptualized her own experiences of living with loss and trauma. Revenal has not, for example, analysed this work in terms of representations of temporality, repetition or the articulation of the void. The ways in which Leonard has used fruit to represent flesh and symptoms of collapse, requires further exploration, especially as suturing also featured in David Wojnarowicz's art practice.

Ravenal also briefly discusses a relationship between theory and art centred on the representation of loss. He cites Julia Kristeva's analysis in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (Kristeva, 1989: 97-98), in which she discusses Sigmund Freud's essay *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) that links 'mourning, transience and beauty'(Ravenal, 2000: 14). Ravenal states: '…Kristeva addressed the question of whether beauty and

death are facets of the same experience or are perennial opposites'. Like Freud, 'Kristeva concludes that the creation and appreciation of beauty spring from the sublimation of grief; beauty represents an artificial, imaginary conquering of death that allows life to continue. In the end she considers it a "miracle", but at the same time a "self-illusion, nothing but dreams and words, words, words...."' Ravenal concludes: 'From this perspective, beauty can be seen to represent human creativity as a whole rather than just one type of expression - as a life force counterbalancing death, yet always imbued with its presence' (Ravenal, 2000: 14). This germane research is one which I will pursue further, as one of the core elements by which artists convey the profundity of loss. Zoe Leonard discussed her motivations, thoughts and feelings apropos this work with Anna Blume giving a valuable interplay between artistic intentions and the resulting work (Leonard and Blume, 1997).

Although Gonzalez-Torres' and Leonard's work have been cursorily recognized as being rooted in the *vanitas* tradition, this area requires greater illumination. I explore and deconstruct common *vanitas* themes such as psychological meaning, aesthetic rendering and the representation of transience. The cross-referencing of the work of these three artists' offers a powerful resource for unlocking mechanisms of mourning and its artistic portrayal.

The Dutch *vanitas* artists working in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were generally not producing paintings as a means of ameliorating their own personal grief. As with Gonzalez-Torres and Leonard however, there is a much more *conscious and deliberate attempt* on the part of contemporary artists to make the grieving process integral to the making process. In these instances, grief and mourning is no longer simply a pictorial element or a discursive theme, but becomes formal methodology. Grief is not only *what* is represented or discussed but *how* it is represented and discussed. It is both artistic subject and creative mode; my research will demonstrate that this hypothesis can be applied to different contemporary artists' works as well as my own. Further analysis of a more extensive range of contemporary artists' works of mourning, while being beyond the scope of my thesis, would undoubtedly be revealing and broaden the understanding of what is an embryonic field of research.

None of the authors cited in this literature review have made reference to psychoanalytical theories of grief and mourning in their studies of the artists in my corpus. This omission equally applies to other contemporary artists' works dealing with grief and

mourning (exceptions to this are the Ph.D. theses produced by O'Neill and Kirkpatrick cited in Chapter One). Furthermore, these critics' methodologies have rarely ventured into associative academic domains such as medicine or religion. This literature review also highlights an even greater omission: that of sustained analysis into pre-existing historical concepts of fine art like *ars moriendi,* the *vanitas* or the abject body. This limited approach needs to be addressed. An exploration of differing fields of study will provide the conceptual tools and vocabulary with which to renew and multiply the works' meanings. For this reason, I look at these artworks from a different thematic viewpoint (that of grief and mourning), and also use this overarching theme as a basis for applying an interdisciplinary methodology. This means that I will be studying a range of complementary domains which includes psychology, sociology, medicine and religion (Christian theology). In the next section I will briefly outline the established paradigm shifts that have occurred in the fields of psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Many of the ideas formulated in these domains have been highly influential in the mapping and understanding of grief and mourning processes. The production of theoretical models, for example in psychology or psychiatry, were formulated as a way to explain the phenomena observed in the bereaved and to aid clinicians in counselling and therapy.

2.4 Theoretical frameworks: an overview of critical discourses surrounding grief and mourning

Early models of bereavement adhered to predetermined linear programmes of development set within limited time frames. Such models tended to be orientated around stages and phases. Often elaborated as an aid to 'grief work', examples of these theories can be found in the works of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), John Bowlby (1907-1990), Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1926-2004) and J. William Worden (b.1932). Emotional responses were subject to normative and standardized expectations. A universal approach was adopted regardless of an individual's personal outlook, experiences, cultural background or belief systems. Whilst Darwin posits that human and animal emotions are expressed as bodily movement likening an adult human's countenance of grief to that of a crying child (Darwin, 1872), Freud's theories advance the idea that outward conduct is based on feelings and the complex workings of the mind. In his seminal paper *Mourning*

and Melancholia (1917), he notes the similarities between the states of melancholia (now termed depression) and mourning; these include loss of appetite, broken sleep patterns and feelings of self-deprecation. He attributed these outward signs in both states to an individual's personal attachment to the loss of a loved person (object) which is experienced as the loss of self (ego). Freud believed that to create a loving attachment (cathexis) with an individual required libidinal energy. To complete the mourning process successfully, an individual needs to withdraw their libidinal energy gradually from the deceased, thus allowing them to form new attachments. Pathological mourning occurs when an individual cannot relinquish their attachments to the loved one and becomes emotionally blocked.

From the 1960s onwards, theories concerning grief and mourning witnessed the emergence of another approach, this time in the form of Bowlby's 'attachment theory' (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Basing his research on cognitive psychology rather than on Freud's metaphysical concepts, Bowlby carefully observed and analysed the reactions of young children when separated from their mothers. He concludes that for humans and animals it is essential that a safe and secure bond exists between the parent and their offspring for future wellbeing. This attachment behaviour is not to be confused with attachments such as feeding or sexual responses. A secure and affectionate bond between the child and carer creates a firm basis which enables secure relationships to be formed with others across a lifespan. Bowlby notices that when a child is separated from their mother, they cry out in protestation until the negligent mother returns. However, if the mother does not appear, the child will continue to protest intermittently, sometimes up to several weeks. Following Darwin, he sees this behaviour as biologically instinctive, developed to ensure the evolutionary survival of the species. He realizes that 'for a young child the experience of losing mother, or of losing her love, is in very truth a bereavement' (Bowlby, 1980: 33). His theories of separation anxiety enabled him to formulate a paradigm of mourning. Working with Colin Murray Parkes, Bowlby developed a framework depicting four sequential phases of mourning: (1) *shock, numbing, distress and anger;* (2) *yearning and searching for the lost figure;* (3) *disorientation and despair;* (4) *reorganization*. It anticipates that the bereaved move through these phases but not necessarily in succession (Bowlby, 1980: 85; Parkes, 1996). He hypothesizes that a child's attachment experience with their family has a direct cognitive impact on how they will probably cope with subsequent losses in their life (Bowlby, 1980: 200-201).

As we can see, early models of bereavement were being formulated from differing

starting points depending on the practitioner's area of research. Whereas Bowlby's model of mourning originated from his observations of childhood attachment behaviours, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross conceived her stages of grief whilst working with near-death hospital patients. She opened up debates about death and dying at a time when it was considered taboo (Kübler-Ross 1969 and 1975). From observing and interviewing patients, she developed five stages of grief theory: *denial, anger, bargaining, depression* and *acceptance*. This model could equally be applicable to those facing imminent death or grieving for the death of a loved one.

During the 1980s the concept of 'stages' and 'phases' evolved into 'tasks' - J. William Worden describes mourning as a 'process' rather than a 'state'. His model includes four tasks of mourning: (1) *to accept the reality of loss;* (2) *to work through the pain of grief;* (3) *to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing* and (4) *to find an enduring connection with the deceased whilst embarking on a new life.* Worden does not offer a time line or a particular order for the completion of these tasks, thus acknowledging that mourning is not a linear process. He also recognizes the importance of gaining a background history of the mourner including the circumstances of death, status, attachments and identity, affirming that each person's experience of mourning is unique (Worden, 1983/2009).

The next incremental shift in the paradigm occurred in the 1990s. Whereas previous theories of grief and mourning were regarded as generic, clinicians now formulated models that acknowledged a nuanced and individualized approach. Rather than treating the bereaved as a homogenous group, more recent theories have recognized that mourners adopt a diverse set of coping strategies. Models moved from being purely descriptive to incorporating intervention strategies, the intrapersonal became interpersonal and clinical methods broadened out to include a biopsychosocial (biological, psychological and social) analysis (Greally, 2012). Prior to this, psychologists regarded the maintenance of an ongoing attachment with the deceased as symptomatic of pathological grief. This theory was originally postulated by Freud. Ironically, Freud himself came to realize after the death of his daughter Sophie in 1920 and the subsequent death of her four year old son, that he could not let go of these attachments and form new ones, but did not commit these personal revelations in the form of a written hypothesis (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996: 6). In their book *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief,* Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman and Steven Nickman (1996)

challenged this theory, based on interviews with adopted children, bereaved children and parents. They discovered that the living actively foster bonds with the lost or deceased through memories. Moreover, these relationships fostered by the bereaved also continue to be developmentally appropriate to the person's ongoing age and status. An inner representation of the deceased allowed the relationship to be maintained in a meaningful way. Klass and others proposed that 'these continuing bonds can be a healthy part of the survivor's ongoing life' (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996: 22). This reconstructive approach to grief work was called 'Biography' (Walter, 1996), 'Reminiscence' (Balk, 1997), 'Restoration' (Stroebe and Schut, 1999, 2001), 'Personal narratives' (Niemeyer, 2001) and 'Psychosocial transition' (Parkes, 2009).

Contemporary theories of grief and mourning which integrate previous hypotheses, using empirical testing to check efficacy are now being formulated. One such concept is the Dual Process Model, developed by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut, which combines pre-existing generic theories (based on cognitive stress) and attachment theories (Stroebe and Schut, 2010: 279). The avoidance of the grieving process is seen as having both helpful and harmful outcomes (Stroebe and Schut 1999, 2001). Mourning is a stressful process whereby the bereaved moves between expressing their feelings and maintaining a level of self-control. The Dual Process Model, involves a stressor specific concept whereby the bereaved person oscillates in their coping behaviour between focusing on loss (loss orientation) and avoiding the focus (restoration orientation). Loss orientation involves grief work such as looking at photographs of the deceased or visiting the grave. Restoration orientation focuses on organizing secondary losses such as sorting out finances or selling a house. This strategy allows for the confrontation and at other times avoidance of the grieving process. This shifting behaviour is developed in accordance with the bereaved person's personality, gender and cultural background as well as the circumstances of the death. A successful outcome allows an individual to maintain a continuing bond with the deceased as well as moving on with their own life.

Similarly, the Two-Track Model of Bereavement formulated by Simon Shimshon Rubin corresponds to the Continuing Bonds paradigm and the Dual Process Model. It does so by recognizing that the relationship with a significant other is transformed, but does not cease on death (Rubin, Malkinson and Witztum, 2012: 26). This particular model adopts a bifocal perspective which simultaneously centres upon two separate but interconnecting domains. Track I *is concerned with biopsychosocial functioning in the*

wake of loss[13] and Track II *focuses upon the bereaved's ongoing emotional attachment and relationship to the deceased* (Rubin, 1999). Whereas earlier theories follow a linear crisis-to-resolution model whereby one "recovers" and "relinquishes" the deceased, contemporary approaches explore the cyclical nature of grief and mourning configuring bereavement as an experience that will be continually re-navigated by an individual. Adaptive paradigms, such as the Two-Track Model of Bereavement employ a pluralistic approach which encompasses psychological, physical, spiritual and sociocultural elements.

This is not to give a falsely schematic view of how the study of grief and mourning has evolved. There have been seminal points and shifts in methodology which merit attention and these can be mapped out as follows: from the twentieth century onwards clinicians have produced theoretical frameworks as a way of charting human experiences and reactions to coping with irrevocable losses. Early stage and phase models based on the negotiation and completion of upsetting emotional states eventually ending in 'recovery' and 'closure' are still respected to this day. This is because they offer a sense of predictability and control. However, they have been rejected by the main clinical bodies as being too simplistic (Hall, 2011; Greally, 2012). The bereaved are currently no longer expected to sever bonds with the deceased and continuing bonds are now seen as offering a potentially healthy outcome. Clinicians are producing frameworks which build upon, adapt and reconfigure previous models, as their research evolves. Whereas early theories posited grief as a negative life event, today it is seen as offering the potential for significant personal growth. Another compelling finding made by George Bonanno is that 'for most of us, grief is not overwhelming or unending. As frightening as the pain of loss can be, most of us are *resilient*' (Bonanno, 2009: 7). The fact that the bereaved use a variety of coping mechanisms in response to loss has now been incorporated into contemporary models of bereavement.

Earlier models failed to take into account individual variability amongst those grieving even if the same type of bereavement was being analysed. Those who failed to conform to generalized patterns of grieving were in danger of being labelled pathological,

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[13] As a term biopsychosocial functioning refers to the impact of bereavement concerning (1) Anxiety (2) Depression (3) Somatic concerns (4) Traumatic Responses (5) Familial Relationships (6) General Interpersonal Relationships (7) Self-Esteem and Self-System (8) General Meaning Structure (9) Work (10) Investment In Life Tasks (Rubin, Malkinson and Witztum, 2012: 50).

as if no other explanation were feasible (Greally, 2012). Contemporary theories of grief and mourning recognize that although grieving is a universal phenomenon, *each person's grief response is unique*. Today clinicians increasingly acknowledge and explore grief as a somatic phenomenon. Whereas grief and mourning were initially approached from a purely psychological perspective (one that risked neglecting the body's fundamental role in this process), they are now increasingly understood as embodied experience. Grief and mourning are lived through and because of this they are fundamentally durational and corporeal. As a result, ideographic approaches are now prevalent and these take into account multi-dimensional factors.

In assimilating the rich history of this academic field, particularly its recent growth to encompass a wide range of neighboring scientific domains, one can better perceive the multifaceted way in which artists have addressed issues of loss, grief and mourning. In the same way that the psychoanalytical has incorporated the sociological, the cultural and the somatic, so too art criticism can adopt a pluridisciplinary approach to its study of creatively mediated loss. By looking at the pictorial, the plastic and the performative through the apparatus of loss, grief and mourning, one actually assembles multiple critical lenses, the culmination of which engenders alternative analytical perspectives, changes of discursive focus and in short, new ways of seeing what we thought we had already seen. The desire to bring the experimental, durational and embodied aspects of making art central to its production, transmission and reception is of particular interest when one considers the works' thematic concern with grief and mourning. The artists demonstrate their understanding of loss as a corporeally and temporally bound process, rather than a modular or finite framework. It is therefore in a similar way that artistic representations of loss, grief and mourning draw parallels with their academic counterparts.

In the light of the findings of my two literature reviews I will now map out my research aims.

2.5 Research aims, objectives and questions

There are three interconnecting and overarching aims that form the core of this research. This research aims to:

- Investigate ways in which artists are forging new approaches in the portrayal of grief and mourning;
- Explore how these new approaches have arisen in an increasingly secular society;

- Explore through my own practice, created in response to loss, grief and mourning (including the use of ephemeral materials and genres) how art might assume new forms and meanings in the context of contemporary society.

To achieve these research goals, the objectives will be to:

- Produce an alternative theoretical research strategy or methodology, which when applied to the corpus, generates unique interdisciplinary 'readings' about artists' materialization of grief and mourning practices;

- Classify the different ways in which contemporary artists are re-contextualizing culturally embedded symbols, signs and metaphors to visually communicate and narrate embodied experiences of loss, trauma, grief and mourning;

- Experiment, develop and review as a research practitioner, alternative ways in which ephemeral materials, processes and the re-working of genres creates new forms and meanings that articulate loss and grief in the context of contemporary society;

- Synthesise and evaluate the research findings and then extrapolate from them in order to suggest ways in which contemporary artists are forging new approaches in the portrayal of grief and mourning whilst considering how such approaches might coincide with social trends of secularism.

The purpose of this study will be addressed by answering the following research questions:

- In what ways are contemporary artists' materializations of living with loss, indicators of wider sociological shifts in mourning practices?

- Through the processing of emotions, narratives and ideas regarding embodied experiences of loss, grief and mourning how are artists mediating, private, traumatic and taboo subjects?

2.6 Methodological frameworks

Artistic research in the arts is a concept that emerged in art institutes to describe a form of knowledge production. It evolved in response to the absorption of art institutes into

established corporate universities. In order to maintain both funding and status, the art sector became accountable for establishing evidence-based outcomes for the production of new knowledge. Since Donald Schön and Christopher Frayling's seminal works regarding the integration of theory and practice in art and design, a growing body of literature has emerged (Schön, 1990; Frayling, 1994). New terms have arisen describing researchers as 'interpretive *bricoleurs'* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: xiii, xv) and methodologies such as the 'multi-method approach' (Brewer and Hunter, 1989), 'Action research' (McKernan, 1996), 'Praxical knowledge' (Bolt, 2007: 30-31), and A/r/tography (Springgay et al, 2008).

For the purposes of my enquiry, I have adopted a pluralistic approach based on a methodological framework known as 'triangulation' advocated by Carole Gray and Julian Malins (Figure 1) (Gray and Malins, 2004: 31). Triangulation employs the use of two or more methods in order to analyse information from a variety of perspectives. Interestingly these two authors advocate that for the purposes of extrapolating information and to prove a theory, 'if no established methodologies exist then invent them!' (Gray and Malin, 2004: 18). The different types of data generated by this methodology allows for the rigorous testing of a working hypothesis. Whilst undertaking my research I deployed triangulation, along with another approach formulated by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean called 'The Iterative Cyclic Web' (Figure 2). This methodology combines practice-led research, research-led practice and academic research (Smith and Dean, 2010). In this model the practitioner moves through a cyclic process (in any order they choose) through three stages, so as to generate knowledge and ideas. The three stages are theoretical analysis, art practice and the production of publications or public artworks. It is the process of iteration moving between stages or going back to previous stages that allows the practitioner to generate ideas and knowledge holistically.
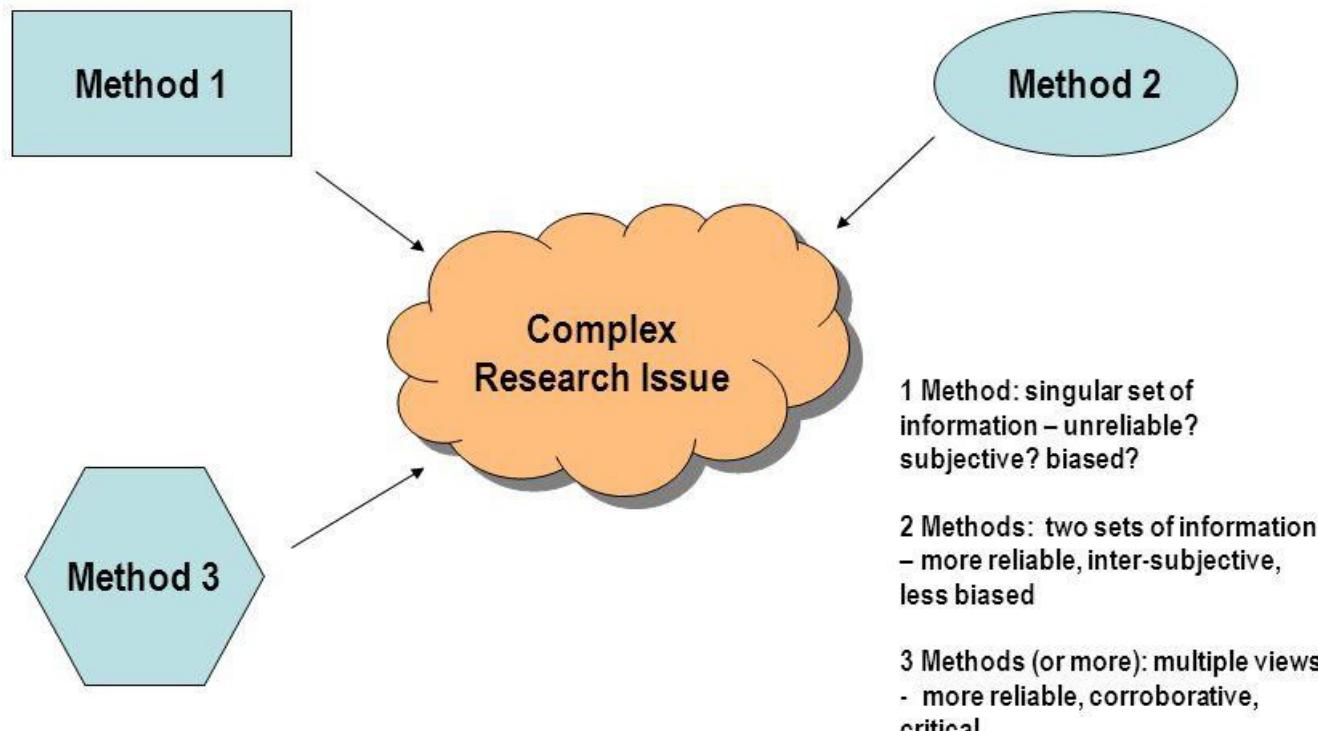
Figure 1. Carole Gray and Julian Malins (2004) Triangulation.
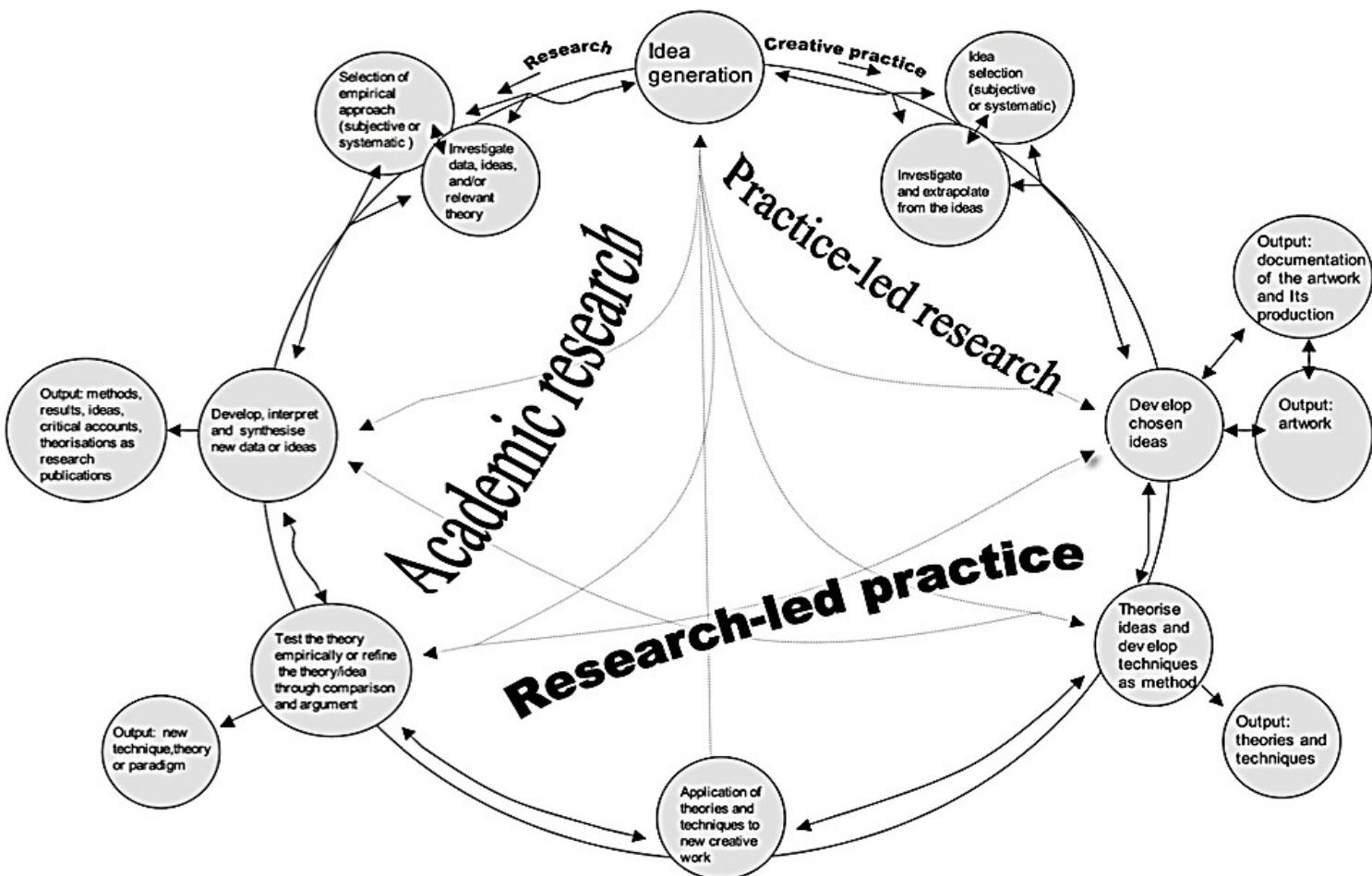
Figure 2. Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (2010). A model of creative arts and research processes: the iterative cyclic web of practice-led research and research-led practice.

2.7 The four concepts

My own findings in practice-led research combined with the literature reviews and the theorization of grief and mourning revealed the complexity of my research topic. Grief and mourning encompass the mind, body and spirit located in sociocultural, sociopolitical, historical, medical and religious domains. Taken as a collective, these subject areas formulate a tangled web of connections. For the purposes of practicality I break down my multifarious topic into smaller units. Taking my cue from my findings, I chose a range of concepts to deploy as theoretical lenses in order to analyse the artworks in my corpus. By adopting this approach, new meanings would emerge concerning sociocultural trends and connections between academic counterparts. This results in a new methodological approach: that of 'reading' contemporary grief and mourning artworks via **the four concepts**: *Ars moriendi,* **Anticipatory grief/ Grief**, **Illness narratives** and **The abject body**. When applied in their entirety (that is, one after another) they provide a composite framework that encompasses the many different facets of 'living with loss'. I do not wish to imply that grief and mourning is in any way a segmented process, because it is not, it is a dynamic, synergistic process. Combined, the four concepts cover grief, trauma and mourning through to death, dying and memorialization.

This new methodological approach emerged after I was deploying Triangulation and The Iterative Cyclic Web. As I became more familiar with the four concepts I then began to use them as a toolkit whereby each conceptual lens could be utilized either separately and/or holistically one after another. I now use the four concepts habitually as a preliminary method by which to 'read' contemporary grief and mourning artworks before undertaking an in-depth analysis. In (Figure 3) the four concepts are represented as coming both before and after Triangulation and The Iterative Cyclic Web. It is in this cyclic way that I deployed these methodological frameworks.

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Triangulation

The deployment of two or more methods. Gray and Malins, (2004)

The Iterative Cyclic Web

Practice-led research, research-led practice and academic research. Smith and Dean (2010)

The Four Concepts

Research method developed for analysing grief and mourning artworks by contemporary artists.

Figure 3. A representation of the deployment of methodologies: Triangulation, The Iterative Cyclic Web and The Four Concepts.

Since all the four concepts have been formulated within different subject domains it also enables a diversity of approach to ensue covering historical constructs as well as current thinking. *Ars moriendi* and the abject body are both historically rooted in Christian theology and have been in existence for hundreds of years; whereas clinical concepts such as anticipatory grief and illness narratives emerged during the twentieth century.

Each of these concepts has a very interesting historical genesis and evolution. For the purposes of my research, I will now briefly outline the precise aspect of each concept as deployed in my hypothesis. Since every concept exists separately in its own right, the order in which they are utilized can vary (Figure 4). In the main body of the thesis they will appear in a different order.
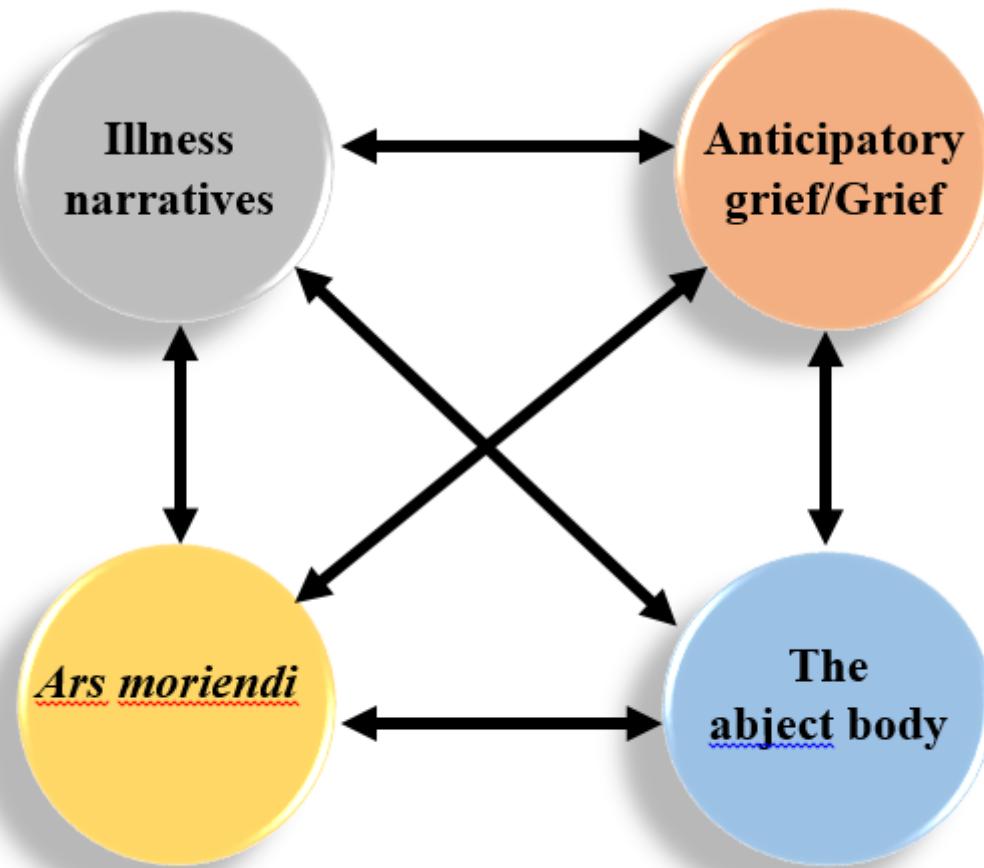
Figure 4. The four concepts. These conceptual lenses may be utilized in any order as an aid to analysing grief and mourning artworks. When applied in their entirety (that is, one after another) they provide a composite framework that encompasses many facets of 'living with loss'.

Ars moriendi

The *Ars moriendi* (art of dying) is an illustrated, theological guide produced in the fifteenth century. This Christian manual provided practical advice (prayers, rituals and instructions) for the preparation and achievement of 'a good death'. Illustrations and text centre upon the dying man in his death bed and a performed moral battle. The narrative describes his epic fight as he seeks to relinquish all earthly attachments in an attempt to secure divine transcendence (Binski, 1996: 40). During the Middle Ages, self-governance regarding issues such as life, death and dying were informed by a strict ethical code of standards and behaviour as decreed by God (Harari, 2015: 222). According to the rules of this belief system, failure to comply could result in an afterlife spent in purgatory. For those living in the medieval era this threat was a terrifying reality. Today, in an increasingly secularized society, personal autonomy and individualism prevails. Since the twentieth century there has been a dramatic increase in the average life expectancy especially in developed countries[14]. Death and dying is now regarded as being medicalized (Clark, 2002). Nowadays, because of the vast improvements in living standards and medicine, people are increasingly placing their emphasis on prolonging life here on earth, rather than orientating themselves towards God and an afterlife (Harari, 2015). Nevertheless, the core principles as stated in *Ars moriendi* doctrinal practice – to fulfill personal obligations in terms of the distribution of material wealth, social leave taking and spiritual preparation, thus ensuring 'satisfactory continuity' - are still very much in evidence today (Binski, 1996: 33). The genesis of 'a good death' as seeded in *Ars moriendi* has now moved via the Christian hospice movement into the medical domain. Whereas the *Ars moriendi* literature conveyed a clear message with regard to 'a good death' as that of securing spiritual salvation and everlasting life; today in medical practice a 'good' death includes a diversity of meanings.

The permutations that surround opinions concerning a 'good death' are clearly dependent on a whole set of variables. As stated in The Open University Course 'Living with death and dying'[15], 'good' can so easily become interchanged with 'well-behaved', meaning that the dying patient does not unduly aggravate their carers[16]; as the unit

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[14] Office for National Statistics, (2015); Royal Geographical Society (With IBG), (n.d).

[15] The Open University, (1999-2018).

[16] A synopsis written by Carol Komaromy and Jenny Hockey explores the perception of death in residential homes for the elderly by those who care for them. They discovered that staff conceptually 'relocated' death into a category of extreme old age in order to create a protective emotional boundary for themselves, other

discussion speculates the question that needs to be asked is 'good for whom?'. Taking this analogy further the 'good death' has been described as 'appropriate death' (Weisman, 1972), 'acceptance and resolution' (Kübler-Ross, 1975: 163) 'an unforgettable opportunity to experience true intimacy' (De Hennezel, 1998: 182).

The myth of the 'good death' and the deathbed scenario as represented in previous centuries remains pertinent today. This is because contemporary artists use the same formal tropes but invert the focus: the doctrinal teaching about peace and salvation is replaced by a contemplation of pain, suffering and noncompliance without a promise of salvation, peace or resolution. By analysing the artworks in my corpus through this historical lens, it is possible to discover how this concept has evolved from representations of death and dying as a transcendental battle into personalised depictions of death and dying as a medicalized experience embedded within secular society. *Ars moriendi* theology has increasingly entered the medical domains and evolved into new narrative and cultural forms. In a similar way, the medical field has produced other concepts or narratives pertaining to grief and mourning, death and dying. Whilst having their roots in a medical rather than a theological discipline, these concepts also help us to look at contemporary art practice. One such concept is anticipatory grief.

Anticipatory grief/ Grief

The term 'anticipatory grief' is used in reference to Wilke's and Spence's work and 'grief' with regards to the post death works produced by Gonzalez-Torres, Leonard and me. Anticipatory grief refers to a major loss before it has actually happened such as that of losing a limb. It is usually used in conjunction with those experiencing a grief reaction to the impending death of a loved one due to illness, but it can also refer to the dying individual themselves. I will be applying this concept to the latter. Anticipatory grief acknowledges that grief and mourning can occur *before* death as well as after. An anticipatory grief reaction may be expressed in response to any types of ongoing and

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residents, families and fellow workers. Residents' deaths were euphemistically referred to as a 'blessing' or a 'release'. A 'good' death for residents was characterised as being pain free (enabling the residents to 'accept' their death) so that it was seen as 'natural', 'peaceful' and 'timely'. It needed to take place in the home where carers were familiar and the family could support them. However, evidence suggested that these ideologies were not always realized. When questioned, the elderly residents revealed that they only 'accepted' death because of their failing health and faced with no alternatives. From the residents' perspective, death's proximity was not seen as 'good', 'natural' or 'acceptable' (Komaromy and Hockey, 2001: 73-81).

associative losses (past, present and future) as they occur and unfold. Anticipatory grief encompasses the same types of emotional responses as seen in post-death grief - fear, sadness, anger, anxiety, dread and depression. Do those living with incurable illness experience anticipatory grief as an ongoing drawn-out process? Or does it mean that grief is delayed because death is seemingly put on hold?[17] How could understanding the premise of anticipatory grief open up a new methodology for the criticism of artworks dealing with loss? The term 'anticipatory grief' was coined by Erich Lindemann (1944) and further investigated by Aldrich (1963) and Rando (1986, 2000). This theory has produced contradictory findings. As a result, fervent debate has ensued amongst mental health practitioners concerning issues about the precise definition of this term, its application as a mechanism for adaption and how it affects post-death bereavement. The main difference between anticipatory grief and post-death bereavement is the element of *hope*. 'In other words, the loss is anticipated; but it has not occurred, and there is a chance, however small that it might not occur' (Stephenson, 1985: 159).

This is a highly significant concept, especially as contemporary artists have undoubtedly materialized grief and mourning whilst assimilating ongoing and associative losses (past, present and future) in their artworks. Regardless of whether artists engage with concepts of anticipatory grief in an *explicit* or *implicit* manner, readings of their works will benefit from a viewer's application of this psychoanalytical paradigm to these artistic representations of loss. When analysing contemporary artworks of medicalized death and dying, it is also helpful to view the theory of anticipatory grief alongside that of illness narratives; within the context of living whilst dying, these two concepts are closely linked. Illness narratives traverse across many fields of study but are primarily located in medicine, social sciences and the humanities.

Illness narratives

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[17] Whereas anticipatory grief is normally associated with the forthcoming loss of (one's) life, this is not always the case. For example, Tony Nicklinson, a sufferer of locked-in syndrome who could only communicate by blinking, tried to secure immunity from the High Court in June 2012, allowing a professional to help him with assisted dying. His plea failed, leaving him bereft. Nicklinson's grief stricken state was caused not by the thought of his death, but by its very opposite, the thought of being alive. He stated 'I am saddened that the law wants to condemn me to a life of increasing indignity and misery' (Topping, 2012). This was also paradoxically true for his family, who were also unable to experience the loss that he so desperately desired: his death. He won this battle six days later after the High Court injunction by flatly refusing to eat. He contracted pneumonia and subsequently died on the 22nd August 2012. To what extent is the concept of mourning limited by what people consider to be either appropriate or conventional? Is grief something that happens because of an event or experience and inevitably leads from it or should it be considered instead as something human beings do according to their own unique responses?

Illness narratives is a rapidly burgeoning genre that has risen in prominence since the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s (Jurecic, 2012: 2). This can also be witnessed in the rise of personal blogs and discussion forums on the Internet. Illness narratives includes art forms such as writing, plays, films, dance and art. It also includes fact and fictional accounts. This concept covers a wide field of study ranging from accounts by those suffering from an illness or disability to medical staff, care workers, sociologists and historians. It encompasses personal accounts as well as universal perspectives. In this thesis, illness narratives are deployed as a lens to focus on the ways in which the artists in my corpus respond to the prevailing sociocultural attitudes regarding cancer and HIV/AIDS at the time they were constructing their artworks. Cultural stereotyping of diseases has an enormous impact in particular on the selfhood of suffering patients. I wish to ascertain the ways in which artists have challenged sociocultural/political stigmatizations and provided discursive forums albeit in materialized forms concerning these issues.

By telling a story of living with a chronic and/or terminal illness, an individual can reclaim their subjectivity and gain insights into their experiences as they unfold. Close self-examination and self-reflection allow for the removal of the inessential aspects of existence. In what ways are contemporary artists portraying visual variants of their illness stories? Spence and Wilke both explored the anguish of being a cancer patient and Gonzalez-Torres documented his partners dying of an AIDS related illness. All the artists in my corpus portray the suffering body as abject. Once again we are returning to the problematic representation of death and dying in Christian art, but this time via the abject body. This concept expresses a particular state or experience. Within critical discourse the notion of abjection as theoretical framework evolved through anthropology, medicine and the arts.

The abject body

The anthropologist Mary Douglas discusses the body in terms of matter which is deemed clean, taboo, polluting or dangerous in the light of societal structures and behaviour (Douglas, 1966/1996). Kristeva builds on Douglas' findings and observes that abjection is: 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Douglas discerns that the 'unclean' or 'pollution' under ritualized circumstances transmutes into the sacred

(Douglas, 1966/1996: 9). Kristeva equally perceives that the abject which evokes states of 'loathing', 'brutish suffering', 'horror' and 'nausea' can also transform into 'jouissance' (Kristeva, 1982: 2, 3, 9 and 10). She states that: 'One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims - if not its submissive and willing ones' (Kristeva, 1982: 9). This cognitive dissonance is also visible in the historical representations of the Christian martyrs and the crucifixion of Christ. The tortured body is mainly depicted not in agonal pain, but instead in submissive states, sometimes bordering on the erotic (Greer, 2003: 207; Kaye, 2003: 12; Burke, 2006: 490).

The diseased and traumatized body is also an embodiment of abjection; both illness and medical treatments exact a toll on the body and socially accepted norms become very difficult to maintain. Nevertheless, in a bid for a cure or an extension of life, patients acquiesce to painful and intrusive treatments. The availability of analgesic relief can make representations of the medically compromised body appear passive. In terms of Wilke's and Spence's work I apply the concept of 'the abject body' as a means of determining how they use their abject embodiment to challenge cultural constructs or norms concerning the 'body beautiful'. At the same time I question whether abject embodiments in Wilke and Spence are in fact direct secular descendants of historical representations of Christian martyrdom. When analysing the works of Gonzalez-Torres, Leonard and my own, this concept will be deployed to see how fragile objects (flowers, fruit and sweets) act as stand-ins for the mutability of the body. As plastic and performative elements, these objects metaphorically 'play out' or 'enact' illness, bodily collapse, dying and death. This concept will be used to ascertain the extent to which these objects convey abject embodiment.

As we can see from the brief outlining of *Ars moriendi,* Anticipatory grief/ Grief, Illness narratives and The abject body these concepts are complex, polyvalent and traverse across a variety of subject disciplines. Indeed at times these concepts converge so that they present themselves simultaneously.

The application of this methodological framework is designed to generate more in-depth research findings that evidence these artists' preoccupations and concerns. From this aggregation I will surmise how artists today are significantly shaping both current and future discourses surrounding visual materializations of loss, grief and mourning. My conjectures will obviously be curtailed both in terms of my own subjectivity and the limitations of this corpus.

2.8 Methods

To address the aims of my research topic I have employed a multi-method approach in order to allow me to generate information that was critical, wide-ranging and corroborative. My methods comprise theoretical analysis, reflective journals, research-based practice and interviews with artists Briony Campbell[18], Helena Godwin[19] and Sally Tissington[20] (artist/writer). I logged my learning experiences in two different types of journal. Sketchbooks were used for the documentation of annotated media experiments, work-in-progress and final works. I also recorded my thoughts, ideas, to-do lists and concept mapping in notebooks. Additionally, as part of my expositional analysis, I exhibited films, performance and live art, installations and sculptural works. The films *Grief and Mourning* were screened continuously for two weeks as part of Warwickshire Artsweek in 2010. Other works were exhibited at Trinity Catholic School in Warwickshire[21].

This thesis builds on my Master's degree where I explored the religious, sociocultural and psychological practices that humans engage in when dealing with death and bereavement. Societies differ greatly in their responding to the problem of death[22].The fact that we die has the potential to render life futile or, conversely, to provide our existence with social activity oriented towards a meaningful conclusion. Taking this as my premise, I produced a body of works incorporating actors who repeated rituals and gestures as a metaphor for existence[23]. For the purposes of this thesis I have utilized my

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[18] Campbell, B. (2012) Interviewed by Sheridan Horn at Campbell's London home, Wednesday 25 July.

[19] Godwin, H. (2011) Interviewed by Sheridan Horn at Trinity Catholic School, Leamington Spa, Wednesday 19 October.

[20] Tissington, S. (2011) Interviewed by Sheridan Horn at Trinity Catholic School Leamington Spa, Wednesday 9 February.

[21] Annual exhibitions at Trinity Catholic School involve the production of artworks by hundreds of pupils (years 7-13), artists in residence, artist mentors and artist teachers. Each year a different issue based topic is selected by art staff and artwork is created from September – February specifically for the annual show held in February. For more detailed information, please refer to Sheridan Horn: (Horn, 2006: 134-145; 2008: 144-157; 2009: 160-173).

[22] In Europe and America for example, sleep is deployed as a euphemism to conceal its boundary with death. Whilst studying at Masters Level, I experimented with how to portray the figure in a state that oscillates between sleep and death.

[23] The resulting performances, live art, installations and films all contain a signature motif that of nude or clothed supine figure(s). In these works performers twist in a sleep-like-state on platforms, beds or in deep water. They are enveloped in cloth or plastic sheets. They roll over, are exhumed, washed and tenderly wrapped up again. All of these ritualistic acts are reminiscent of how societies deal with death (preparation

art practice as an expositional method in order to make my own claims to knowledge when exploring my research questions. My practice-led research has been invaluable in providing me with tacit knowledge, which has informed and underpinned my theoretical exegesis. Through my art practice, I was able to evidence grief and mourning processes in my work and those produced by the artists in my corpus as being 're-enacted' through performative time-based states of materiality. I deduced these links whilst carefully recording objects that were decaying, changing state and dissolving along with corporeal traces in media such as the imprints of my hands in clay or wax. Through observing these types of processes, I began to realize that artists today are encapsulating something that is both intriguing and precious. Because loss, trauma, grief and mourning are such difficult experiences to endure, aspects of these types of lived experience are transmuted by the artist into materialized forms. The artists' feelings and memories are embedded, 'played out' or actualized within their works. Many artists today are fully aware of this and manipulate their materials accordingly in order to communicate their embodied experiences. Nevertheless, even if this is not an artist's intention, tacit information (psychological and somatic) is being inscribed or enmeshed within grief and mourning works which I will evidence as my hypothesis unfolds.

2.9 Statement of ethics

Research into death, dying and bereavement is intense, emotive and daunting because it has the potential to be harmful not only for the researcher but also for any voluntary participants. I therefore adhered to the policies and principles as set out in the Birmingham City University's Research Ethical Framework (2010). For example, as part of my methodological practice, I interviewed several artists in order to gain insights into their experience, intentions and motivations for producing artworks in response to bereavement. Before conducting these interviews, I informed participants of my research

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of the corpse), but also how culture uses daily routine to avoid confronting death. In these works the actors refuse to engage with the viewer. The performers' eyes are either closed or they look away, engrossed in their activity. Because of this, the viewer is forced to wait for the scenario to unfold if they are to access the work. This creates a sense of frustration and monotony similar to the acts witnessed. Each representation hints at an uneasy undertow that the figures, in their cyclic performances, seek to allay. Nondescript backgrounds allowed the performers to inhabit a liminal space. Death is not depicted as a finite end to life, but as an inherent part of life. Rituals performed to allay the fear of death, ultimately confirm its presence in life. These works emphasise that death is no longer a remote fear but the driving force behind our everyday existence.

aims and purposes, offered them anonymity and obtained their consent before proceeding. The voluntary participants in my study were also made aware that they could withdraw their consent right up to the point of publication. However, all the artists involved declined to do so - the names listed in this text are authentic. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Since 1986 I have been a secondary school art teacher (of 11-18 year olds) at Trinity Catholic School in Leamington Spa. Working as an artist teacher during my doctoral research I conducted all my art practice at this school. This enabled discussions to ensue (both formally and informally) with pupils and colleagues about issues surrounding loss, grief, death and dying. Briony Campbell (photographer) and Helena Godwin (fine artist) who I interviewed as part of my enquiry also volunteered to talk with art and photography GCSE and A' Level students about their work concerning these topics. Open forum discussions about highly sensitive issues such as these are very rare within the school sector. However, they offered the students present an opportunity to benefit from developing their knowledge and understanding about fundamental life experiences.

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) forms part of the National Curriculum for schools in the United Kingdom. However, death, dying and bereavement or death studies as a subject is not considered a core component of school education. Instead, it is left to the discretion of individual schools to decide whether or not to include this subject as part of the PSHE curriculum. Because this is an extremely difficult topic to teach, the majority of schools adopt a passive approach. As both a teacher and parent myself, I fully understand that when studying highly charged issues such as these with students one may unintentionally reignite a past trauma that they themselves have suffered. It is therefore vital to provide students and their parent(s) or guardian(s) with plenty of advance notice before subjects like this are disseminated precisely to avoid causing any harm. Likewise at the beginning of each lesson I took the opportunity to carefully reiterate the lessons content before proceeding. At this juncture students were also made aware that they could leave the lesson at any given point if they felt uncomfortable and remove themselves to a designated 'safe' area where a teacher was already in attendance. Again participants were reminded of the need for respectful behaviour and sensitivity towards those present. At Trinity Catholic School we also employ a qualified counsellor so I provided students with their contact details in case they needed their services at a future date.

2.10 Death in the photographic image

A brief analysis concerning certain aspects of photographic theory and its production will now be outlined; all the artists in my corpus have utilized photography either for the purpose of image-making or as documents. Roland Barthes' theorizations in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, written as a novelistic eulogy to his mother Henriette, is germane; in it he revealed that the *eidos* of a photograph is death. He also discovered other aspects of death and dying inherent in photography both in its production and its final outcome.

Another important factor to consider is the exponential rise in the currency of the photograph since its invention in the 1830s to its migration onto digital social media sites in the 1990s. The current proliferation of photographs as a common form of communication onto digital platforms is an unprecedented phenomenon[24] and heralds new forms of digital memorialization and cenotaphs. I will return to this topic again at the end of this section.

In her critique *On Photography*, Sontag recognized that 'All photographs are *memento mori*' (Sontag, 1977/2008: 15). She extended this idea further in relation to photographs of individuals:

> *To the solitary stroller, all the faces in the stereotyped photographs cupped behind glass and affixed to tombstones in the cemeteries of Latin countries seem to contain a portent of their death. Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people.*
>
> (Sontag, 1977/2008: 70)**.**

Roland Barthes agrees with this observation in *Camera Lucida*. He describes the performative act of having his own photograph taken: 'I am neither subject nor object but

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[24] The website '1 second – Internet Live Stats', (n.d.) streams the uploading of photographs onto Instagram as they occur. The site states that 793 Instagram photographs are uploaded in 1 second. On the 18 July 2018 at 6.03pm, I watched the electronic counter record approximately 70,000 photographs being uploaded onto Instagram in 1 minute. In her presentation on the state of the Internet, Mary Meeker showed a graph which correlated the number of photographs being uploaded and shared on select platforms per day. In 2005 the number recorded was fewer than 300 but by 2014 it had risen to a staggering 1.8 billion (slide number 62/165). The platforms in 2014 were Flickr, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp (Shontell and Yarow, 2014).

a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter (*sic*)' (Barthes, 1980/2000: 14). Rather than discuss photography in terms of its processual qualities, Barthes observes his own perception/reaction when looking at photographs or when being photographed. His observations circulate round the relationship between photography and death.

The familiar photographic concepts of the *studium* and the *punctum* were established by Barthes while observing and disseminating his personal responses. The studium refers to the viewer's interest in the cultural aspects of an image such as war or fashion. The punctum is a particular detail in the photograph which creates an intense and poignant response in the spectator such as tenderness and eroticism. Whilst contemplating the Winter Garden Photograph (a photograph that he declines to reproduce in his book) of his mother as a five year old standing with her older brother, Barthes made another discovery: 'I now know that there exists another *punctum* (another "stigmatum") than the "detail". This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* ("*that-has-been*"), its pure representation' (Barthes, 1980: 96). He further discerns that the depiction of time as embedded in a photograph can create a vertiginous awareness of one's own mortality.

This becomes apparent when Barthes looks at the portrait of Lewis Payne taken in 1865 by Alexander Gardner. Payne is depicted handcuffed, sitting in a prison cell after his attempted assassination of the Secretary of State W. H. Seward. This image was taken shortly before his death by hanging. In Barthes own account 'The photograph is handsome, as is the boy' (Barthes, 1980/2000: 96). Payne stares at the camera lens and by extension, directly into the eyes of the viewer. Using this image, Barthes reveals the existential paradox that photography inculcates. Payne, who is long dead ("this has been"), is viewed in the present moment as being alive, but is going to die ("this will be"). Barthes observes 'Whether or not a subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe' (Barthes, 1980/2000: 96). The fact that a photograph is indelibly embedded with time as historically in the past whilst simultaneously existing as an object in the continuous present, leads Barthes to conclude that 'each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death' (Barthes, 1980/2000: 97)[25].

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[25] Whilst meditating on the Winter Garden Photograph and grieving for his mother, Barthes also realizes 'The only "thought" I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two, nothing more than waiting; I have no other resource than this *irony*: to speak of the "nothing to say" ' (Barthes, 1980/2000: 93). The acknowledgement of his own mortality was to prove tragically prescient. Shortly after this book was published on 25 January 1980, Barthes was hit by a van whilst crossing a street

Barthes describes photographers albeit unknowingly as 'agents of Death', the act of his being photographed as a 'gesture will embalm me' and that; 'With the photograph we enter into *flat Death*' (Barthes, 1980/2000: 14 and 92). In this respect, photography is aligned to the *vanitas* because they share the same *eidos*: that of fleeting human existence and the inevitability of death. The synchronistic containment of time as embedded within a photograph also produces another fascinating anomaly. If someone photographs a corpse, it renders the corpse as 'the living image of a dead thing' (Barthes, 1980/2000: 79). It is this strange incongruity which is utilized to such stunning effect in extreme embalming memorials located on the Internet (discussed in Chapter Six).

Contemporary visual practitioners are aware of Barthes' theories and use them to underscore and subvert 'readings' of their own photographic image-making. For example, Wilke and Spence produced photographic narratives of their own living with dying which exist in the continuous present. The knowledge that they are dying ("this will be") and are now dead ("this has been") heightens the poignancy of these images.

Photochemical imaging (film and plate) is a much slower process than digital photography. In chemical photography, latent images are exposed onto light sensitive film or plates. It is only possible to see what has been captured after the film or plates have been processed, scanned and printed. The daguerreotype is a unique object lacking in reproducibility unlike the carte de visite, film and digital photography. A roll of film contains between 12-36 exposures but a 32 GB digital memory card accommodates between 596-7,900 pictures (Mathies, 2014). Digital technology has revolutionized photography. In a digital camera, images are captured onto an electronic image sensor visible on a LCD screen built into the camera. This allows the photographer to see the picture immediately. Images stored on a memory card are then transferred to a computer ready for editing, printing or uploading onto the Internet. These processes can be conducted in the privacy of one's home. Pocket-sized smartphones with their inbuilt cameras and Internet connectivity have taken this process a step further which means that individuals can upload snaps onto the Internet immediately.

In this way, it is possible to see why post-mortem portrait photography popular in

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in Paris (25 February 1980). He was rushed to hospital where his health slowly deteriorated. He died on 26 March 1980 aged 64. Because of this tragedy, *Camera Lucida* is synonymously imbued with the double deaths of the author and his mother (Batchen, 2009: 14).

America and Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has migrated from the domestic (distribution amongst an intimate circle of family and friends) to its re-emergence as a worldwide digital cenotaph located on the Internet. Early portraits were cherished as personal keepsakes kept in albums, framed for display in the home or carried on one's person whereas today photographs are more likely to be stored on a smartphone or computer file. Ironically, images stored in this way renders them vulnerable in terms of preservation because future technological innovations could make even digital preservation methods obsolete (Knapton, 2015).

I am aware that I cannot discuss photographic theory in the depth that it warrants; although I fully acknowledge its importance, it is not the main concern of my thesis. However, the concepts outlined in this brief synopsis are significant when considering artists who have deployed the medium of photography in response to loss, grief and mourning.

2.11 Thesis structure

Chapter One introduces the problem statement and situates my research in relationship to the work of others in this area of study. I offer the further contributions to knowledge and theory that my research will make. The meaning of key terms and the rationale for the selection of artists is given.

Chapter Two provides a synopsis of the frameworks underpinning the research including literature researches, an introduction to the artists and selected artworks; the research aims, objectives and questions; methodologies, methods and the thesis structure.

Chapter Three begins by analysing works made by Wilke and Spence whilst living with loss (pre-mortem), followed by chapters discussing artists who created works in response to the death of a loved one (post-mortem). This logical progression creates an anomaly for the reason that Chapter Three entitled *Living with loss: Hannah Wilke and Jo Spence* is a critique. Subsequent chapters reveal that my research practice informs my analysis of their work, especially with regards to my central hypothesis. As a researcher, I am keen that my claims to knowledge as discovered through my art practice will be utilized subsequently for theoretical purposes in looking at artworks afresh and to produce new meanings. In Chapter Three I set about explicating my core hypothesis by analysing the works of Wilke and Spence through four conceptual lenses. These concepts are deployed in the following order: Illness narratives, The abject body, Anticipatory grief

and *Ars moriendi*. To date, Wilke's and Spence's body of work has not been analysed as documents of grief and mourning. I argue that these two artists are not representing grief and mourning as homogenized experiences but instead as individualized ones. In order to reveal the complicated diversity that living with loss entails, the analysis of artworks covers a broad spectrum. Each of the four concepts investigates a different facet of their loss, grief and mourning.

Illness narratives provide a sociocultural perspective. At the time when Wilke and Spence were working, cancer was personified within the public consciousness in very ugly guises. As a result, patients could find themselves stigmatized and marginalised. Discourse on this topic includes points of view from Audre Lorde, Susan Sontag, Anatole Broyard and Siddhartha Mukherjee. Both Wilke and Spence personified cancer in their work not only in a bid to conceptualize this disease but also as a means to challenge stereotypical thinking. At this point in the chapter, emphasis shifts onto the abject body and its problematic representation in relation to the cult of the beautiful body. Comparisons are made between historical paintings of Christian martyrs and photographic self-portraits by Wilke and Spence. Analysis then switches to encompass anticipatory grief and mourning. As with all the artists in my corpus, I do *not* use their works as illustrations of grief and mourning theories. I refer instead to psychological and sociological literature in order to highlight resonances or intersections between these domains and artists materializations in art. In the case of Wilke and Spence, I reference the ways in which their works evoke and mimic symptoms of trauma, grief and mourning. References to grief and mourning theory include Therese Rando, Geraldine Humphrey, David Zimpfer and Miriam Greenspan as well as insights into the unspeakable nature of pain by Elaine Scarry, narrative chaos by Arthur Frank and the body as living text by Rita Charon.

Utilizing the religious concept as stated in *Ars moriendi* literature and the notion of a 'good' death reveals how Wilke and Spence reconfigure this historical legacy to deliver personalised secular equivalents concerning their own death and dying. The chapter concludes by summarizing all the different ways in which loss, grief and mourning is embedded within these works.

In Chapter Four: *The construction and dismantling of loss in Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013) begins by explaining the rhizomic nature by which knowledge is generated in practice-led research. During my research it quickly became apparent that I was dealing with a vast amount of multidimensional information centred

on the theme of loss. In order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which loss is materialized in art, I constructed my own post-death memorial entitled *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There*. Through observation and analysis I then theoretically dismantled it in writing both at the time of its production and subsequently. This exercise produces a wealth of tacit and factual information/knowledge. The final installation (a sculptural *vanitas* consisting of objects coated with ash) is placed centre stage and spotlit. This work is displayed in isolation within a black-cubed-gallery-space.

Through making comparisons between *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* to the historical *vanitas* mechanisms by which loss is being conveyed in my work is rendered visible. It is discovered that loss accrues through layered meanings as encoded in signification, symbolism, the representation of time as being only in the past tense, object inertia, obsolescence, silence and death.

Ultimately, loss also resides in the fact that the work itself is destroyed and now only exists in photographic form. In my analysis of the performative encounter with my original work and its subsequent reiterations (photographic documents and writing), I draw upon Peggy Phelan's definition of performativity and 'the performance of death' as only being performed once, but existing in innumerable registers 'technological, historical, psychic and political' (Phelan and Rogoff, 2000: 133). My exposition reveals that loss, grief and mourning can be hidden or registered subliminally within an artwork. Although I will tacitly and objectively support my own claims to knowledge in this chapter, I will now need to substantiate my hypothesis further. It is in this way that my art practice informs my theoretical exegesis of Wilke's and Spence's body of works.

In Chapter Five, *Vanitas: An exploration of grief and mourning as corporeal and durational experience*, I continue to investigate and develop my research questions. The production of a memorial work to my father entitled *D(e)ad* (2010-2011) which incorporates corporeal and temporally bound elements makes me realize that this artwork *actualizes aspects of the grieving process itself*. I deploy the elucidation of *D(e)ad* to foreground my analysis of works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Zoe Leonard. Emphasis is placed on the *vanitas* because all of the artists' work is rooted in this particular genre. I evidence the ways in which the historical *vanitas* has been appropriated to express personalised expressions of loss, grief and mourning. Once again, I utilize my methodological approach of scrutinizing all of the artworks through four interrelated conceptual lenses so as to produce new 'readings'. The concepts are used in the following order: Illness narratives, The abject body, *Ars moriendi* and Grief.

A brief overview of the *vanitas* is mapped out. Each of the four concepts is headed by a concise description and an analysis of *D(e)ad* at various stages in its performative unfolding across a period of twelve months. Gonzalez-Torres' memorial work is explored as a challenge to the socio-political negligence of the homosexual community in America during the HIV/AIDS crisis.

D(e)ad is then deployed as a heuristic aid to gain understanding of the artworks as corporeal representations of the abject body. My work is contrasted with James Elkin's description of cut flesh in art as depicted in Dutch still-life painting. This segues into an investigation regarding Leonard's and my own use of fruit as visual analogies for the diseased and wounded body.

I begin to consider these questions by comparing *D(e)ad* with the *vanitas*. I posit that the *vanitas* foreshadows or is a precursor of the hologram. I support my hypothesis by citing Sveltlana Alper's observation that the Dutch painters were obsessed with depicting objects and their surfaces from a variety of angles and viewpoints. The *vanitas* is examined in terms of its mimetic depiction of surfaces and the evocation of Marie-Celeste like environments. Finally, conceptual investigation hones in on grief and mourning. Once again, examinations are foregrounded through the tacit, didactic and heuristic knowledge acquired from my elucidation of *D(e)ad*. The historical *vanitas* is revisited and a critique follows about the ways in which loss is signified through this genre. A discourse ensues concerning aestheticism/beauty and the articulation of loss contrasting views between Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva and Philippe Ariès. References are also made to grief and mourning literature (Tony Lake, Paul Rosenblatt, Dennis Klass et al and Tony Walter).

Chapter Six: *Articulating the void*, revisits the research findings with regards to cenotaphs in art. These commemorative works encapsulate an actual self-portrait (Wilke and Spence) or a metaphorical portrait of the deceased, their mode of death and dying, the artist's unique grieving processes including rituals, coping methods and memorial practice. At the core of these cenotaphs is the articulation of loss as represented through changing states such as the pictorial, plastic, processual or performative. I include Briony Campbell *The Dad Project* (2009) as a counterpoint, because of her effective deployment of subliminal referencing. I briefly outline and discuss three unsuccessful works which I had previously produced (a performance and two films). These works are included because they directly influenced my methodological approach in *Grief Shadow* (2014). I introduce Campbell's photographic account of her father's dying days. Her vigil is

presented as a photographic narrative of ordinary snapshots, reminiscent of a family album. These pictures present both a presence and its corresponding absence. I decide to adopt her low key approach in my work. *Grief Shadow* is a live art tableau produced using an all-black palette. It is a commemorative work for my father marking the anniversary of his death. It depicts a young man sat at a table reading a book. This fictional scenario is set in a black cubed space. The figure is mute, motionless and does not interact with the audience.

Grief Shadow augments *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* in its imaginary presentation of the world as lacklustre alluding to psychological states of negativity and depression. Analysis proceeds with regards to the semantics of the shadow. Discourse circulates around the fact that this work does not make it explicit who precisely is grieving. Is it the figure in the tableau, the artist or the viewer?

The introspective pose of the figure who *sits in* his sadness acts as a potent signifier. The sombre monochrome palette of this tableau throws the colourful spectators into stark relief. I compare my approach with Campbell's; *Grief Shadow* is deemed successful because it embodies my personal grieving experiences as that of making the world seem unfamiliar, intense moments of gloomy introspection, psychological oscillation and the longer recognition of mourning as suffused melancholy. I suggest how this work could be extended further.

Here-and-Now; Then-and-There articulated loss but not the grieving process, for the reason that it did not change states. Conversely *D(e)ad* was effective because it actualized grieving through its metaphorical 'playing out' of bodily collapse and death through processual change. *Grief Shadow* provided affirmation that it is possible to embody the synergistic and dynamic processes of grief, mourning and melancholy through a static work.

At this juncture discussion shifts to encompass a new cultural phenomenon called extreme embalming. This art form is a reworking of the Christian cult of saints' relics and historical post-mortem photography portraiture as established in Europe and America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The chapter concludes with an overview of society as having evolved from a theocracy to a secularized one. I cite Stephen Jenkinson's assertion that Western societies are not only 'death phobic' but also 'grief illiterate' (*Stephen Jenkinson Way of Grief*, [radio programme] 2013).

In Chapter Seven: *Conclusion* I briefly revisit my aims, methodological

approaches, practice-led research, the artists in my corpus and state my original contributions to knowledge in this field of study. I review my research and state the salient findings, key ideas and arguments. My new methodological approach, the four concepts is discussed as a successful generator of new readings and knowledge. I highlight potential areas for further research.

Chapter Three

Living with loss: Hannah Wilke and Jo Spence

3.1) Introduction. 3.2) Illness narratives: representations of cancer as imaginary sociocultural constructs; 3.3) Questioning the personification of cancer. 3.4) The abject body - *even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course*; **3.5) A crisis of representation: trauma, testimony, witness and martyrdom. 3.6) Anticipatory grief: loss, trauma and reparation; 3.7) Narrative disruption and the shattered self. 3.8)** *Ars moriendi*: **a modern iconography of medicalized death and dying; 3.9) The conceptualization of medicalized dying as a secular equivalent of a 'good' death; 3.10) Resurrective practice. 3.11) Conclusion.**

3.1 Introduction

I will argue that the secularization of society has meant that grief and mourning has moved from being represented as a homogenized experience to an individualized one. Because of advances in medicine, durational medicalized dying is now commonplace. The outcome of this development means that how and where one dies has changed. As a result how, when and where one grieves and mourns has also altered. Consequently, the invention of new technologies has meant that how the dead are memorialized or rather the ways in which memory can be edified has evolved. In order to evidence these exciting developments as represented in art, I begin by examining a body of Wilke's and Spence's works based on their experience of living with cancer. Because the embodied, lived experience of loss, trauma and grief is complex and multivalent, I deploy a method of analysis using four conceptual lenses to aid clarity.

When facing chronic/terminal illness, one's ability to cope is impacted by many factors such as the way in which a particular disease is viewed within a sociocultural context. Cultural stereotyping also impacts on the management of selfhood whilst living with a debilitating illness (**Illness narratives**). Disease and medical treatments exact a toll on the body and socially accepted norms become difficult to maintain (**The abject body**). The patient is also expected to navigate ongoing and associative loss as it unfolds (**Anticipatory grief**) ending, in Wilke's and Spence's case, with medicalized death and dying (*Ars moriendi*).

I will ascertain the following: the ways in which Wilke's and Spence's representations of the sick body challenge the stigmatizing personifications of cancer that

prevailed at the time when they were working; to what extent representations of abject embodiment these artists' medically compromised and wounded bodies are direct secular descendants of the portrayals in art of the historical acquiescent Christian martyrs; the methods deployed by Wilke and Spence in order to materialize/actualize their loss, grief and trauma. Finally, I will assess what aspects of the legacy, as extolled by the concept of *ars moriendi* which they have embodied within their final works, render them pertinent today.

It is important to remember that trauma, grief and mourning reverberate in an individual's psyche in a multi-dimensional way, arching across many domains such as sociocultural/political, historical, somatic, spiritual and medical. The application of the four concepts is to allow Wilke's and Spence's body of works to be analysed in a clear and logical manner. However, by separating out their works in this way, I do not wish to infer that **Anticipatory grief** only resides in a singular domain because it does not. It is the layered, synergistic effect encapsulated within these works wherein *the actualization of grieving processes* exists.

So far, no one has investigated this body of work by Wilke and Spence as either *embodying and/or mimicking the symptomatic processes of grief and trauma*. I set out therefore to evidence my hypothesis as developed through my art practice and expositions (details of which are discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six).

3.2 Illness narratives: representations of cancer as imaginary sociocultural constructs.

Hannah Wilke; *So Help Me Hannah Series***:** *Portrait of the Artist with her Mother, Selma Butter* **(1978-1981).**

Jo Spence; *The Property of Jo Spence* **(1982), from:** *The Picture of Health?* **(1982-1986)**

Jo Spence; *15th October, 1984,* **from:** *The Cancer Project.*

On reading Audre Lorde's proclamation in *The Cancer Journals* in which she likens her mastectomy scars to those of a warrior rather than a victim, Spence thought 'what crap' and went on to state:

I don't have any pride in my scars at all. I actually wanted to show what

had been done <u>to</u> me, plus the crossover between sexual availability and sexual glamour and the impossibility of that for an ageing, mutilated woman.

(Spence in an interview with John Roberts – Spence *et al,* 2005: 96).

As her words reveal, Spence was an ardent feminist who actively used her medicalized body to challenge stereotypical representations of the female body. Wilke adopted a similar stance, hence the polemical bias in critiques about their work. Critical discourses include a range of feminist tropes from patriarchal objectification, eroticism, gender performativity to narcissistic posturing. Although these discussions are relevant and important, I wish to derive new readings through critical analysis. To achieve this I will begin by analysing specific photographic works produced by these practitioners as illness narratives. An individual's response to illness is inevitably influenced by the prevailing context of sociocultural attitudes. Similarly, the processing of loss and grief is also affected by societal behaviour. It is essential therefore to gain an overview of how cancer was viewed at the time when Wilke and Spence were working.

Throughout the twentieth century cancer was commonly regarded as a cruel and indiscriminate killer:

Because countless metaphoric flourishes that have made cancer synonymous with evil, having cancer has been experienced by many as shameful, therefore something to conceal and also unjust, a betrayal of one's body. Why me? The cancer patient exclaims bitterly.

(Sontag, 1989/1991: 110).

Those suffering from cancer were expected to bear their condition stoically despite experiencing physical and psychological pain. On being diagnosed with breast cancer in 1982, Jo Spence quickly realized that her changed status was being met with silence, pity, and that except for close family and friends, people generally seemed to display 'a reluctance to engage socially with the subject' (Dennett, 2011: 224; Spence *et al*, 2005: 304). Up until the late twentieth century cancer was 'felt to be obscene - in the original meaning of that word: ill-omened, abominable, repugnant to the senses' with the sufferer being 'robbed of all capacities of self-transcendence, humiliated by fear and agony' (Sontag, 1978/1991: 9 and 17). Sontag, who overcame cancer twice before dying from leukaemia in 2004, challenged this type of stigmatization. She observed that chronic or terminal illness such as cancer, syphilis and AIDS/HIV, reflects socially embedded myths

and taboos concerning sexual morality, lifestyle choices, fear of death and contamination by association (Sontag, 1991). She advocated that

> ...illness is <u>not</u> a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness – and the healthiest way of being ill – is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking.

<div align="right">(Sontag, 1978/1991: 3).</div>

It is impossible to eradicate metaphorical thinking, especially in conjunction with formidable diseases as evidenced historically whereby maladies have been characterised by individuals[26], communities[27] and mythologizing[28]. Negative metaphors concerning illness can perpetuate or create new forms of stereotyping and stigma, as Anatole Broyard noted, but positive metaphors can be a source of healing and comfort: 'Perhaps only metaphor can express the bafflement, the panic combined with beatitude, of the threatened person' (Broyard, 1992: 18). He observed that in an emergency, people tend to resort to storytelling as a means of bringing a crisis under control[29]. 'The patient has to start by treating his illness not as a disaster, an occasion for depression or panic, but as a narrative, a story. Stories are antibodies against illness and pain'. When diagnosed with prostate cancer, he invented mini-narratives: 'Metaphor was one of my symptoms. I saw my illness as a visit to a disturbed country, rather like contemporary China. I imagined it as a love affair with a demented woman who demanded things I had never done before' (Broyard, 1992: 20-21). Siddhartha Mukherjee likens cancer to the 'peculiar instability of

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[26] Mary Mallon (1869-1938) an Irish immigrant cook working in New York, was known as "Typhoid Mary" because she was the first person to be identified as a carrier of this infectious disease. She became a symbol of disease in America (Rosenburg, 2015).

Gaëtan Dugas (1953-1984) was labelled Patient Zero in the AIDS epidemic in North America. 'Further studies clearly demonstrated that he could not be singled out as having brought AIDS to the gay bath houses of San Francisco and Los Angeles, from where it was believed to have spread. However, the idea of Patient Zero has lived on. The concept is now routinely used not only to describe index cases in new epidemics, but in the creation of characters used to encapsulate the social meanings attached to different diseases' (Science Museum, London, n.d.).

[27] The AIDS epidemic in the 1980s was originally known as the "gay plague" a phrase irresponsibly perpetuated by the media (Clews, 2014).

[28] In the Romantic era (late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century) tuberculosis or 'consumption' was associated with possessing a passionate or artistic temperament (Sontag, 1978/1991: 29-35).

[29] Restitution stories are obviously popular in that the sufferer successively foils mortality by putting it on hold. Often a patient will tell this type of story because it is the one that they themselves and others wish to hear, hence Wilke's assertion that her final exhibition would be called 'Cured'. As her partner Goddard stated 'It wouldn't turn out that way, the title or the wish, but I think she knew that too' (Frank, 1995: 76-77; Goddard, 1995: 16).

modernity'; asking if its successful development is due to its adopting similar if not superior survival strategies to that of the human species? 'It lives desperately, inventively, fiercely, territorially, cannily, and defensively – at times, as if teaching *us* how to survive' (Mukherjee, 2011: 38). He believes that metaphorical thinking in terms of cancer is inevitable and even admits that writing a book about it, felt as if he was writing about a person not a medical history, hence the title *The Emperor of all Maladies: A Biography of Cancer* (Mukherjee, 2011: 39). An individual's illness narrative is therefore nested within a complex interplay of sociocultural contexts which mixes fact with fiction; not only are diseases personified but are also given a personality within the public consciousness. This means, for the sufferer who literally embodies an illness, possibly becoming linked to a disease's culturally constructed anthropomorphic existence.

Up until this point, photographs of mastectomies were primarily located in the medical domain. Photographic images in medicine were used for educational and diagnostic purposes as an aid to understanding the pathology of disease and surgical procedures. It was therefore revolutionary for Wilke and Spence to produce images of their diseased bodies in a fine art context. By borrowing from a medical pictorial tradition with its own visual repertoire and displacing it into a fine art one, they raised challenging questions. Suddenly fine art, which for centuries was obsessed with beautification, is being made an exposal of mutilations. The work of these two artists also queries cultural personifications of cancer[30] within the public consciousness.

3.3 Questioning the personification of Cancer

The diptych *So Help Me Hannah Series*: *Portrait of the Artist with her Mother, Selma Butter* (1978-1981) (Figure 5) contains two separate photographs of Wilke and her mother naked from the waist up[31]. This work is unsettling because it juxtaposes the ravishingly

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[30] Cancer is still being anthropomorphised in the twenty-first century. In 2013 Cancer Research UK launched an advertising campaign to raise money. They sent letters out personifying cancer as the author. The letter began: "EVERYONE KNOWS ME. And they know the devastation I cause. I didn't think it could happen to me. That's what a lot of people say. The truth is it happens to most of more than one in three. For those people, their friends and families, things won't ever be the same again. And it's all down to me. I AM CANCER...I don't care who I hurt...WHY AM I WRITING TO YOU? …]" (Advertising Standards Authority Ruling on Cancer Research UK, 2013).

[31] This diptych is a contemporary version of the *memento mori* genre. *Memento mori* is a Latin phrase meaning: Remember you must die. Symbolic objects such as a skeleton, candle or clock would be juxtaposed with figures so as to set up dualisms concerning the transience of beauty, the futility of materialism and the fleetingness of life. An example of this genre would be Death and the Maiden from the Middle Ages where a beautiful woman would be locked in an embrace with a skeleton or decomposing corpse (De Pascale, 2009: 86-92).

beautiful daughter next to her cancer-ravaged mother and is an eerie presentiment of Wilke's own death from this disease. Selma Butter has had a mastectomy: livid scarring striates the site where surgical amputation has occurred. On closer inspection, further metastases can be discerned migrating away from the primary site of infection. These raw marks, which evidence disease and body trauma, differ greatly from Wilke's decoratively applied mark-making (tiny metal objects placed upon her hair, shoulders and chest), which ornament her body. These miniature guns, delicate chains and metallic shapes allude to military medals and insignia worn by members of the armed forces. The symbolic positioning of war objects placed on Wilke's body next to that of her mother's pockmarked chest hints at injuries sustained by mortar fire or shrapnel blast. That medical photographs up until this point were used to document specimens of disease and soldiers' war wounds enforces this comparison (McFall, 2000). The cumulative effect personifies cancer as that of a lethal enemy or a war zone.

In 1971 President Richard Nixon signed the *National Cancer Act,* which heralded the "war" on cancer. Metaphors associated with military warfare were commonly used by oncologists and their patients to describe the "battle" or "fight" against cancer the "enemy". Oncologists saw medical treatments as an "arsenal" with which to "combat" cancer. By using an array of biological, nuclear and chemical weaponry; the patient's body inevitably became the "battlefield" (Reisfield and Wilson 2004: 4024; Sherwin, 2006). By personifying cancer as an adversary, as Wilke intimates in her work, the sufferer is cast in the role as either "winner" or a "loser". However, like Spence, not every patient wants this warrior status conferred upon them, especially with a disease which is beyond their control. This notion of who or what is in control of the diseased body is also questioned by Spence. Before going into hospital in 1982, she was photographed by Terry Dennett in a series of tableaux baring her breasts. In one of these scenarios she stands facing the camera with 'PROPERTY OF JO SPENCE?' written in ink across her malignant breast (Figure 6). The text formulates a question: is this *her* breast, because it forms part of her body - or is it controlled by the sociocultural body, the body politic or the medical profession? This image evokes the conceptual fugitive nature of cancer. In Spence's representation, cancer resembles a squatter who has taken up occupancy in a property against the owner's will.

Figure 5. Hannah Wilke, *So Help Me Hannah Series: Portrait of the Artist with her Mother, Selma Butter*. From the *So Help Me Hannah Series* (1978-1981). Diptych, cibachrome photographs, 40 x 30 inches each. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Figure 6. Jo Spence (with Terry Dennett), *The Property of Jo Spence* (1982), from *The Picture of Health?* (1982-1986). Copyright/Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

During this era, cancer was seen as a shameful and stigmatizing disease. Erving Goffman observed that people with a stigma may find themselves having to carefully conceal their 'spoil[ed] social identity' in order to 'pass' in society and thus avoid 'an embarrassing incident' (Goffman, 1963/1990: 31 and 95). For someone with breast cancer, this meant wearing a prosthesis and/or undergoing breast reconstruction and hiding their loss of hair with a wig or head covering. Lorde, who had a mastectomy in 1978, refused to wear a prosthesis. She argued that a breast prosthesis or reconstructive surgery was a disavowal by women of having had the disease and a cosmetic sham (Lorde, 1997: 14, 58, 62 and 67). Her fury was piqued during a post-operative examination by a nurse's comments upon discovering that she was not wearing a prosthesis:

> *"You will feel better with it on", she said. "And besides, we really like you to wear something, at least when you come in. Otherwise it's bad for the morale of the office."*

(Lorde, 1997: 60).

Lorde defined all women who had suffered breast cancer as warriors and regarded her own mastectomy scar as the mark of a warrior and not that of a victim (Lorde, 1997: 61). She refused to conform to what she regarded as social stereotyping in order to ease the discomfort of others. In the same way, Spence and Wilke through their self-disclosures, opened up debates regarding this taboo subject.

Working with her partner Terry Dennett, Spence produced a stark representation of her mutilated breast, *15th October, 1984,* from *The Cancer Project* (Figure 7). The work consists of two black and white photographs placed one above the other. In both images, Spence is naked from the waist up, her head not visible and her left breast scarred and maimed. These representations are reminiscent of the ethnological photographs produced in the 1860's by John Lamprey (Figure 8) or the criminal identity portraits developed by Alphonse Bertillon in 1882 (Figures 9 and 10) (Ewing, 1996: 19, 126-127). Compositionally, emphasis is placed on the breasts and particularly the disfigurement of the left breast. By utilizing a pictorial rhetoric associated with law enforcement (documenting a person's profile and face after they have been arrested for identification purposes), cancer is personified as a felon or as a criminal act.
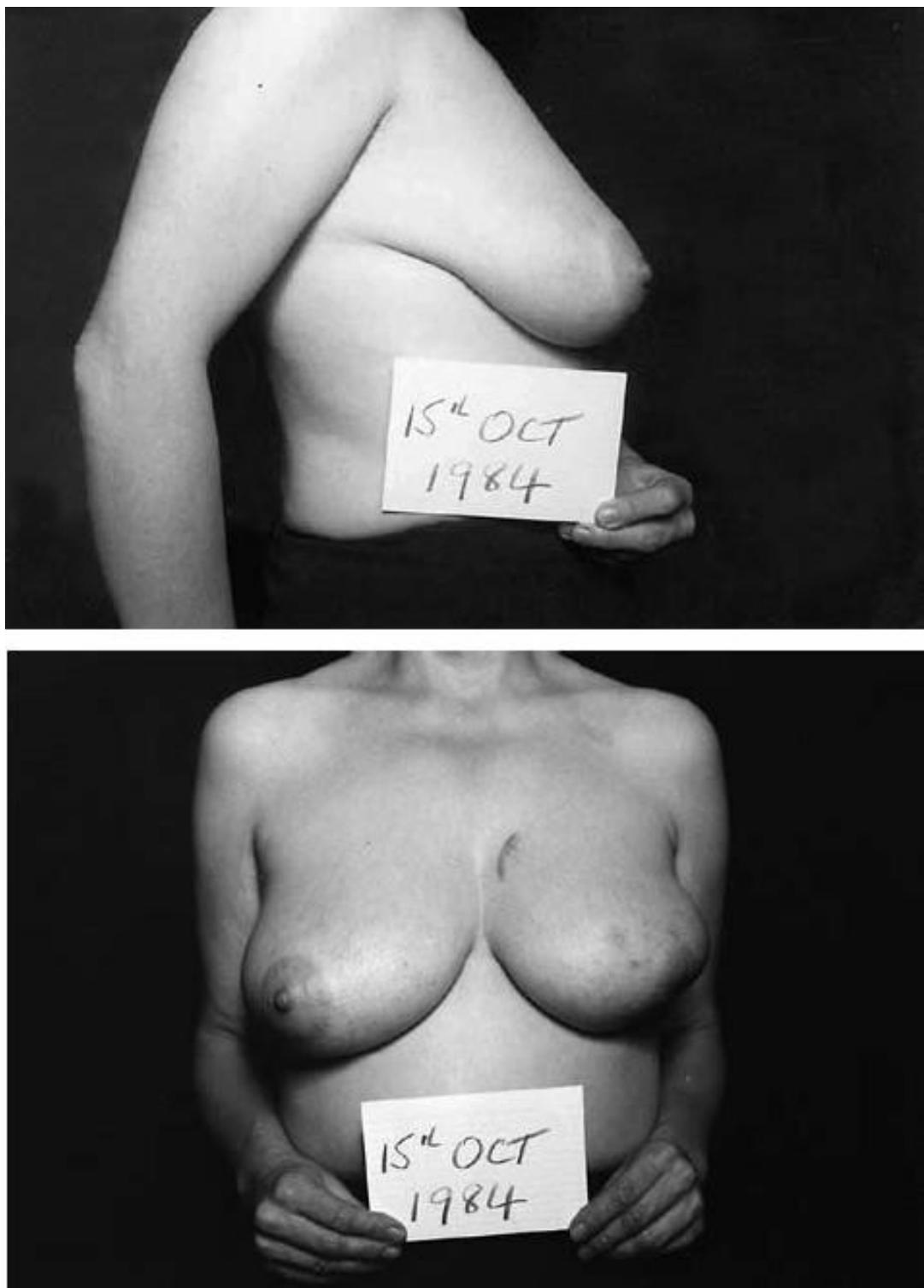
Figure 7. Jo Spence (with Terry Dennett), *15th October, 1984* from: *The Cancer Project*. Photograph, 50 x 70 cm. Copyright/Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.
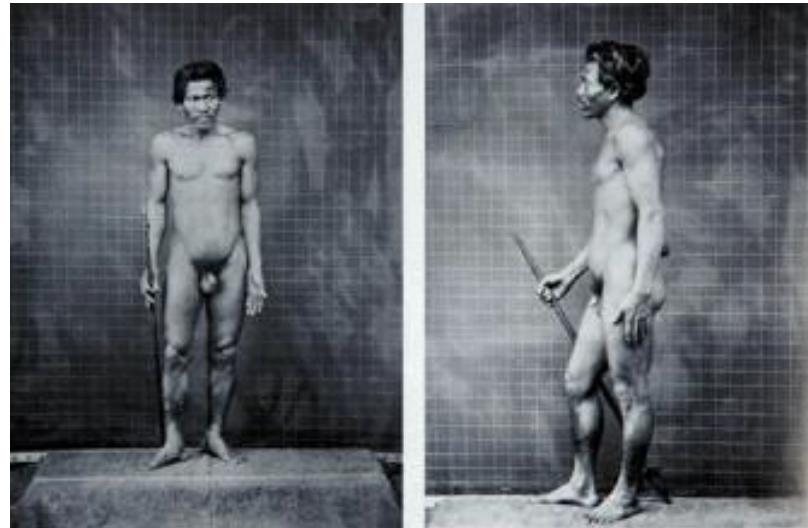
Figure 8. John Lamprey, (c.1868-1869) *Front and Profile Views of a Malayan Male.* Albumen Print.
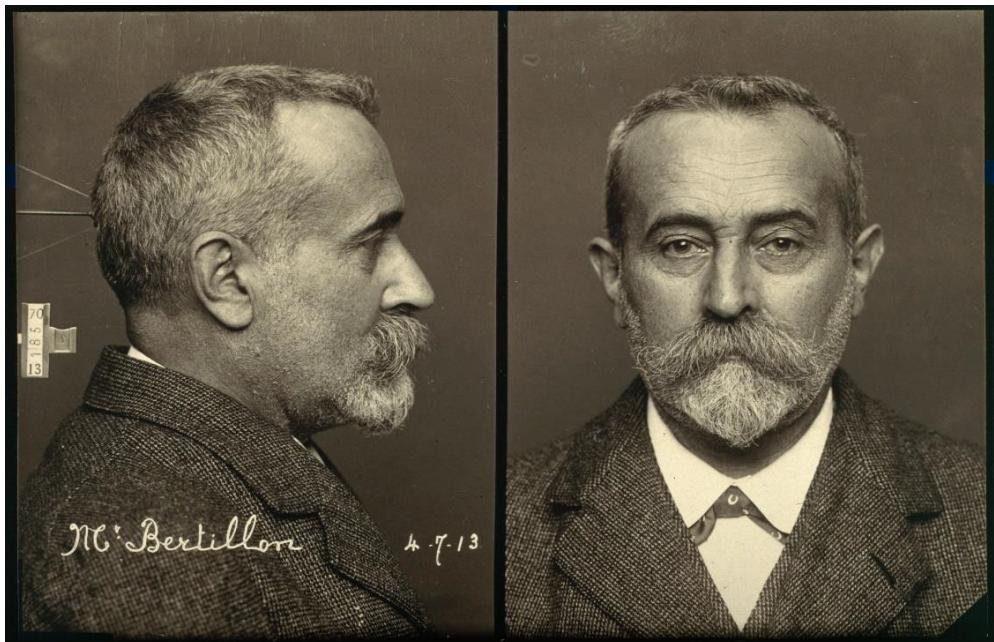
Figure 9. Alphonse Bertillon, in 1913, demonstrating the two-part (front and profile) method of photographing suspects. Courtesy of Wellcome Images (Clark, 2015).

Figure 10. Album of Paris Crime Scenes (1901-1908), attributed to Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914). Gelatin silver prints. Overall: 24.3 x 31cm, page: 23 x 29 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

To summarize, Wilke and Spence personified cancer as a foe, warzone, trespasser and heinous criminal. In this way not only did they conceptualize their illness but they also raised awareness of cancer's possible guises within the public consciousness. Like Sontag they were keen to decouple cancer mythologies from its associative stigmatization of the patient. Wilke's and Spence's visual idiolects in this matter were seminal. Using a combination of visual metaphor and their vulnerable bodies they highlighted stereotypical personifications of cancer. Moreover, their abstract conceptualizations of 'cancer' and 'the body' served to simultaneously merge and separate these objects, opening up new dialogic interpolations. Their work posits both positive and negative interpretations. For example, *The Property of Jo Spence* (1982), despite its negative connotations (cancer as intruder) was a photographic talisman[32] for Spence which she took into hospital with her (Spence, 1986b: 157). She re-conceptualized her malignant breast as being part of her own bodily property over which she had rights. It seems that this symbolic reconfiguration may have led to her renegotiating with her physician[33] to forgo a mastectomy in favour of a lumpectomy (Spence, 1986b: 150-151). To further this enquiry, emphasis will now move from the exploration of these artists' works as individual and collective personifications of cancer to the specificity of their bodies as sites of testimony and trauma.

Critical response to Wilke's and Spence's representations of the female body has produced politically charged feminist discourse. However, this investigation can be extended by changing the focus from the *female* body to the abject body. In the next section works are examined from the standpoint of loss and suffering. Could these works (sometimes produced *in extremis*) be considered direct secular descendants of the

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[32] When faced with a situation that arouses fear, chaos, acute distress and uncertainty, even a rationalist may find themselves utilizing superstitious practice in order to gain control. Like Joan Dideon who resorted to magical thinking after her husband died. She refused to throw out his shoes, assuming that he would need them upon his return (Dideon, 2006: 37, 188). Wilke also employed magical thinking when her mother was chronically ill, believing that if she simply kept on photographing her then she could keep her alive (Takemoto, 2008: 130). This same conviction was shared by Nan Goldin who said '… I'd always believed that if I photographed anything or anyone enough I would never lose them. With the death of seven or eight of my closest friends and dozens and dozens of my acquaintances, I realize that there is so much the photograph doesn't preserve. It doesn't replace the person and it doesn't really stave off mortality like I thought it did. It doesn't preserve a life' (Westfall, 1991). In this kind of magical thinking the fear of losing someone is evaded by the ritualistic act of photographing them and having the tangible proof of their existence in a fixed format, hence the possible compulsion to forestall death by repetitive documentation. But ironically a photograph is always a document of a *past* event.

[33] Interestingly Spence refers to this anonymous doctor as 'this potential daylight mugger' and her cancer as 'this invader' both these are menacing terms (Spence, 1986b: 150-151).

Christian cult of relics which honoured martyrs and saints?

3.4 The abject body – *even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course (Auden, 1938)*

Hannah Wilke; *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art* **(1974),** *S.O.S. Starification Object Series, An Adult Game of Mastication* **(1974-1975).**

Hannah Wilke and Donald Goddard; *Intra-Venus series No. 3, August 17, 1992/ February 15, 1992/ August 9, 1992* **and** *Intra-Venus Series No. 10, June 22, 1992.*

Jo Spence; *The Property of Jo Spence* **(1982), from** *The Picture of Health?* **(1982-1986)**

Jo Spence; *15ᵗʰ October, 1984,* **from** *The Cancer Project.*

The depiction of the abject body in European art is not always a straightforward account of something that is abhorrent or conveys suffering or sorrow. Artists may also conflate within the depiction of abject embodiment: yearning, passion, ecstasy and transcendence. Julia Kristeva noted that although 'We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity' (Kristeva, 1982: 9). This ambiguity can make for difficult and conflicted viewing. Taking the conceptual vocabulary of Mary Douglas' leaky body and Kristeva's abject body we can look at Wilke's and Spence's representations of the medicalized body again. These artists continually depict their wounded bodies in poses that are rarely seen publicly: sitting on the toilet, taking a bath or undergoing intimate or invasive medical treatments (Figure 11). These images question traditional images of feminine beauty and also challenge cultural representations of the body. In society, the pursuit of a youthful appearance has become an obsession, with ageing seen 'as a proxy for poverty, neediness and proximity to death' (Gilleard and Higgs, 2000: 120). Susie Orbach surmises that the pursuit of eternal youth has led to the body increasingly being experienced as an 'object' or a 'worthy personal project' (2010: 2-4).

> *Success means regulating the body: controlling hungers, desires, ageing and emissions. Success means seeing the body as a lifelong work: success means anticipating faults – physical, medical and aesthetic – and correcting them.*

> (Orbach, 2010: 111).

The cult of the body beautiful means that images of sickness, bodily weakness and

decomposing flesh are inherently conflicted[34]. In *S.O.S. Starification Object Series, An Adult Game of Mastication* (1974-1975), Wilke implies that the high expectation and maintenance of body image produces a form of suffering martyrdom (Figure 12). Her work presages the rise in the quest for the ideal body per se[35]. For this work Wilke posed mostly topless as a seductive glamour model. Arranged carefully on parts of her face and body are pieces of spat out chewing gum, moulded into tiny folded shapes. These cryptic forms allude to scars, jewellery and genitalia. They are reminiscent of permanent body modification such as tattooing, tribal scarification or cosmetic surgery. Because her body adornment is clearly removable, Wilke's carefully applied mark-making along with her posturing is primarily equated with notions of beautification. Like the gum, the gorgeous model is eye candy to be consumed and spat out when finished with. The unease and psychological pain that beauty engenders on both an individual and sociocultural level are materialized by Wilke as tiny wounds/scars/blemishes that proliferate over her skin and finger nails.

Of course, Douglas' notion of the leaky body is not solely a recent phenomenon and Kristeva is not the first person to have ever thought about the abject body. One could reference representations of Christ and martyrs as early versions of abject bodies[36]. Wilke's and Spence's work create startling parallels with these earlier representations. Using Kristeva's terms, it is possible to track representations of abject 'jouissance' to 'brutish suffering' across Wilke's oeuvre (Kristeva, 1982: 2, 9-10). In her earlier works *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art*, (1974) (Figures 13 and 14) and *S.O.S. Starification Object Series, An Adult Game of Mastication* (Figure 12) Wilke experimented symbolically with how to materialize psychological and physical pain. However, in her *Intra-Venus Series,*

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[34] A research team led by John Speakman at Aberdeen University conducted an experiment into: *The relationship of female physical attractiveness to body fatness.* It was discovered that men and women from Europe, Africa and Asia rated the same ideal body preferences as that of thin, young females aged between 19-22 years old. A critical factor in these results is 'evolutionary fitness' because young thin females are considered to be reproductively fertile with a lower risk of contracting a fatal disease (Wang *et al.*, 2015).

[35] Whereas previously women were subjugated, objectified and commodified, men too are increasingly coming under societal pressure to conform in terms of their physical appearance as indicators of social status and lifestyle. This can be evidenced in the recent phenomenon of the metrosexual. The pursuit of an ideal feminine beauty has resulted in eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Masculine beauty as equated with that of a young strong male has led to muscular dysmorphia which is a compulsive obsession with body building (Mataix, 2012).

[36] Kristeva states that historically religion has performed the task of purifying the abject through catharsis as represented in art. With an increase in secularization, this role is now provided by modern art and literature. She does not however evidence her proposition through the analysis of art but concentrates instead on providing examples in literature (Kristeva, 1982: 17-18; Chare, 2011: 1-2).

Figure 11. Hannah Wilke (with Donald Goddard), *Intra-Venus No.3, August 17, 1992/ February 15, 1992/ August 9, 1992.* Performalist self-portraits [chromogenic supergloss prints with overlaminate] three panels: 71 ½ x 47 ½ inches each. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Figure 12. Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. Starification Object Series, An Adult Game of Mastication* (1974-1975). Twenty-eight [black-and-white photographs] 7 x 5 inches each, 35 ¾ x 42 ¾ inches framed. Collection Centre Pompidou, Musee National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

this became unnecessary because her own wounded body became a living testimony. In *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art*, performed at the Kitchen in New York, the artist used her body to create a series of posed tableaux starting with the Virgin Mary and ending with the crucified Christ. She used three props in order to generate this metamorphosis: a pair of high heeled shoes, a white table cloth and a plinth. The performance lasted approximately two minutes and resulted in a single photographic work containing 20 selected images (Figure 13). Wearing a makeshift loincloth, Wilke conflates Christ and St Sebastian. Her hands held aloft, she could be viewed as Christ on the cross or St Sebastian tethered to a stake, tree or column. However, these attitudes are not a re-enactment of their tortuous suffering; instead Wilke references images of Christ and St Sebastian that are calm, sensual and erotically charged. Her portrayal of a suffering St Sebastian (Figure 14) entering into a near death state of spiritual transcendence as represented historically by artists[37], in this instance is therefore unequivocally linked to that of exquisite erotic pleasure. Retrospectively, Wilke's playful enactments from her early career of iconic figures such as the Virgin Mary and St Sebastian as compared to their depictions in *Intra-Venus* serves to heighten her physical decline as a result of ageing and terminal illness. Her youthful portrayal of the acquiescent Virgin Mary in *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art*, (1974) in the top row (Figure 13) lacks the same authorial conviction exhibited by her posed as a kind and care worn Madonna[38] (Figure 15). This is also true of the enactment of a sensual Christian martyr (Figure 14) as opposed to her later startling testimonies bruised, exhausted and pierced by surgical devices (Figure 16).

3.5 A crisis of representation: trauma, testimony, witness and martyrdom

Historical representations of Christian martyrs in art offer regulated encounters with abjection. Suffering (transmuted through depictions of the beautiful body) is conflated with spiritual transcendence. Violent acts of torture and death are screened or censored to

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[37] Alessandro Vittoria (c.1600), Carlo Saraceni (c.1610-1615), Nicolas Regnier (1620) or François-Guillaume (18th century).

[38] This is equally true of her earlier depictions of Venus and caryatids, as compared to her startling representations of these characters when posited by her as middle aged and medically compromised (Figures 13, 11 and 19).
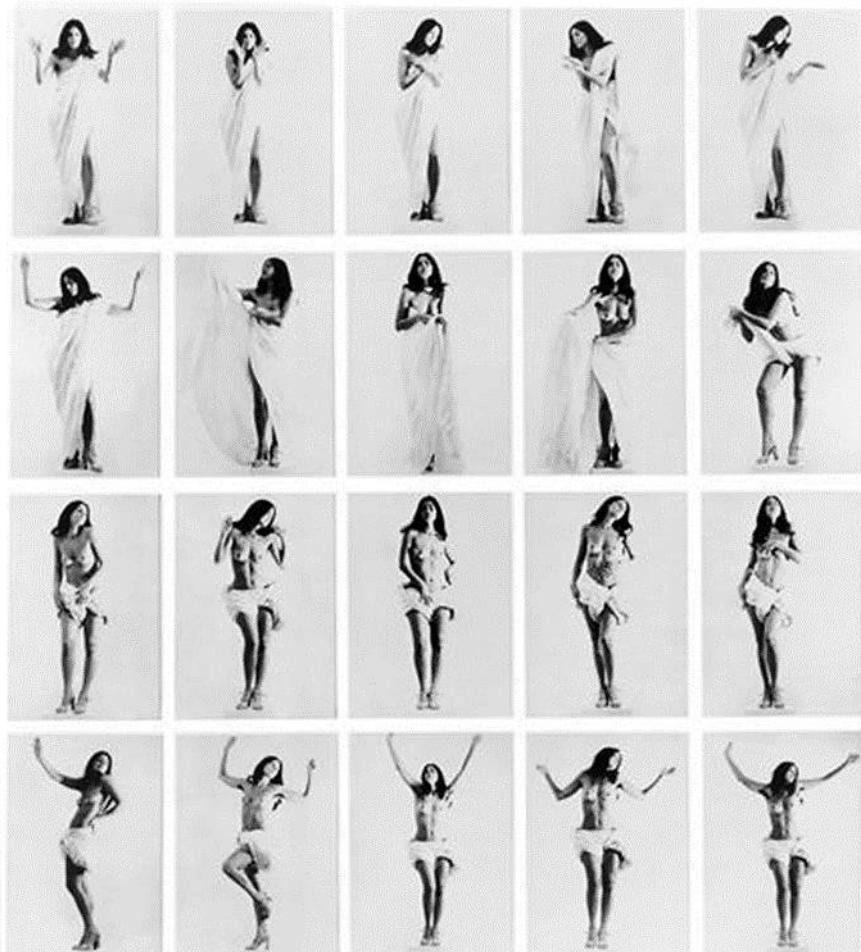
Figure 13. Hannah Wilke*, Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art* (1974). Twenty [black and white photographs], 6 ½ x 4 ½ inches each, 40 ¾ x 33 inches framed. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Figure 14. Hannah Wilke, *Hannah Wilke Super-t-Art* (1974). Detail, [black and white photograph], 6 ½ x 4 ½ inches. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

provide images for religious contemplation. Vulnerability is signaled not by loss of bodily control or other indicators of horrific fear and agony, but through the body in repose. Christian martyrs and saints are invariably portrayed as young nubile females or athletic, muscular males. Suffering is fetishized through the rendering of beauty as body surface (Figure 17). Abject liminality is conveyed through the knowledge that these haptically charged bodies are mutable and therefore easily wounded. The awareness that these flawless acquiescent bodies are easily cut, pierced, burnt or flayed provides affective potential. Like Wilke's decorative use of carefully placed gum on her body to indicate psychological scarring, the wounds of martyrs are portrayed as iconic emblems of faith. Representations of St Agatha, such as those by Piero della Francesca (c. 1460-1470), Cariani (Giovanni Busi) (1516-1517) and Francisco de Zurbarán (1630-1633) portray the saint offering her severed breasts on a platter or a dish. St Agatha is also the patron saint of bakers, probably because her sliced off breasts resemble baps or cakes. Likewise, St Lucy presents her gouged out eyes on a salver; the inclusion of the martyr's amputated body parts signifies their extreme suffering and forbearance. Served up as imitation food, the saints' bodily votive offerings provide symbolic nourishment for devotional contemplation. This in effect is a transubstantiationalist reversal of the Eucharist whereby bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Other versions of St Agatha, as in the paintings by Lorenzo Lippi (c. 1638-1644) (Figure18) and Francesco Furini (c. 1635-1645), portray her benevolently tendering a pair of shears or clippers. In this context these incongruous instruments of torture heighten the saint's innocent vulnerability.

Figure 15. Hannah Wilke (with Donald Goddard), *Intra-Venus Series No. 4, July 26, 1992/ February 19, 1992.* Performalist self-portraits [chromogenic supergloss prints with overlaminate] two panels: 71 ½ x 47 ½ inches each. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Figure 16. Hannah Wilke (with Donald Goddard), *Intra-Venus Series No. 10, June 22, 1992.* Performalist self-portrait [chromogenic supergloss print with overlaminate] 71 ½ x 47 ½ inches. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Figure 17. Pietro Perugino, *Saint Sebastian* (c. 1495). Oil on wood, 170 x 117 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

The depiction of the corporeal bodies of Christian martyrs as appearing anaesthetized to their abject misery, clearly symbolises their state of grace and beatification. In *Intra-Venus Series* (1992) (Figures 16 and 19), Wilke is not exhibiting signs of extreme pain probably because of analgesic relief. Both the abject body as religious martyr or as the medicalized body are about exacting more time - either through redemption and life everlasting or by medical intervention in the hope of extending life expectancy. There is a direct lineage between the portrayal of abject Christian martyrs and Wilke's and Spence's contemporary representations of their embodied trauma. Wilke was aware of this link. She displayed clumps of her own diaphanous hair which fell out as a result of chemotherapy treatments, blood-spotted bandages from a bone marrow harvest and two lead alloy contact relics as tangible proof of her martyrdom. Each item is signed, dated and catalogued to establish authenticity. These tiny precious objects, like the relics of saints, are iconic items worthy of veneration.

Figure 18. Lorenzo Lippi, *Saint Agatha* (c.1638-1644). Oil on canvas, 75.7 x 64.1 cm. Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas, Austin, USA.

Figure 19. Hannah Wilke (with Donald Goddard), *Intra-Venus No. 1, June 15, 1992/ January 30, 1992*. Performalist self-portraits [chromogenic supergloss prints with overlaminate] two panels: 71 ½ x 47 ½ inches each. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

The word martyr signifies 'witness' (from the Greek martur). Unlike the allegorical representations of Christian martyrs in religious art, Wilke's and Spence's suffering is evidenced photographically. By producing photographic self-portraits these two artists established some verisimilitude regarding their personal testimonials. In comparison, the abject body in religious art depicts violent incidents that have already occurred in the past whilst Wilke and Spence document what is happening to them in the here and now. Again, this makes their accounts seem utterly candid, compelling and truthful. Painful suffering as a result of medical practice although ameliorated by palliatives is masked as clinical efficacy. Wilke's body in the *Intra-Venus Series* is a visual testimony of her struggle to carry on living whilst dying. Whereas previously in her art she had devised and placed symbolic texts upon her body to contextualize and make pain visible, in this instance her actual body *is* a living index of suffering. As Arthur Frank points out, 'only the ill person herself can *be* the story…' (Frank, 1995: 141). Wilke's and Spence's embodied suffering can be 'read' through their bodily disposition and flesh. Their bodies are marked by cancer and the exacting punishment that medical treatment incurs. The skin is punctured, sutured, taped and cut; it evidences scabs, mottling and spreading bruises. Wilke becomes bald and bloated from being pumped full of drugs and fluids contrasting with Spence, who became emaciated at the very end of her life. Their blunt and visceral testimonies call those who view their abject states to bear witness. Frank surmised; 'Thus the witness makes a witness of others; a particular quality of the word witness is its movement of outward concentric circles. When someone receives the testimony of another, that person becomes a witness, and so on' (Frank, 1995: 142). Human beings understand that they will die, but mostly prefer to ignore this fact when it comes to the incomprehensibility of their own death. Wilke and Spence's embodiment of their perilous situation is a salient reminder of the irrefutability of one's own mortality.

Spence stated that when she exhibited *The Picture of Health?* (1982-1986), that she got 'no feedback from *anyone*.' She added 'This isn't just an art work. This is an actual body that someone inhabits' (Spence *et al*, 2005: 412). The idea in 'art' that the viewer looks at body 'shells' that are no longer inhabited even when like Spence at the exact moment she was being photographed she clearly was, creates a paradox. It is almost as if someone inhabits the trauma. For the individual who is experiencing the trauma 'it is the literal return of the event *against the will* of the one *who it inhabits'* (my emphasis) (Caruth, 1995: 5). In Christian belief there exists a dualism whereby the spirit and body

become separated at death, so that the flesh or body is seen as a transient vessel that contains or 'holds' an individual's unique and transcendent spirit. This too in part may account for this dichotomy whereby the representation of the tortured human body can be viewed impartially as an empty 'shell'. Like the effect of trauma itself, those who witness these artists' abject states may find themselves temporarily poleaxed or cognitively voided in the aftershock.

With hindsight, Spence comprehended that

> *If a trauma I'm representing is fresh and I haven't had a catharsis or any kind of insight or resolution from the trauma, I'm literally putting my trauma on the wall. It isn't an interpretation: it's the trauma itself or an extension of it.*

(Spence *et al*, 2005: 412).

Cathy Caruth points out that when someone experiences trauma, part of the event eludes 'integration into consciousness' (Caruth, 1995: 152). This is because the event is so horrific or unexpected that it disrupts the normal patterns by which memory is encoded, being totally beyond prior constructions of knowledge or meaning making schemata (Caruth, 1995: 152-153). Nevertheless the event can still be recalled in precise and excruciating detail: 'The flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both *the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility*' (Caruth, 1995: 153). By displaying unmediated documents about their illness, especially when one takes into account the stigma attached to cancer in the early 1980s, the viewing public was probably shocked, leading to the stunned silence that initially greeted Spence's body of work. It is in fact possible for both mediated and unmediated testimonies of trauma to cause reverberations of fear, horror, recoil and incomprehension in those who subsequently witness them. The fact that Wilke and Spence meticulously recorded and catalogued their illness enabled them to review and assimilate the trauma that they may not have 'fully owned' or 'that was never fully experienced as it occurred' (Caruth, 1995: 151).

Wilke's and Spence's embodiment of abject trauma is enmeshed within their works. Their suffering is viscerally present as raw body shock. It is also the symptomatic effects of trauma or what Caruth eloquently describes '*the structure of its experience* or reception' is evident both in singular works and across the span of their output (Caruth, 1995: 4). It reveals itself through iteration, repetition and the disruption of their

biographical narratives. It is signaled by gaps, losses, voidness and the literality of their subsequent deaths. As flesh and bone bodies, they vehemently haunt these works returning themselves to us like the after image of a traumatic event that instantaneously defies repression.

Representations of the abject martyrs and saints offer Christians signs of hope and comfort. Through the paradoxical combination of beautiful body surfaces and inflected wounding, they signal testimonies of faith, healing and redemption. However, the secular images of suffering produced by Wilke and Spence examine the fleeting nature of human existence and ask questions about one's purpose in life concerning the here and now. By revealing their abject embodiment they offer up their insights, observations and critical knowledge to others. In this way, Wilke's and Spence's portraits are secular equivalents of the Christian martyrs; despite their suffering, not only do they secure enlightenment and cathartic release for themselves but vicariously, for others too.

Although grief and trauma are two separate phenomena, they can be experienced together to create a complex synergy. In the next section I will be exploring individual works by Wilke and Spence and looking across the breadth of their output to see the ways in which they have materialized other aspects of their *uniquely personal grieving processes*.

3.6. Anticipatory grief and mourning: loss, trauma and reparation

Jo Spence and Terry Dennett; *Marked up for Amputation* **(1982).**

Jo Spence and Rosy Martin; *Untitled* **taken from** *The Picture of Health?* **(1982-1986).**

Jo Spence and Tim Sheard; *Narratives of Dis-ease,* **photographs labelled from left to right:** *Excise, Exiled, Expected, Expunged* **and** *Included* **(1990**).

Hannah Wilke and Donald Goddard; *Intra-Venus Series, Performalist self-portrait***s (1991-1992).**

Anticipatory grief is an acknowledgement that something invaluable has been lost or is about to be lost forever. People living with chronic/terminal illness find themselves having to negotiate ongoing and accumulative loss[39]. Assimilating these losses is arduous

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[39] Loss is not a singular event but constitutes a multiplicity of losses which are embedded in life itself (Humphrey and Zimpfer 2008: 3). Loss is compounded by loss. Both Wilke and Spence had encountered death and dying in their lives before contracting cancer. In 1961 Wilke's father died of a heart attack when

and complex because they are multidimensional, encompassing 'psychological, social and physiological factors'. Losses also register in the past, present and future sometimes unfurling instantaneously (Rando, 1986: 15 and 17). Anticipatory grief differs from post-mortem grief in that there is *hope* that a recovery may be delivered. Even if, like Spence, the patient is granted a reprieve, the processing of loss and trauma is durational. In Wilke's and Spence's case, loss is evidenced both overtly and covertly. The toll of their loss is conveyed overtly through their challenging of debilitating sociocultural stigmatization and literally by bodily collapse (loss of hair, weight, surgical interventions, wounding), autobiographical disruption, body posture and facial expression. Covert evidence is established through visual metaphors, symbols and dislocation.

When Spence contracted breast cancer in 1982, she initially had 'a crisis of representation', not knowing how to decipher the enormity of what was happening to her (Spence *et al*, 2005: 414). From 1982 until 1990, before she was diagnosed with leukaemia, she produced works which narrated her grief and trauma. The majority of her work is made up of self-portraits produced collaboratively with Terry Dennett, Rosy Martin, Maggie Murray and Tim Sheard. In *Marked up for Amputation* (1982), (Figure 20) Spence used a self-timer on her camera to take a photograph of herself in hospital. In this image she opens the left hand side of her dressing gown to reveal her naked balloon-shaped breast. At the top of her breast, a black 'x' has been applied by her doctor marking it as malignant. For Spence, the performative gesture of being marked with an 'x' by her physician was an event in which the true horror of her forthcoming loss was crystalized: the 'x' became a personalised encryptment of her trauma.

she was aged twenty one. Then in 1970, on her thirtieth birthday, her mother had a mastectomy, from which she recovered. In 1978 following a stroke her mother was diagnosed with cancer again. She died in 1982. Five years later Wilke became ill with lymphoma. Initially the disease progressed slowly, but in 1991 it become highly aggressive (Princenthal, 2010: 99 and 111; Wilke, 2018).

Before being diagnosed with breast cancer in 1982, Spence experienced and subsequently 'narrated' the many forms of personal loss in her life. The first occurred when she was a child evacuee during World War II. By the age of ten she had moved home eleven times and attended six schools. Throughout her life, she suffered intermittently from asthma, hay fever, eczema, depression and bronchitis. When she was twenty-eight she had an operation to remove an ovarian tumor weighing fourteen pounds. Her mother died of liver cancer six weeks after having a mastectomy and her father died three weeks later. She also coped with several failed love affairs and a divorce (Spence, 1986b: 48, 86-91, 152; Spence, 1986c *Spare Rib*: no 163).

Figure 20. Jo Spence (with Terry Dennett), *Marked up for Amputation* (1982), from *The Cancer Project*, Nottingham. Copyright/Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

After her operation she began to experiment with images involving an 'x' marked on or above the left breast (in ink or with surgical tape) on both herself and inanimate plastic dolls[40] (Spence *et al* 2005: 271, 275, 310). The 'x' is a symbol that is encoded with a variety of meanings including an error or mistake, a kiss, a grid or map reference, or, for an illiterate person, the 'x' is a substitute when witnessed by an observer for their signature on a document. In mathematical equations *x* is a symbol for *an unknown quantity* and the basic maths symbol x means *to multiply by*. Rita Charon noted that the body is a living text through which an individual's life is inscribed and can be read via 'scars, infarcts, stenoses, adhesions' and surgical procedures (Charon, 2006: 122). Spence's use of an 'x' as a stenographic iteration[41] materializes not only her somatic trauma but also psychic rupture. When the 'x' is 'read' in conjunction with the exposal of her breast mutilation, it intensifies the reverberations of her loss. Deployed in this way 'x' is a powerful symbol of loss or that which has been voided. As Caruth theorizes, when someone experiences trauma part of the event eludes 'integration into consciousness. Indeed, the literal registration of an event - the capacity to continually, in the flashback, reproduce it in exact detail - appears to be connected, in traumatic experience, precisely with the way it *escapes* full consciousness as it occurs' (Caruth 1995: 152-153). Spence's 'x' as a gesture that simultaneously crosses out her experience and contradictorily marks

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[40] In a series of photographs, she depicted dolls in various stages of destruction marked up with an 'x' for mock surgery, bald indicating chemotherapy treatments or with their breast neatly snipped off. The dolls' plastic perfection was wilfully destroyed, a metaphor perhaps for the pain and suffering that the pursuit of an idealized body inflicts upon those living with abjection. The dolls' mute and impassive expressions, despite being damaged, hint at the stoical stance that cancer victims are expected to assume (Tembeck, 2008: 96).

[41] Spence's iterative inscribing of an 'x' onto her body as a symbolic re-enactment of her wounding is reminiscent of Frank Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* whereby prisoners are killed in a machine designed for this purpose. The killing machine is a calibrated device consisting of a bed above which is constructed a glass panel through which are inserted a plethora of needles. The prisoner is stripped naked, gagged to prevent 'him screaming and biting his tongue to pieces' and strapped down on to the bed lying on his stomach (Kafka, 2009: 73). The glass panel is then lowered. Both bed and panel vibrate and the prisoner's crime is literally etched (as the line of a sentence) into his back by the needles that are calibrated to cut deeper and deeper into the flesh. The entire killing process takes twelve hours. After the sixth hour even 'the most stupid' prisoner comprehends his fate, as the officer in attendance relays

> The man simply begins to decipher the inscription. He purses his lips, as if he is listening. You've seen that it is not easy to figure out the inscription with your eyes, but our man deciphers it with his wounds.
>
> (Kafka, 2009: 80).

In the same way, torturous medical treatments are imprinted in to the patient's body and psyche in a bid to cure or temporarily prolong life.

the locus of her trauma conceptually mimics this phenomenon. Her repeated use of an 'x' between, 1982-1990 also shows the cyclical pattern equated with the grieving process itself.

From 1984 onwards she also re-enacted her trauma in phototherapy sessions. For example (Figure 21), working with Martin, she created a storyboard containing seven full frontal photographs of head and shoulder self-portraits. In this sequence she portrays her feelings of being infantilized as a hospital patient. In the last picture she depicts herself once again marked up with the ominous 'x' ready for surgery. By acting out her trauma over and over again, Spence was able to assimilate very painful emotions and gradually contextualize her grief. Geraldine Humphrey and David Zimpfer note that the assimilation of a major loss into one's life is a cyclical process that necessitates many returns to the initial stages of grieving, only to begin the process all over again. Bereavement includes 'ideas of reaction, adaption and process.' The cyclical aspect of this process allows an individual to react to the emotional pain and suffering which eventually resolves into a cognitive and behavioural understanding, leading finally to adaption and acceptance. The process 'involves the total experience' (Humphrey and Zimpfer, 2008: 3).

In 1990 Spence once again revisited her trauma in a phototherapy session with Tim Sheard, a psychotherapist; it resulted in a work called *Narratives of Dis-ease* (Figure 22) consisting of five staged self-portraits. Using props such as a hospital gown, mask and teddy bear, Spence posed against a dark background. *Narratives of Dis-ease* reads like extracts or fragments from a story with each photograph labelled from left to right: *Excise, Exiled, Expected, Expunged* and *Included.* The iteration of the prefix 'ex' in four of these five labels again conjures up the original 'x' that was penned by her doctor above her left breast before surgery. This photographic narrative encapsulates her mourning process from feelings of grief and vulnerability, raising searching questions about sociocultural notions of feminine beauty and sexuality, to combatting her bodily stigmatization through humour as well as acknowledging her ongoing struggle of living with trauma and loss. On completing this work, Spence observed that 'the results were very painful, particularly those prints which showed the ways in which my body is not only badly scarred and damaged, but also ageing, overweight and deteriorating' (Spence, 1995: 134).

**Figure 21.** Jo Spence (with Rosy Martin), *Untitled* taken from *The Picture of Health*, (1982-1986). Copyright/Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

Figure 22. Jo Spence (with Tim Sheard), *Narratives of Dis-ease*, photographs labelled from left to right: *Excise, Exiled, Expected, Expunged* and *Included* (1990). Colour photographs, 36 x 24 inches each. Copyright/Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

Although Spence articulates cognitive acceptance of the losses incurred from contracting breast cancer, she clearly feels sadness from having to live with the after effects[42]. Spence literally mapped out her psychological pain and suffering from surgery to eight years later, using an iconic 'x' as a marker for her loss. By revisiting and reworking aspects of her psychosomatic sequelae she achieved cathartic outcomes. Through alternatively confronting and embracing her stigma as well as distancing herself from it, she learnt to integrate her losses into her life[43] (Spence, 1995: 134-135).

Because inevitably future directedness and plans become uncertain, grief for the terminally ill patient concerns past losses and that which is being lost in the present (Humphrey, 1986: 64). This sense of acute narrative disruption can be observed in Wilke's work.

3.7 Narrative disruption and the shattered self

Wilke represents the narrative disruption caused by the effects of chronic illness and the ongoing production of the self in *Intra-Venus* 1991-1992. Her larger than life-size *performalist*[44] self-portrait photographs (produced with Donald Goddard) are presented

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[42] The shock of dealing with a life threatening illness such as cancer can mean that grief is temporarily put on hold or displaced. Sam Taylor-Wood (now known as Sam Taylor-Johnson. I use her original name here because this is how she is referenced in accessed literature sources) deployed the tactic of inversion by using 'surrogates' or 'stand-ins' to grieve for her. Unlike Wilke and Spence, she materialized her grief and mourning not by using her own body as an autobiographical self-referent, but by using male surrogates in a performative act of self-displacement. Her oblique method of grieving offers a contradistinction to that of Wilke and Spence. This project for Taylor-Wood became a personal obsession. She realized that the series could have been encapsulated within 10 photographs but insisted on reworking the idea again and again despite logistical difficulties (Summerscale, 2007, Hattenstone, 2009). *Crying Men* contains 28 images. She was also aware that the production of this series may have been a displacement strategy enabling her to process painful emotions concerning her illness and its aftermath (Summerscale, 2007, Hattenstone, 2009). For Taylor-Wood, the act of grieving could only be materialized and released by watching disassociated others literally mirror back to her the unspeakable pain that she had endured. Like Taylor-Wood, Wilke and Spence also adopted a self-mirroring technique in order to gain self-knowledge and catharsis as events unfolded.

[43] Spence stated: *In these photographs is the beginning of a 'subject language'. One which allows me to start the painful process of expressing my own feelings and perceptions, of challenging the 'ugliness' of being seen as Other. In so doing I cease to be a victim, becoming again an active participant in life. I am not suggesting that making these pictures has solved all my problems, nor do I want to create a new mythology, dwelling only in the active roll, I still oscillate between going subject/victim, but am no longer 'stuck' and have begun to live with my own totality* (Spence *et al*, 2005: 374).

[44] By naming her photographic self-portraits, *performalist* Wilke exploits the ambiguities that this invented word infers. Because it is a word that lacks definition being unanchored in both language and society, it embodies Wilke's unstable state and shifting self-identities.

as singular images, diptychs and triptychs. In them, Wilke reworks representations of women associated with the European canon of art from the iconic to the ordinary. Hospital stage props are used to perform a game of charades centred on the medicalized body. She playfully and acerbically asks the question "Who am I?" For example, with her eyes closed and a blue hospital blanket draped over her head, Wilke pastiches the acquiescent Virgin Mary (Figure 15). In another representation, she sits facing the viewer on the edge of a hospital bed wearing a white shower cap and a black cardigan which alludes to the tradition of seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish portrait painting (Figure 19). In role again, this time as a full frontal nude, she holds a vase of flowers above her head mimicking the pose of a caryatid. However, the illusion is disrupted by the inclusion of two large bandages taped on either side of her pelvic girdle evidencing a recent bone marrow harvest (Figure 19). Nude and totally bald, wearing only a pair of slippers, she adopts a pose reminiscent of the Venus Anadyomene (Figure 11). In other portraits Wilke performs as herself - that is, as a hospitalized cancer patient. She confronts the camera both knowingly and unknowingly. Intimate details of her daily routines are evidenced as she becomes debilitated, wounded and ravaged by disease and invasive medical procedures. She is captured bald, naked and listless, sitting on a portable commode, asleep or legs flopped apart in a bath (Figure 11). Through these performed representations, Wilke enables aspects of herself to unfold – feminist, artist, muse, goddess, icon, and patient. This discussion of identity spans across historical, mythological, sociological and cultural domains. It is also self-referential as many of these character types – Madonna, Venus, a caryatid, femme fatal and cover girl – are recurring themes which she explored across her artistic career. By setting up a series of self-encounters, Wilke was able to objectify herself and gain understanding of the biographical disruption that inevitably occurs with the onset of chronic illness and the grieving process. The images produced are unsettling. They are not displayed in chronological order and aspects such as her body hair, which oscillates from luxuriant growth to baldness, produce a melancholic effect. Across this photographic series, her face registers hope, humour, stoicism, vulnerability, pain, fatigue and resignation. The psychological conflicts which arise from negotiating accumulative loss combined with the constant threat of death evoke in the dying person 'an anxiety-provoking crisis' (Humphrey, 1986: 63-64). In one self-portrait Wilke performs a silent scream (Figure 23).
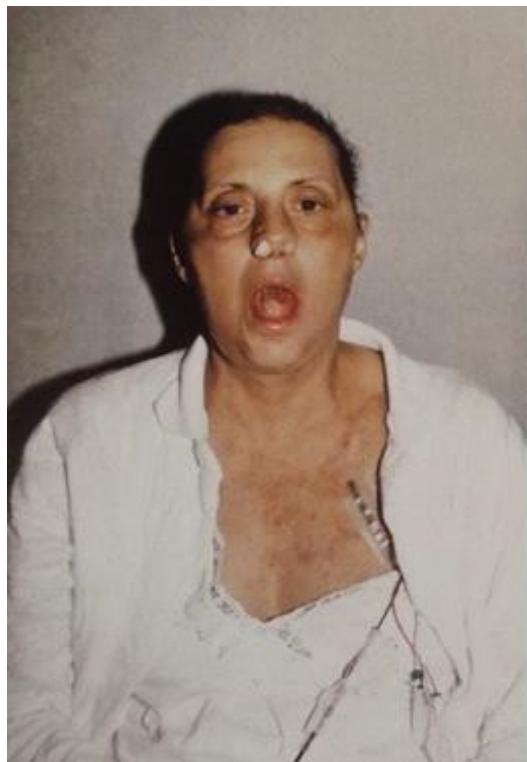
Figure 23. Hannah Wilke (with Donald Goddard), *Intra-Venus No.5, June 10, 1992/ May 5, 1992*. Performalist Self-portraits [chromogenic supergloss prints with overlaminate] two panels: 71 ½ x 47 ½ inches each. Copyright Estate of Hannah Wilke. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Intra-Venus No.5, (Figure 23) makes evident the psychological and physical trauma of living with cancer. This work comprises two head and shoulder portraits. In both photographs Wilke faces the camera with her mouth open, revealing her tongue. The predominantly toxic yellow and Sulphur blue colour scheme and physical angst in the right hand portrait creates a visual discord and noise, inciting the viewer to imagine a scream. This self-portrait pays homage to Edvard Munch's (1863-1944) primordial shriek in his series entitled *The Scream* (1893-1910). Wilke's angst is also reminiscent of the rictus expressions portrayed by the eighteenth century sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1736-1783) in his "character heads" (1770-1783). Messerschmidt's sixty-nine busts produced in the later part of his life catalogued extreme psychological states and directly influenced Wilke[45] (Princenthal, 2010: 112). In Wilke's left hand self-portrait she looks debilitated. In this representation she wears a white night dress and cardigan and is hooked up via a port in her chest to IV lines. Her nostrils are bunged up with surgical wadding. Her partially open mouth reveals that she has oral mucositis[46]. The evident physical transformation of Wilke across the span of one month is shocking and speaks of significant loss. She seems to be articulating that her pain is unspeakable. Elaine Scarry theorized that:

> *Physical pain does not simply resist language, but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.*

> (Scarry, 1985: 4).

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[45] Both Munch's and Messerschmidt's work portray autobiographical angst. Munch produced four paintings of *The Scream*. His expressionistic depiction of a scream was originally registered by him whilst out on a walk. He heard it as if eternally tearing through nature. It mirrored his own state of mind. He was in debt, recovering from a failed love affair and fearful of developing mental illness like his sister Laura who at the time was interned in an asylum with schizophrenia. In each study, Munch portrays a swirling landscape in acrid colours which threatens to subsume a dead-eyed howling figure. The horror of this wavering apparition screeching in perpetuity intimates the vacuity of existential nihilism (Puchko, 2015; 'The Scream, 1893 by Edvard Munch', 2011).

     Critics have speculated that Messerschmidt's "character heads" were produced as a direct result of the artist suffering from an undiagnosed mental illness. The busts which portray intense emotional states or expressions were allocated titles after his death which seem 'descriptively inaccurate'. "The yawner" for instance is not yawning but screaming. Messerschmidt may have produced these busts as apotropaic objects (Boström, 2012; Cotter, 2010; The J. Paul Getty Museum, n.d.).

     By referencing Munch's and Messerschmidt's impressions of psychological angst produced *in extremis*, Wilke serves to amplify (for those who know these works) the perturbation of her performalist self-portraits.

[46] Oral mucositis is a condition caused by either chemotherapy, radiotherapy or a bone marrow transplant. As a consequence of one of these medical treatments the mucosal lining of Wilke's tongue has peeled off and appears ulcerated. This medical condition can be severely painful and the patient may have trouble ingesting food or liquids and it can be very difficult to talk.

The performed scream in the right hand portrait articulates pain and frustration. In the left hand portrait, Wilke performs a listless self that is slowly suffocating and can barely open her mouth to speak. Frank postulated that the chaos narrative is difficult to hear and assimilate, because it reminds us of our own vulnerability. 'Ultimately, chaos is told in the silence that speech cannot penetrate or illuminate […] Chaos is what can never be told; it is the hole in the telling' (Frank, 1995: 101-102). Between her performed scream in the right hand portrait and her listless 'o' shaped mouth in the left hand portrait, Wilke seems to be referencing a mute and inexpressible core of suffering. The two portraits side-by-side poignantly represent exhaustion and accumulative loss as experienced by those living with terminal illness.

Loss and trauma are also indicated in the diptychs and triptychs between the cut/pause/gap between one image and the next. In a heartbeat, the witness recognizes when skipping from one disturbing image to the next, the perilousness of Wilke's situation. It makes for uncomfortable viewing. Her work expresses bodily collapse, irrefutable loss and a shattering of personal identity. Miriam Greenspan, a psychotherapist wrote that

> *It is said when someone we love dies, a part of us dies too. In my experience*
> *it is not a part but the whole – the self we've known is all at once shattered.*

(Greenspan, 2003: 90).

This statement is equally viable in terms of an individual facing death. As the person's identity is crushed, the many selves, as Wilke has evidenced, may be forced to renegotiate an expanded sense of self within the confines of increasing physical diminishment[47].

To briefly summarize, aspects of *the actualization of grief and trauma processes* is evident in Wilke's and Spence's work especially when examined across a wide breadth and time span. By taking an overview, palpable patterns materialize which embody the processual symptoms of grief and trauma. Elements such as recursion, woundedness, hiatuses, displacement and chaos are manifestly present. Whether this is expressed through personalised encryption, self-displacement or chronological disruption it is enmeshed within these works and has the potential to be 'played-out' upon viewing. All these artists challenge cultural norms, even whilst assimilating painful and ongoing loss.

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[47]Spence wrote: 'As I become more aware of how I have been constructed ideologically, as the *method* becomes clearer, there is no peeling away of layers to reveal a 'real' self, just a constant reworking process. I realize that I am the process.' (Spence, 1986b: 97).

And in so doing they opened up a dialogical space not only for themselves, but also for a global community.

In the next section I move on to analyse Wilke's and Spence's final works produced pre-mortem and post-mortem through the lens of *ars moriendi*.

Ars moriendi is a Christian theological text formulated in the early fifteenth century produced for the dying and those in attendance to aid them in achieving salvation. As a seminal guide to end-of-life issues, *Ars moriendi* is a wellspring of information which helped to formulate current thinking, especially with regards to what constitutes a 'good' death. The central tenet in *Ars moriendi* concerns spiritual preparation and the organization of one's personal affairs such as making a will, sorting out funeral arrangements and saying fond farewells to family and friends. The fulfillment of these obligations was also for the purposes of securing a 'good' memory after death. Modern death and dying has moved from a domestic setting into a medical one. Today, questions are still being asked about who is a 'good' death for? Is it for the dying person, or for those who take care of them or for those who are left behind? I am interested in exploring the ways in which Wilke and Spence conceptualize medicalized death and dying as experienced with in a secularized society and how the concept of *ars moriendi* has been reworked for a contemporary audience.

3.8 *Ars moriendi*: a modern iconography of medicalized death and dying

Hannah Wilke and Donald Goddard; *Intra-Venus Tapes* (1990-1993).

Jo Spence; *Untitled* (1992). Posthumously inscribed 'Jo Spence on a "good day" shortly before her death, photographing visitors to her room at the Marie Curie Hospice, Hampstead'.

Jo Spence and Terry Dennett; *Metamorphosis* (1991-1992).

The standard *Ars moriendi* illustrated text contains approximately eleven woodcut block illustrations. These are organized into five pairs representing the five temptations – lack of faith, despair, impatience, vainglory and avarice. In each pairing, the first illustration shows the devil presenting a temptation and the second picture depicts the solution for overcoming it. The dying man is depicted with teeming action taking place around his deathbed as the forces of good and evil fight for his mortal soul. Evil is represented by the devil and demonic creatures and good by angels, saints, Christ and the Virgin Mary

(Figure 24). After an epic battle, the man dies. The final woodcut depicts the man who having achieved redemption[48], ascends into heaven whilst the devil and his minions flee back to hell in defeat.

This representational device acknowledges the psychological turmoil that dying inflicts not only upon the one dying, but also for those in attendance (Figure 25). In its storyboard representation of events, *Ars moriendi* imagery is a precursor to Wilke's filmic fragmentation of her lived experience.

The *Intra-Venus Tapes* (1990-1993), depicts over 30 hours of colour video footage, shot primarily by Donald Goddard, but also the artist herself, close family and friends (Figures 26, 27 and 28), (Wilke and Goddard, 2007). It documents the final two and half years of her life. In order to complete this work according to Wilke's instructions, Goddard had to secure funding and elicit the help of two film makers, John Carlson and Debra Pearlman. The work was finally completed in 2007. The installation comprises sixteen television screens arranged in a four by four grid on the wall. The film is presented chronologically starting in the top left hand screen and reads from left to right, finishing in the bottom right hand monitor. Each television monitor shows approximately two hours of footage and the films run simultaneously. None of the imagery was edited, but the sound had to be edited in order to reduce dissonance. The result is a collage of moving imagery that charts Wilke's day-to-day living whilst dying. She is portrayed creating artworks, mounting an exhibition, swimming nude in an azure pool with her beautiful long hair tied up in a loose knot, conversing with friends or petting her parakeets. Images flash up of friends, an orchestral recital, close ups of cacti; the myriad of rich details that one associates with routine existence. But running simultaneously and interlacing this imagery are the grisly reminders that she is terminally ill.

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[48] The departing soul (as represented in the medieval tradition by a small, naked child being exhaled through the mouth) is caught by (an) angel(s), thus indicating glorious spiritual salvation (Ariès, 1981/2008: 248).
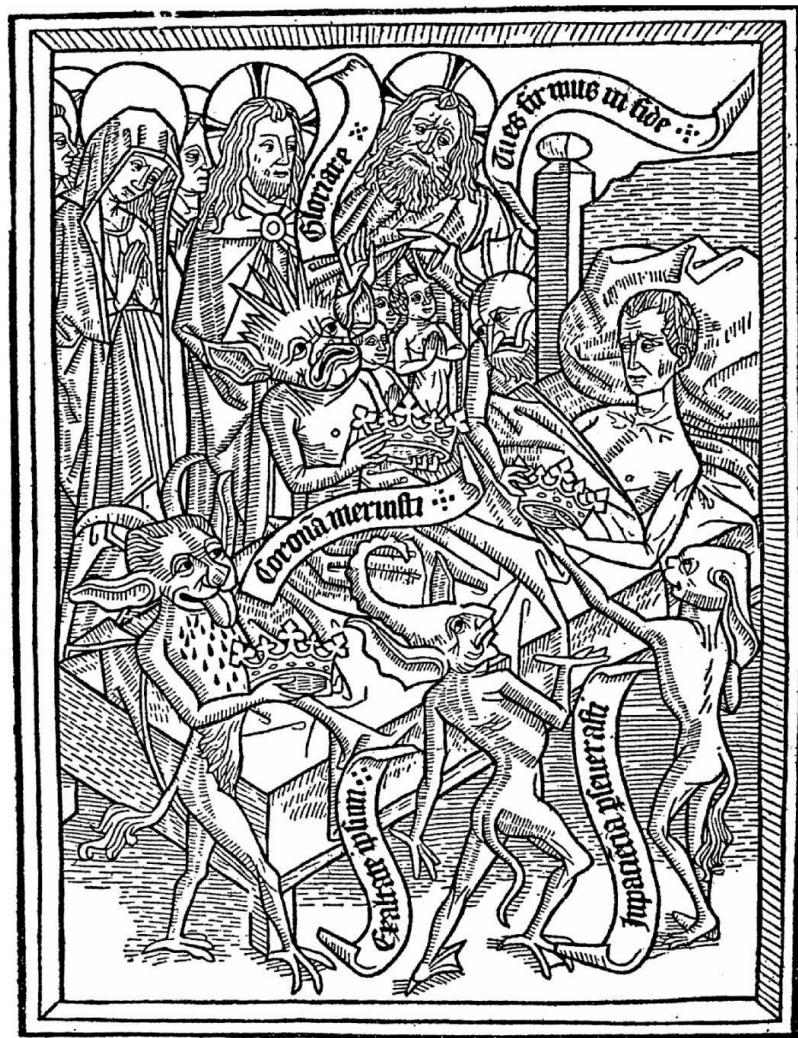
**Figure 24.** Artist unknown, *Ars Moriendi* (c. 1460). Woodblock, (one of a pair). The Netherlands.
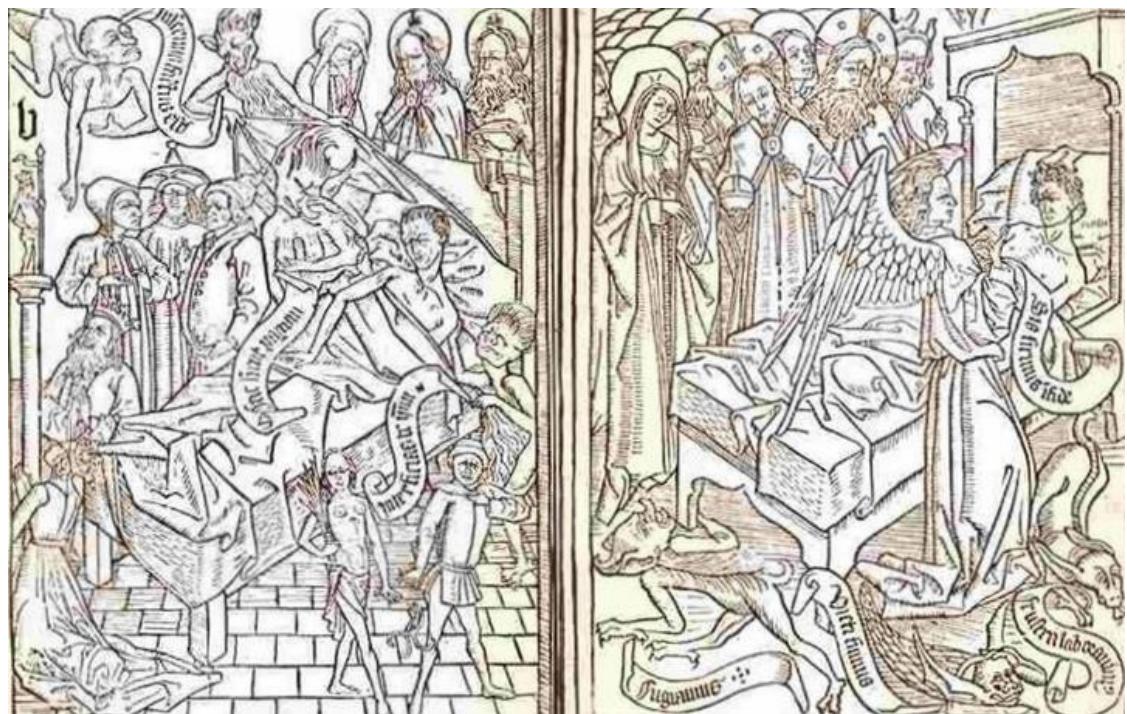
Figure 25. Artist unknown, *Ars Moriendi* (15th Century). Woodcut (pair).

Figure 26. Hannah Wilke and Donald Goddard, *Intra-Venus Tapes* (Photograph of video installation), filmed (1990-1993), realized in 2007.

Figure 27. Hannah Wilke and Donald Goddard*, Intra-Venus Tapes* (Photograph of video installation), filmed (1990-1993), realized in 2007.

Figure 28. Hannah Wilke and Donald Goddard*, Intra-Venus Tapes* (Photograph of video installation), filmed (1990-1993), realized in 2007.

It quickly becomes apparent that managing this type of illness is tedious and requires enormous reserves of patience, perseverance and stamina. The spectator witnesses her continual visits to hospital, being given injections, using cotton wool wadding to bung up her nostril to stem nosebleeds, sitting on a chair to shower, endless phone conversations, crying, vomiting, her body rocking in pain, being confined to bed, struggling to breathe and struggling to eat. Her body weight vacillates and she is preoccupied with her hair… is it falling out, yes it's falling out in clumps, no hair, some hair, during one hospital treatment she says "…Oh God, Oh God, Oh God…what a bitch…this is some process let me tell you!". This work is extremely challenging to watch because of its painful and upsetting content. And yet the overriding impression of Wilke is utterly beguiling. She is dignified and possesses an indomitable spirit: she laughs, jokes, smiles, sings, snores in bed, poses and primps. The cacophonous soundtrack ebbs and flows between the monitors relaying snippets of conversation, sea waves, screeching parakeets, a plane, phones ringing, music, laughter and weeping. The overall effect is one of teeming life combined with sadness as she edges ever closer towards death. Her death is indicated by the flat screen monitors, randomly clicking off one after another and going blank, until the only film rolling is in the bottom, far right hand corner. The film ends with her shown naked and supine in a hospital bed intermittently groaning in pain and close to death. The final cut pans out through her hospital window and down below to a busy highway streaming with traffic. Life in all its mundanity goes on whilst she dies.

Ars moriendi literature was produced as a spiritual guide to aid the individual concerning the status of their soul in the afterlife. It provided actions, instructions and prayers especially in the negotiation of a final psychological battle at the point of death. Historically religion provided cosmic ordering which gave meaning to human lives. The *Ars moriendi* text delivered a sense of order and comfort especially for those in attendance of the dying. The unavailability of antibiotics[49]and palliative care from the medieval period until the nineteenth century was compounded by the unacknowledged link between health and hygiene; death and dying could be a very unpleasant, painful and messy

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[49] 'A number of discoveries in the 19th century were important events for the understanding of communicable diseases. For example, the link between contaminated water and cholera was discovered by John Snow in 1854; the importance of hygienic handwashing before attending delivery of a baby was noted by Dr. Semmelweis in 1845; and the discovery that microorganisms cause disease was made by Louis Pasteur around this time.' Penicillin was the first antibiotic to be discovered by Alexander Fleming in 1928 (OpenLearn Create, The Open University, 2017).

process. Wilke's installation points to modernity and the nascent ascendency of science, but equally in her confessional approach she bears testimony to the indignities of bodily collapse and suffering that medicalized death and dying may entail. Scientific advancement enables the medicalized extension of her life as well as her mode of artistic production. Nevertheless the temporal postponement of her death comes at an enormous personal cost. Whereas *Ars moriendi* portrays a cast of characters swirling centripetally around the dying man's sick bed locked in a transcendental battle for his soul, Wilke's work pits her somatic and psychological struggle with the effects of medicalized dying in the material plane as sited in the here and now. What lies 'beyond' is held in abeyance. Her astonishing account depicts the durational aspect that medicalized death and dying can entail as measured in years. No longer is death seen as something that happens at the end of one's life. Peter Eleey observed that Wilke's posthumous work 'anticipates the confessional mode of more recent popular cultural and social media, but without the scripted structures and familiar narrative forms that increasingly codify these presentations of so called real life' (Eleey, 2010). Wilke's documentation of 'living whilst dying' is raw and unmediated. This is in stark contrast to Spence, who stages her self-portraits whilst lying in a hospice bed shortly before her death *Untitled* (1992) (Figure 29) and posthumously *Metamorphosis* (1991-1992) (Figure 30) working with Terry Dennett.

On Christmas Eve in 1990 Spence was diagnosed with breast cancer and leukaemia. Until her last few days she worked on 'The Final Project: A Photofantasy and Phototherapeutic Exploration of Life and Death' with David Roberts (whom she married a few weeks before her death) and Terry Dennett, but her illness meant that she was too debilitated both physically and mentally to complete it[50]: 'one aspect of leukaemia that Jo could not deal with through phototherapy was her rapidly changing appearance. She always hated "victim photography," and yet here she was looking like a victim'[51] (Takemoto, 2009). She observed that

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[50] This unfinished project was exhibited posthumously in 2016, London. It was curated by David Campany who was briefly taught by Jo Spence in the late 1980s at the Polytechnic of Central London (Richard Saltoun Gallery, 2016).

[51] As a result of her physical debilitation, Spence reworked photographs from her personal archives using simple analogue methods such as "slide sandwiching" to create montages. Dennett observed that this photofantasy effect 'express[ed] the sense of unreality she felt about the possibility of dying and non-being' (Takemoto, 2009). She also photographed still life set-ups containing references to death culture such as Mexican Day of the Dead figurines, toy skeletons, skulls, religious paraphernalia and family photographs.

When you're as badly damaged as I am, you just want to have nice things around you. I don't really want to have to think about the politics of leukaemia […].

(Spence *et al*, 2005: 416).

Consequently Spence all but abandoned her documentary technique of self-mirroring. An exception to this is *Untitled* (1992). In this portrait Spence lies with her head and shoulders supported by five crisp pillows. Next to her bed is a utilitarian cabinet, upon which rests a plastic feeding beaker. She wears a short-sleeved nightdress. A patchwork quilt lying across her body provides a homely touch. Her fleshy Rubenesque figure that is characteristic of her earlier self-portraits is now emaciated. She has a sore on her lower lip and her eyes have sunken into their sockets. She is gravely ill. Nevertheless, despite her utter exhaustion and debilitation, she gazes at the viewer and offers the merest hint of a smile.

Figure 29. Jo Spence (with Terry Dennett), *Untitled* (1992). Posthumously inscribed 'Jo Spence on a "good day" shortly before her death, photographing visitors to her room at the Marie Curie Hospice, Hampstead'. Copyright/Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.
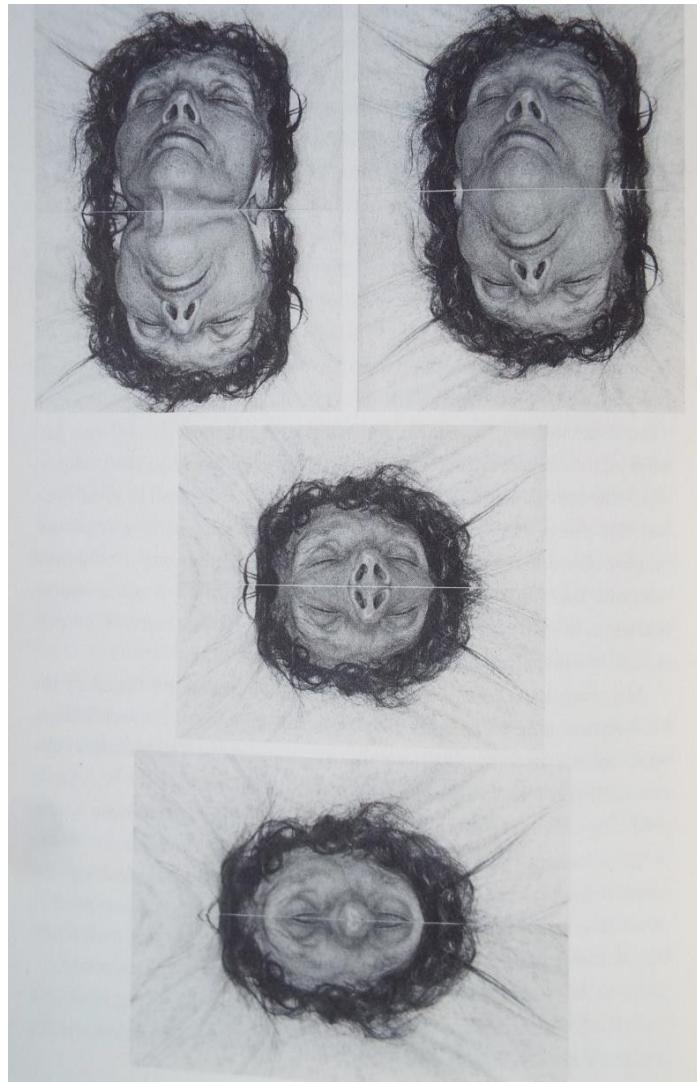
Figure 30. Jo Spence (with Terry Dennett), *Metamorphosis* (1991-1992), from *The Final Project* (unfinished). Copyright/Courtesy of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive.

Spence's self-portrait harks back to intimate family memorial photographs produced in Europe and America during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. During this period, photographs were taken of a loved one either in the process of dying and/or as recently deceased for the family album (Figures 31 and 32). Post-mortem portraits were commissioned by grieving families and kept as cherished mementos. The recently departed would be dressed in their clothes and photographed either reclining in bed, sitting on a chair or lying in state. These pictures were seen to help those who were grieving and assist them in keeping the memory of the deceased alive. As photographic documents they were considered to be incredibly precious objects. At a time when infant mortality rates were high, sometimes a post-mortem portrait was the only image of the sitter in existence (Linkman, 2011: 18-19). Throughout this era, the presence of family and friends gathered around the dying was viewed as an integral component for the attainment of a 'good' death. 'In correspondence, relatives routinely described their own absence as a 'deprivation', whereas attendance to the dying was professed as a 'privilege'' (Linkman, 2011: 15). With the invention of the carte de visite[52] in the mid nineteenth century and the production of multiple photographic prints, families could mail post-mortem portraits to relatives and friends. 'For those denied the 'privilege' of attendance at the deathbed, a post-mortem portrait may have offered a form of proxy admission to the theatre of death and so provided some measure of consolation. It may also have served as an important acknowledgement of the recipient's right to have been in attendance' (Linkman, 2011: 16). Post-mortem portraits of the deceased resting in peace presented the grieving survivor with a tangible source of solace. This was especially important after a painful or violent death. The bereaved could look at a post-mortem photograph of the deceased and acknowledge that their peaceful demeanor evidenced a merciful release from prior suffering. This offered comfort because it naturally suggested that the deceased had achieved a state of eternal serenity and redemption.

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[52] A carte de visite is an albumen print mounted onto card.

The standard 2 ½" x 4" format was patented by a Parisian photographer, Andre Adolphe Disderi, in 1854. Through the use of a sliding plate holder and a camera with four lenses, eight negatives could be taken by Disderi's method on a single 8" x 10" glass plate. That allowed eight prints to be made every time the negative was printed.

(The American Museum of Photography, 1998/2004).

Figure 31. R. Dechavannes, *Post-mortem Photograph of Young Girl in Paris, France* (c.1900).

Figure 32. Reichard & Lindner, *Post-mortem Portrait of Emperor Friedrich III* (16 June 1888), Neues Palais, Potsdam.

3.9 The conceptualization of medicalized dying as a secular equivalent of a 'good' death.

Untitled (1992) or as posthumously inscribed 'Jo Spence on a "good day" shortly before her death, photographing visitors to her room at the Marie Curie Hospice, Hampstead', resonates with the historical idea of a 'good' death (Figure 29). This portrait implies that Spence is saying goodbye to family and friends. Since her gaze is focused at the camera lens, the viewer is included in this farewell gesture. The spectator's position is an intimate and privileged one. This portrait is a legacy of representations of a 'good' death as originally formulated in the *ars moriendi* tradition. Its inheritance is the idealized or romantic depiction of a 'good' death as extolled during the nineteenth century in post-mortem photographic portraits, paintings and literature[53]. Whereas a 'good' Christian death included material objects of faith such as a crucifix, rosary beads, a burning candle or other religious icons, Spence's self-portrait is a secular equivalent. Rather than clasping a crucifix and/or rosary beads to her chest as religious testimony, Spence compresses a camera squeeze-bulb, symbolic of technological innovation, in her right hand. She is represented as being cognizant, in control and herself: a proactive photographer.

In *Beyond The Family Album* (1979), Spence reconstructed her autobiographical timeline by collaging together family photographs, magazine advertisements and texts. She skillfully juxtaposed pictures taken of herself from babyhood to adulthood with candid descriptions of her life at the time when the photograph was snapped. This threw into stark relief the mythology of the family institution. As a genre, the traditional family album omits images of divorce, trauma, illness, abuse and conflict. Family life is represented as a series of happy events. Spence stated in reference to her earlier career as a portrait photographer 'I gave people a view of themselves that they wanted to see' (Spence *et al*, 2005; 172). And indeed this is what Spence has done with her own final image. Unlike Wilke, she deliberately negated the specificity of her dying trajectory. All unpleasant realities of her death and dying are omitted in favour of producing an idealized picture of herself. This creates a paradox because although she reveals a very private moment of herself facing imminent death, the image is staged to such an extent that it draws a veil over the event and refutes death. Her final self-portrait leads historically from

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[53] Representations that continued to extol the Christian notion of the 'good death' can be seen in the staged photograph *Fading Away* (1858) by Henry Peach Robinson, the death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) by Charles Dickens and that of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

the pre-mortem and post-mortem photographs as sited within the family album. As with these precursors the aim is to provide a 'good' memory for posterity and to help provide comfort for the bereaved.

Spence's last collaborative venture was *Metamorphosis* (1991-1992) produced with Terry Dennett to be completed after her death. According to Spence's instructions, Dennett was to take a photograph which 'should not be too gruesome a death or near death portrait' (Avrahami, 2007: 119). The resulting picture of Spence was then manipulated by Dennett using an image reversal technique (Figure 30). He produced a sequence of four pictures. Each image has been produced by mirroring or flipping the original portrait across its horizontal axis. As the series progresses, Spence's face becomes squashed together so that it converges into a fleshy mass, fringed by hair. The final image is reminiscent of genitalia, a womb-like structure or a ripened pod. It draws parallels to the idea of organic lifecycles such as birth, reproduction and death or the religious concept of reincarnation. Unlike Wilke, Spence chose not to portray the obscenities of medicalized death and dying[54]. Instead, *Metamorphosis* evokes the cyclic kaleidoscopic collapsing and re-emergence of Spence as being asleep/dead or merging into an amorphous mass. The use of reflected images and double referents (sleep/dead, corpse/death) means that the understanding of this work is constricted almost to the point of being hermetically sealed. Because that which is beyond death cannot be represented, epistemological meaning is instantaneously reflected back to the spectator in an endless feedback loop. In effect, this work is a cognitive version of a hall of mirrors. As an allegory, *Metamorphosis* points to the idea of a changing state or form but in its effect it also alludes to the opposite that of stasis and suffocation.

3.9 Resurrective practice

What lies at the crux of these two artists' phenomenal body of works concerning their premature death and dying is that they herald a new phenomenon that is currently emerging: that of post-death resurrective practice. When *Intra-Venus Tapes* was originally

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[54] Einat Avrahami postulates: 'Spence's refusal to deal directly with the body is uncannily similar to her own audience's resistance to her embodied, sick self in the breast-cancer photographs' (Avrahami, 2007: 124). I am inclined to agree with this observation. During this era cancer was considered to be a death sentence and because of this there was a conspiracy of fearful silence which isolated the patient. Spence having experienced this oppressive silencing personally, probably in her increasingly debilitated state decided to avoid any unnecessary further forms of upset and conflict.

exhibited, it was heralded in one newspaper under the banner *How to live after you're gone* (Bramen, 2007). Filmic documentary, according to Peggy Phelan, is able to give life to the dead; it enables the narrative of their lives to be re-run in perpetuum, apparently contradicting both time and death. In this sense, the devastating finality of death is no longer an inescapable impasse for the mourner (Phelan, 1997: 156). In an interview, Goddard confessed that in realizing this installation: 'Toward the end of this process, it was difficult for me to keep working on the project. It has been difficult for me, seeing Hannah so alive' (Takemoto, 2008: 135). The dynamic autobiographical performativity of Wilke's and Spence's oeuvre means that when their work is posthumously exhibited, they exponentially 'live' and 'perform' again. Spence's self-documentation challenges being infantilized as a hospital patient, sociocultural stereotyping and stigmatization of the body. The affective potential of her works means that post death she is able to 'rise-up' and sound out a clarion call to others insisting upon some form of sociopolitical change. Whereas the depiction of the mortally wounded Christ invited the faithful to accept suffering, Wilke marks the collapse of her wounded body as a testimony to the loss of the self. As a dying mortal, she becomes the Christ figure: a focus for contemplation. As Wilke demonstrates, the conventional rites and imagery associated with abject suffering have been liberated from esotericism. She reconfigures religious aesthetic iconography in order to provide tangible evidence of her own tenuous existence. Presenting her work as diptychs and triptychs, a formal method of presentation used in church altarpieces, she performs as the Virgin Mary and martyrs. She collects relics as evidence of personal injury, in the knowledge that these objects will outlast her increasingly fragile body. And like Christ, but in materialized form, she is resurrected from the dead as an act of transcendence.

3.11 Conclusion

The four concepts (Illness narratives, The abject body, Anticipatory grief and *Ars moriendi*) provide a conceptual map. The concepts can be imagined schematically as looking like four concentric circles produced by ripples in water. Each ripple represents a separate concept which oscillates concentrically within the same medium. In this instance, the medium is a conceptual one that of 'living with loss'. By taking a bird's eye view of Wilke's and Spence's work across the span of their production, the enormity of their ongoing and associative losses is rendered visible. The application of each concept allows

for a different focus to be applied which compositely arc across representations of their lived experiences from diagnosis to death. By deploying this methodology new readings of their works have emerged (Figure 33).

Illness narratives provided an appreciation of the sociocultural mythologizing of cancer, which prevailed at that time of their making. Both artists brought to the fore sociocultural personifications of cancer. They did this by skillfully separating 'the body' and 'cancer' into two distinct objects of study so as to produce an uncanny effect; exposing that which is normally concealed. They brought to the fore the stigmatizing links made between victim and cancer as being interchangeable with death, decay and obscenity. This method enabled them to contest stereotypical thinking and made the viewer aware of the enormous amount of energy, artifice and self-vigilance required to restore and maintain a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963/1990).

Studying these artists' works through the lens of the abject body allowed the focus to shift. Comparisons were made between historic depictions of abject embodiment in a religious context with modern representations of the medicalized body. In this section I explored the dichotomy between Wilke and Spence making artworks as suffering *living* bodies with antecedent portraits of *imagined* tortured Christian martyrs. Both types of representation create cognitive dissonance. Historical images of Christian martyrs depict acquiescent bodies as having been cut, pierced, gouged or disembowelled. These haptically charged bodies act as agents to express spiritual ecstasy and transcendence. For Christians they offer opportunities for hope, healing and redemption.
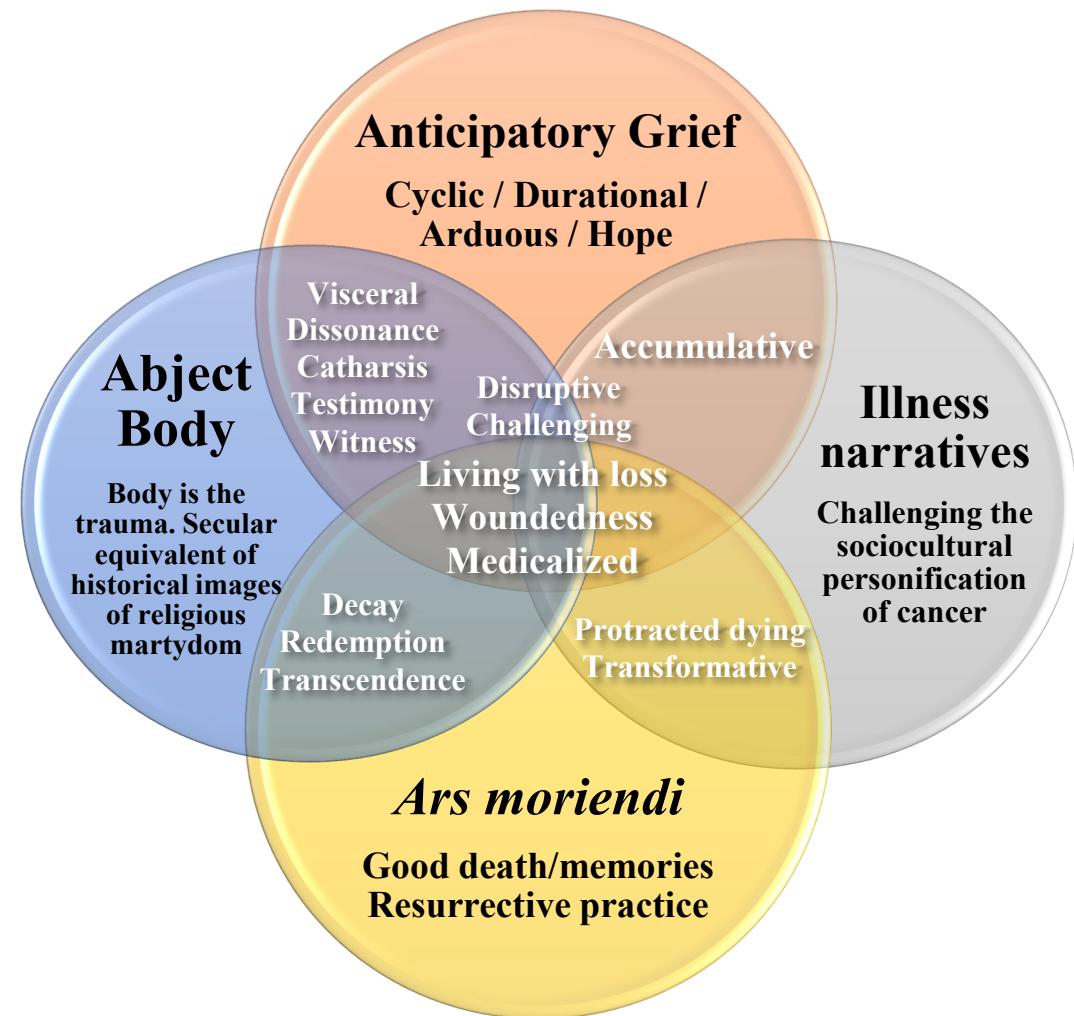
Figure 33. Venn diagrams showing the application of the four concepts to the works of Hannah Wilke and Jo Spence in order to explore aspects of their unique grieving processes as represented in materialized form.

However, Wilke's and Spence's wounded bodies present *actualized* trauma. Their work can be fascinating, seductive and compelling but also because of the subject matter, disturbing and even repulsive. This is because the embodiment of trauma, either in singular representations or as a series, can create a strong visceral response in the viewer. Shocking images such as these harness the potential to somatically imprint encoded trauma onto those who witness them. The horror triggered by this type of somatic transference may provoke dissonance or a dissociative response in the spectator. Paradoxically, this work may also provide healing potential for others in the form of a vicarious catharsis because it equally arouses empathy and compassion. Wilke and Spence offer their testimonies of embodied suffering not as a meditation on a possible 'beyond' but on a present existence which becomes a starting point for considering how to live better with others and different ways to think about illness (Spence *et al*, 2005: 412). These artists' works are contemporary secular equivalents to historical images of religious martyrdom.

The next conceptual lens, anticipatory grief, honed in on aspects of Wilke's and Spence's unique materializations of loss, grief and mourning. This allowed the works to be analysed from a psychoanalytical perspective. By evidencing recognizable patterns or symptomology in these works with observations documented in theoretical literature, there is a danger of seeming to provide a very simplistic view of the ways in which materializations of grief and mourning unfolds. I must stress that it is the fluid interplay embedded within these works across multi-dimensional domains that the *actualization of their unique grieving processes* appears and 'plays-out'. However, by looking across the breadth of these artists' work the arduous, cyclic and durational aspects of grief and mourning can be seen. Spence's repetitive use of her stenographic 'x' or the iterative 'ex' symptomatically mimics visual and auditory flashbacks as suffered by trauma victims. The 'x' both appears and simultaneously crosses itself mimicking the dissociative effects experienced by traumatized individuals. Wilke on the other hand, uses medical objects in a pictorial game of charades to display the startling collapse of her diseased body. Her body *is* the trauma. Through a series of performative portraits she *exposes* the chaotic effects of her horrendous suffering and the ways in which this havoc exacts a toll on the maintenance of selfhood.

Finally, these works of premature death and dying were analysed from the standpoint of *ars moriendi*, a religious concept that has evolved into contemporary notions

of a 'good' death. Spence's final self-portrait on her deathbed is a direct secular descendent of the *ars moriendi* tradition that of leaving a 'good' memory by securing a 'good' death. Through her modern day version of a carte de visite she leaves behind an idealized memento of herself for posterity. In *Metamorphosis*, a collaborative post death work, she resurrects herself in a feat of self-transcendence producing a new work from beyond the grave. Likewise Wilke transcends her death and dying state. In her final work *Intra-Venus Tapes* she posits her dying self within the vibrancy of her ongoing daily existence, creating a phantasmagoria of memories and remembrance. As Goddard states, 'Hannah was so full of life and still is' (Takemoto, 2008: 138). Wilke eclipses her death and dying status by 'living' again in filmic form.

As I have shown, Wilke and Spence reveal not only the types of loss that they are forced to navigate, but also their coping methods. Spence adopted the techniques of a journalist or detective as well as undertaking a self-styled counselling programme. This allowed her to gain insights into her dilemma, which she then used to educate others. Both Wilke and Spence challenge metanarratives such as patriarchy and Wilke particularly reframes Christian ideologies to create her own mythos. In this way she secures both for herself and vicariously for others, hope and cathartic healing in the form of precious contact relics and icons.

Artworks are often seen as repositories of thought and knowledge, but they are also so much more than this because they can embody complex, durational phenomenological processing. Just as lived experiences are psychosomatically stored in the human body, artists can also transfer aspects of their lived experiences in materialized form. Information is encoded both implicitly and explicitly. In this way, individualized processes such as loss, trauma, grief and mourning may be communicated to the viewer. Artworks are 'read', 'experienced', 'observed', 'sensed', 'registered intuitively', or 'imaginatively acted upon' by the spectator. In the case of Wilke and Spence, more obvious signs of lamentation are interwoven with intimate confessions of anxiety, fear, pain, humour, hope and pragmatism. As we can see it is possible to track these artists' unique journeys of living with loss right up until their death. The application of the four concepts enables the layered complexity of loss, grief and mourning to be revealed as resonating within different domains: sociocultural, political, historical, psychological, medical, physical, religious and spiritual. The *actualization of their unique grieving processes* accrue as one trope overlays another. Besides narrating their living whilst dying, Wilke and Spence also performed their own self-styled resurrection and memorialization.

They 'live on' in the form of materialized and digital cenotaphs. This is a new phenomenon which is emerging and one which I will return to at the end of Chapter Four. Because of their immense bravery, Wilke and Spence not only bequeathed a vibrant legacy concerning feminist issues but also rich and dynamic accounts of modern death, dying and memorialization.

Chapter Four

The construction and dismantling of loss in *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013)

4.1) Introduction. 4.2) Experiencing *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* in situ. 4.3) Mourning as visual ennui. 4.4) *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* no longer exists. 4.5) The inference of loss and mourning in *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There.* 4.6) A photographic memorial work 4.7) Conclusion.

4.1 Introduction

In their book *Thinking Through Art,* Katy Macleod and Lin Holridge discuss the ways in which the coexistence of writing whilst making artworks aids doctoral research. They propose that 'the writings cast light on word-image relations as the complex thinking in the artworks is contextualised and revisited in written form, which in turn revisits the artwork. In fact it could be argued that it is the tension between the two modes which helps to generate the depth of thought encountered in the final submissions' (Macleod and Holridge, 2006: 87). I concur with this observation. Making and producing written responses regarding my art work whilst theorizing about Wilke and Spence's work and the *vanitas* was not at all contradictory for me. It is precisely this type of 'mess' or 'series of rhizomic connections' which practice-led research entails that enables new knowledge to emerge (Vincs, 2007: 101-107). My art practice is not simply an encapsulation of a theory that I am pursuing; it operates instead as both driver and foil, enabling theorisation to unfold in ways that would not have been possible without its production.

Whilst analysing the artists' work alongside my own art practice, it quickly became apparent that I was dealing with a multiplicity of complex issues that revolved around a centrifuge of loss. In order to help analyse multidimensional information centred on the theme of loss, I decided to track and meditate on the various losses incurred, inferred and realized when making and exhibiting my own work. I did this primarily whilst formulating and producing a work entitled *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013). I consciously assembled and disassembled this work theoretically through written analysis as it developed. By adopting an approach which combined action with reflection, I began to understand the methods deployed by the artists in my corpus concerning their materializations of loss. At the time of making this work I was also writing about Wilke

and Spence. My research artwork is different from Wilke's and Spence's. Whereas they documented their visceral experiences of living with cancer, my work is a product of post-mortem loss rather than anticipatory grief; the resulting installation is low key and elegiac in tone. Nevertheless, it was the insights that I gained whilst producing this exposition which enabled me to re-contextualize Wilke's and Spence's work as contemporary narratives of loss. At the same time, it also provided me with a deeper understanding of the compositional techniques employed by sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch artists in their representations of loss as rendered in *vanitas* paintings.

Here-and-Now; Then-and-There is a memorial work produced in response to the death of family members and friends. Memorials are erected to honour the memory of the deceased. In European and American societies the corpse is stabilized by means of refrigeration or embalming and then, by ritual disposal, through burial or cremation. The dead are subsequently represented by a tombstone, monument, shrine, tree, digital cenotaph or ceremonial farewell. These rituals provide symbolic manifestations or markers[55]. The artwork is *not* an attempt to ameliorate or anesthetize the acute pain and distress of ongoing loss as articulated by Wilke and Spence or the aftermath of post-mortem grief[56].

Instead, this work seeks to represent a sorrow which has subsided with the passing of time. Before constructing this sculpture, I experimented with 'ghost' objects or traces made from delicate, ephemeral casts (wax shoes, an imprint of a dress and cutlery items). I was searching for visual representations of grief as observed by Silverman and Nickman in *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*:

> *Yet as mourners move on with their lives to find new roles, new directions and new sources of gratification, they experience the past as very much a part of who they are. The deceased are both present and not present at the*

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[55] Elizabeth Bronfen stated that 'One of the crucial aspects of the mourning process includes the transformation of what was a living person and then an inanimate but destabilised decaying corpse into a permanent and stable inanimate representation: in Humphrey's [*sic*] words, into mummy, monument or memory, ash, ancestor or angel' (Bronfen, 1992: 78, Humphreys, 1981: 268).

[56] Helena Godwin (born 1963), a Midlands based community artist, stated that her art practice changed dramatically after the untimely death of her brother. Prior to his death she worked solely in two dimensions; after it she began working as a sculptor in wood, stone and plaster in a metaphorical attempt to create forms that filled the void left by his absence. Godwin stated that in response to her brother's untimely death she began sculpting '…because I was so distressed I didn't, I didn't know what to do with myself' (Godwin, 2011).

Sally Tissington, an artist writer, began making artworks three weeks after her baby son Alfie died because it eased her pain: 'But only in the days when I was making the works, you still had the night to get through. It was only in the day that it was better' (Tissington, 2011).

same time. It is possible to be bereft and not bereft simultaneously, to have a sense of continuity and yet to know that nothing will ever be the same. The reality is that there is an inner system that continues to be centred on the person who is no longer physically present.

(Silverman and Nickman, 1996: 351).

This resonated with my own experiences of grief and mourning: that of an enduring re-interpretative oscillation or elision of the here-and-now with the then-and-there. This effect can be seen in my installation of delicate wax shoes placed on a powdery white background which creates a presence which in itself invokes an absence (Figure 34). The brittle 'ghost' objects produce a haunting presence that suggests fugacity and loss.

I then produced three still life set-ups using actual objects, a table and wall(s) coated with a thin layer of cement powder. These still-life experiments produced monochromatic vacuums that looked as if the 'life' or vitality had been sucked out of them. This is because all the objects and their surroundings were rendered a smooth, monotone texture and colour. These artworks hinted at relics such as Victorian photographs as well as the destruction and petrification of Pompeii by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* explores these types of effect further but on a larger scale, using ash to signify loss (death rituals) and funereal sculpture. The artists in my corpus have all referenced funereal sculptural form and/or ritual as a method to connote death and memorialization. Wilke's *Intra-Venus* series when exhibited in a gallery is the equivalent of an oratory and Leonard's *Strange Fruit* a cemetery[57]. Wilke's and Spence's photographs act like votive offerings and Gonzalez-Torres candy spill works are reminiscent of altars and shrines. As a memorial, *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* represents a personal investment that I have undertaken which relates to my desire to reflect on these things. Before commencing this memorial, I gathered together a range of objects with associative memories of deceased family and friends. For example, the tin enamel jug reminds me of my grandmother who used a jug to sluice down her front and back doorsteps with fresh water after scrubbing them clean. The shape of this jug immediately conjures up for me the caustic smell of Vim and summer holidays spent with my grandparents in Wells, Somerset. Because these objects

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[57] The Philadelphia Museum website which houses this work in its collection states; '*Strange Fruit* has the aura of a graveyard, a gathering of strangers wherein each remains uniquely individualized, a place hospitable to reverie and solace.' (Philadelphia Museum of Art: Collections, 2018).

Figure 34. Sheridan Horn, *Ghost Objects* (2010). Wax casts and icing sugar. Installation, 2 x 4.572 metres.

are commonplace, they also reference countless individuals, activities, rituals and when arranged together, create an interplay in and of themselves. The artwork reconfigures the *vanitas*. By 'talking back' to this established genre I aimed to gain a better understanding of how loss is construed in historical Dutch *vanitas* paintings and the ways in which artists are re-appropriating this genre in order to materialize their own bereavements.

In making this work, the following items were either completely or functionally lost: 10 plastic carrier bags, 562 lumps of coal, 124 logs, 366 kindling sticks, 80 firelighters, 107 paper faggots, 32 matches, a metal jug, kettle, 2 glass decanters, 2 glass tumblers, a ceramic ornament, 2 white cotton double bedsheets, a violin, guitar, cricket bat, 2 sports trophies, 3 glass perfume bottles, 3 cardboard boxes, a china candlestick, spectacles and case, a framed photograph, 15 silk flowers, 1 computer and printer, a Filofax, camera, telephone, 4 books, a clock, skull, 15 black plastic bin bags, 6 artists' brushes, 3 face masks, 15 pairs of latex gloves, 16 litres PVA glue.

A key factor is the investment of time involved in making an artwork. This work was created across several months. The ash was the result of an open fire in my living room. To convert paper, wood and coal into ash took approximately 140 hours. The creation of this artwork including the gathering together of disparate objects, coating them in glue and ash as well as setting the work up in situ appropriated 76 hours. In total, the amount of time spent producing this work was approximately 216 hours.

I found the recording of these processual losses to be significant. Usually when experiencing an artwork one focuses on that which exists rather than the opposite. What I find fascinating about the artists' work in my corpus is that this status quo is reversed so that absence, disappearance, loss or that which no longer exists is brought into relief. In my memorial this processual loss is not overtly evident but is subsumed into the work itself. Like Leonard, I discovered that the act of repetitive making (covering objects with glue and ash) gave me the space to process thoughts and emotions related to loss. The investment over time in a repetitive ritual such as Leonard's stitching of fruit skins or Gonzalez-Torres' offerings of sweets mimics the durational and iterative process that grief and mourning entails.

4.2 Experiencing *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* in situ

On completion, the work was exhibited at Trinity Catholic School, Leamington Spa in February 2013 (Figures 35, 36 and 37). The descriptive account below is based on

conversations with members of the general public, my observations of people interacting with the work and information gleaned from students' sketchbook analysis. I have written this description in the second person so as to provide an insight into what it was like to experience this work in situ:

You enter a black cubed space. The walls and ceiling are pitch black. The floor is grey. It is very dark which makes the edges of the room difficult to perceive. In the centre of this space is a sculptural installation. It is spotlit from above. Everything about this object sculpture is monochrome. The work comprises a table which is placed at an angle. The table is covered with a cloth that touches the floor. It is laden with everyday objects. Further items are strategically placed on the ground around its base. The work is domestic in scale. As you walk towards the sculpture to take a closer look, your shoes make a crunching sound. You look down and notice a fine layer of gritty material. You look up and see that it is the same material that coats the entire assemblage in front of you. The object sculpture is coated in a layer of ash. Everything is texturally homogenous. Although the objects have the same textural quality, there are slight differences in colour ranging from soft ochre, taupe and grey to charcoal. The variances in colour are very subtle. You walk around the table. The objects have been positioned in a tiered arrangement allowing them to be viewed from all angles. There is no front or back to this work - it is circular in format.

It is obvious from the omnipresent skull and other well-known signifiers of fleeting time such as a clock, Filofax and camera that this is a *vanitas*. Earthly pleasures are indicated through the presence of sports items, musical instruments, books, food and decanters. Scent is represented by perfume bottles... but in essence are any of these sensual desires actually evoked? You mentally telescope back. On entering the room you recall that the spotlit ensemble looked like a variety of interlocking shapes, patterns and forms. Some of the objects were clearly discernible, but many were not. However on closer inspection this work is immediately recognizable as a *vanitas*. Although this work is an object sculpture, like the historical *vanitas* painting, compositionally the depth-of-field is shallow. The black background creates a diminutive effect. Outside the circular pool of light the blackness presses in on the installation. This generates an intimate, but slightly oppressive atmosphere. The textural uniformity of the work makes it hard to focus upon. It operates like a visual ennui. Unlike the traditional seventeenth century Dutch *vanitas* painting, this work does not seek to arouse sensual memories through the interplay of exquisitely rendered objects, vibrant colours and surface textures. Instead this artwork is an inversion or shadow of the *vanitas*. It is in effect a *vanitas* representation stripped of its vital phosphorescence. With its references to funereal sculpture this work seems to pay homage to the *vanitas*. *The Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* evokes a different kind of loss. Whereas traditional *vanitas* paintings signified loss through a commentary on the fleeting nature of human existence this work mourns the *vanitas* itself. Because this work is so monotonous, corpse-like even it acts as a double

referent signifying both itself and its genesis. In a strange
way it nullifies itself. Although the artwork is arranged to
encourage you to walk around it, because it is circular in
format the inclination is to walk away from it or straight past
it as if it does not exist. This is an anti-art memorial.

(Sheridan Horn, February 2013).

Figure 35. Sheridan Horn, *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013). Objects, ash and glue.

Figure 36. Sheridan Horn, *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013). Objects, ash and glue.

Figure 37. Sheridan Horn, *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013). Objects, ash and glue.

4.3 Mourning as visual ennui

Again and again the work was glanced at, looked at in a polite and perfunctory manner or rapidly passed over[58]. Why did this artwork seem to exert such a lack of interest in the viewer? Culturally, when something is placed centre stage and spotlit, it is used as a signal to attract attention. This is a well-known theatrical device. If the object is subsequently perceived as offering an anti-climactic experience then the spectator may feel cheated and so disregard it, glaze over or move quickly on[59]. The term *glaze* in this instance is semantically revealing. The sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch artists glazed their *vanitas* paintings in order to produce lustrous colours that further enhanced their sensuous qualities. Glazing involved applying a transparent layer(s) of oil paint over a dry opaque underpainting. The Dutch term for underpainting is *dood-verf*, literally 'dead-colour'. Underpainting was used by Dutch artists to establish important structural elements in their pictures, such as compositional design, lighting, tonal values, volume and surface textures. These elements were mapped out using a monochromatic palette, hence the term 'dead-colour'. The most common underpainting was that of placing warm earth tones (burnt umber sometimes mixed with black) on top of neutral grey or warm brown grounds. Cool grey monochromatic underpainting was also regularly deployed[60]. Glazing techniques produce an intense luminosity of colour through optical mixing. In this instance, colours are not physically mixed together but instead are built up in separate layers one on top of the other. For example, a red glaze washed over dry opaque blue paint would optically mix to create purple nuances. This method has been likened to that of placing a colour acetate sheet over a black and white photograph. However this analogy does not evoke the exquisite translucency and brightness of colour that glazing produces

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[58] *Here-and Now; Then-and-There* was not analysed as a formal sociological study. The work was viewed by a variety of audiences across a two-week period which included hundreds of children, the general public, artists, parents, staff and school governors. My observations and analysis were gleaned from classroom critiques with students aged 11-18 years old, discussions with members of the general public and fellow artists.

[59] Alternatively, it could be that the theatrical element inherent in this work is another reason why the audience did not engage with the work. Is it possible that spectators who were aware of a performative aspect to this work perhaps did not wish to be implicated in the performance? The theatrical element essentially turns the audience into performers and because they are implicit within it, they removed themselves.

[60] Monochromatic underpainting is also called grisaille (*gris* in French means 'grey') painting. This style of painting was historically executed for the purposes of imitating sculpture in two dimensions. Conversely in my work, ash is used as a monochromatic medium to evoke grey funereal sculpture which in turn emulates *vanitas* painting.

as found in sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish painting. Glazing was used in combination with many other methods, especially that of opaque and semi-opaque painting techniques (Janson, 2001). *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* is a sculptural version of dead-colouring. Whereas the Dutch *vanitas* painters used glazes to infuse their work with colour and vibrancy, the overall tonality and mood of my work is one of monotony and deadness. The work instead evokes the alternative meaning of the word *glaze*: that of producing a fixed or lifeless expression often equated with boredom.

My memorial work could be construed as something which lies beneath, is buried or lies within the shadows. As Isaac Newton (1642-1727) discovered, colour is not an inherent property of objects, but instead a perceptive phenomenon occurring when the human brain receives messages from light receptors located within the eye. It is light which creates colour. When light hits the surface of an object, some colours are reflected whilst all the other colours in the spectrum are absorbed. It is only those colours which are reflected from the surface of an object that the visual system, in accordance with the brain, translates into sensations that we recognize as colour[61]. *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* represents how objects are seen at night without the aid of light. The surfaces of objects when seen under these conditions range from light grey through to pitch black. In darkened lighting conditions not only do the surface of objects appear monochromatic, but they also give the impression of being texturally homogenous[62]. This highlights a visual anomaly in my work, because although the objects are spotlit, they are represented as one would perceive them in darkness. According to Newton, these objects are depicted as they actually *are* in reality: that of being grey objects in a colourless world (Finlay, 2007: 384-385). Even though it has been scientifically proven that colour is a visual illusion, in cultural and personal terms colour is an intensely subjective phenomenon. A world devoid of colour equates with drabness, depression and grief. By depicting

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[61] All information in this paragraph describing how humans see colour may be accessed from the following two sources: Biggs, T., McPhail. S., Nassau, K., et al, 2008; Pantone LLC, 2018.

[62] This phenomenon can be witnessed in an interior room at the crack of dawn. When it is dark, objects appear monochromatic, ranging from light grey through to pitch black. As the sun gradually rises, the surfaces of *some* objects begin to gain tinctures of colour. This stage is reminiscent of hand-tinted, black and white photographs. Warmer colours appear first, followed by cooler ones. Progressively, with the infusion of more light into the room, surface textures become increasingly discernible. As the saturation of colour intensifies, rich details are rendered visible. This visual sensation can be seen every day with its opposite effect occurring at sunset. Even so with patient and attentive viewing this spectacle is sublime. Historical figurative painting in its processual use of monochromatic underpainting followed by the suffusion of transparent, opaque and semi-opaque colour mimics natural visual phenomenon. The subtleties of this type of visual spectacle would have been especially familiar to painters who lived before the early 20th century. After this point, the instantaneous availability of electric light meant that the minutiae of this phenomenon would have been less likely to be consciously discerned.

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colourful objects as being colourless, this work encapsulates how objects are perceived in darkness without the aid of artificial light. Colour vision is an illusion and serves to conceal that which is always present.

I chose to use ash because it is a muted and melancholic medium. It also carries obvious cultural associations: for example, in a Christian burial service on the committal of the body into the ground the priest intones '…earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust…' It also provided a surface texture redolent of tombstones. However, my choice of ash as working medium was motivated by another, more theoretical concern. Death is a cataclysmic event and as a result, the processes of grief and mourning tend to fall under its shadow. Similarly, ash is a result of fire and, because of this, remains overshadowed by the dramatic event which precedes its creation. In this way, I took a by-product of an event and put it centre stage; that which was hitherto approached as merely secondary remnants, becomes the focus of the work. The ash is presented as an interesting phenomenon in its own right, as autonomous subject matter. In taking ash and making it a predominant feature, my aim was to highlight the grief and mourning process. In terms of the evolution of artistic genres my work in a figurative way grieves for the *vanitas,* by killing it of all its vivacity.

The process of covering items in ash meant that the objects are rendered functionally obsolete. This method of ossification suggests that this collection of objects are 'dead'. Furthermore, by intimating that the objects are in a state of petrification the representation of time in this work is halted. In the historical *vanitas* time is depicted as durational (past, present and future). Blousy blossoms, decaying fruit, snuffed-out candles juxtaposed with other motifs are deployed to signal the fleeting nature of earthly pleasures. Time is simultaneously presented as evanescent, evolving, expansive, paused, temporal, finite or cyclic. Conversely in this artwork time is presented as existing solely in the past. The unidirectional, narrative flow of time as signified in the traditional *vanitas* is disrupted. Although the work contains symbols of passing time such as a fallen blossom, recording devices and leisure pursuits, the petrification of these objects conveys a sense of time as historic. The all-pervading presence of a human skull combined with the intimations of funereal sculpture, proposes that time has coalesced at the point of death. Is this the kernel wherein the inertia in this work lies? The recognition that a collection of familiar shapes and forms insists on merging into a yawn-making inactive sameness? It suggests perhaps, that this work may not be conceptually worth engaging with because it conveys prescient inklings of sinking vacuity. The work exudes an aura

of passivity which serves to alienate the viewer.

I carefully chose each of the objects in this work because they reminded me of deceased family members and friends. However, in the final exposition this fact was neither recognizable nor relevant. Because I adhered so closely in compositional terms to a historical *vanitas* painting, object signification immediately became generic. It is like an historical remnant. Although this work's genesis is the *vanitas,* it is also representative of modern European culture in that all of the artefacts gathered together are the result of manufacturing and technological revolutions. Even the ubiquitous skull is a mass produced plastic replica and the flowers and fruit are fake. Because of the fast pace of technological innovation, some of these objects such as the computer and printer, camera, Filofax and telephone have themselves become antiquated within a matter of decades.

The siting of this work within a blacked out space hints at the dark interior of a crypt and thus, death and memorialization. By making all the textures of the objects uniform they take on a dull, muted regularity thus evoking the monotony of the mourning process which is never ending. However, although this artwork alluded to the finality of death and created a mournful atmosphere, it did not *actualize the grieving process itself*. This is because the work starts and ends in the same state. There was no sense of a change of state or process.

4.4 *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* no longer exists

The act of taking photographs of the work gives the illusion that a moment in time can be frozen or even that the work itself still exists and is available for viewing. Like the photograph of an individual who has aged or died, the photographs of this installation are a fabrication - having been destroyed, it no longer exists. The artwork only survives now in the form of written and photographic documents; the original work is void. From my perspective the photographs call up memories of making the work and for those who saw the finished installation, of experiencing it in situ. As with photographs of people, the images of the work evoke personal thoughts and memories. These pictures may prompt recall of similar artworks or associative imagery - or, as in my case, actual people and events. Although an artwork is not a person, the function of photographs operates in the same way. The real life experience of this work has now for those individuals involved become a part of their idiosyncratic memories. So what *is* the art work? Is it the original

iteration or its subsequent reiterations?[63] For those who did not experience the original work in situ, the photographs and written synopsis offer an alternative performative encounter. Peggy Phelan proposes the following definition of the term performativity:

> *Performativity is about reiteration and repetition. It is about an impersonal grammar of acts. The best and quickest way of explaining this is if we think about the performativity and the performance of death. You will perform your death once, supposedly, but it will be interpreted and witnessed within the general context of the performativity of death as a technological, historical, psychic and political experience.*
>
> (Phelan and Rogoff, 2000: 133).

Although death, like our birth, is only performed once, the collective repetition of this act by countless individuals means that death and dying is commonplace. Because death as a state or place is inconceivable, artists will always try to represent it. In the same way, the actual process of dying continues to provoke fear and fascination in humans so that they will inevitably try to exert some form of control over it. Therefore the performativity of death exists in innumerable registers, images and recollections. Art has a similar performative autonomy. As John Berger discusses in *Ways of Seeing,* when a work of art is commercially reproduced, it will inevitably proliferate a multitude of contexts so that: 'In its travels, its meaning is diversified' (Berger, 1972: 20). Equally, it is also important to look at the gaps occurring between these iterations and registers. For instance, in *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There,* it is the space between such reiterations that tacit knowledge is emerging. Even more significantly, it is from within these intriguing abstract lacunae and negative spaces that loss and mourning materialize. To evidence this assertion I will now sum up the salient interim findings.

4.5 The inference of loss and mourning in *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There*

Loss and mourning is inferred in the work primarily through the application of negation, lacunae and negative spaces. I am using the term 'negative space' to describe a shadow,

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[63] The *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* in its final presentation as a photographic triptych can be seen as the artwork as much as the original sculptural tableau because it becomes the artwork at the next level of production.

silhouette or inversion, produced either conceptually or through materialized form. To begin with, the actual production of this artwork incurred processual losses. These included manufacturing ash which is a trace element of burnt matter along with the deletion of everyday serviceable objects. Although these processual losses were inculcated into the artwork itself, they nevertheless registered as subliminal stimuli. In an oblique way, this work references loss and subdued sorrow. Rebecca Abrams describes the impact that the sudden death of her father had on her as a teenager:

> *Looking back on those weeks I remember how dark and gloomy everything*
> *seemed: the other people were like shadowy figures in a dream, the rooms*
> *I moved through were grey and dingy. I had switched off my mind and my*
> *emotions, I had shut myself away inside myself.*

> (Abrams, 1999: 6).

Metaphorically speaking, this is exactly what occurred when I encased the objects in ash. I visually 'switched them off' and 'shut them away inside themselves' resulting in a collection of 'dark', 'gloomy', 'grey', 'dingy' and 'shadowy forms'. By deliberately inverting the objects, their subdued status figuratively alludes to a psychological damping of mood like that of melancholia. Another quality imparted by the ash is that it 'switches' each article into its binary opposite. Soft linen, silk flowers and the delicate leaves of a book are rendered stiff and unpliable. Transparent objects are reduced to impenetrable shapes and forms. Smooth china, plastic, cardboard and wood became fossilized (into stone). It is as if the objects have been 'flipped' into their counterparts. This is like another feature of grief summed up by the colloquialisms "my world was turned upside down" or "inside out". The bereaved know that nothing will ever be the same again.

Objects are not merely passive entities. Every object has a social history (production, purpose, value and aesthetic) and is encoded with semiotic meaning[64]. Objects are imbued with human agency and because of this artists use them as visual metaphors or stand-ins for the body and psyche. Making the objects in the art work function like sarcophagi suggests that they are entombed. This is especially so considering that the objects former vibrancy and purpose has been extinguished. It infers that these entities have metaphorically 'died' and like the dead, their remains have been buried in a

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[64]This is exemplified in Marcel Duchamp's seminal *ready-mades* (see *Fountain,* 1917) whereby unaltered everyday manufactured objects were designated as art. To this day ready-made or object art continues to prompt discussions about sociocultural activities through object signification.

grave or tomb. As such, these collective micro 'deaths' are reiterated in the entirety of the assemblage which itself alludes to funereal memorialization. The notion of the crypt is also implied by the negative space that surrounds the installation, particularly as the lighting throws this edifice into stark relief. Within the construction itself it was possible to see an interplay of shapes and shadows which changed according to viewpoint.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) in his essay *The Thing* searches for the essence or 'thingness' of an object. In contemplating a ceramic jug: 'The jug is a thing? What is the jug?', he concludes that: 'The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds' (Heidegger, 1975: 166, 169). In other words, the negative space(s). 'The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel' (Heidegger, 1975: 169). The exterior darkness that enshrouds this still life is echoed in the interiority of its objects. Empty spaces are delineated by the cloth-covered table, boxes and computer equipment. Dusty vessels that once held liquids such as perfume bottles, decanters and a kettle are reduced to object husks encasing darkness. Silk flowers that originally burst forth with colour are rendered dull and grey with stiff petals that curl around shadows. The black orbits of the skull stare blankly back, registering emptiness. As stand-ins for the body and psyche not only does this collection of object shells suggest one's own death, but also the death of the other. The funereal tone of this work combined with the heightening of negative spaces insinuates a sense of profound loss. The emptiness encapsulated within these object stand-ins, metaphorically hints at psychological or emotional emptiness. It suggests that it is people who are the 'holding vessel' or the 'void that holds'. When a loved one dies, for those left grieving, loss is palpable because the deceased has *gone* forever. As 'holding vessels' the bereaved struggle to psychologically 'hold' the 'void' or absence that death entails.

Contextually *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* harks back to the past. It pays tribute to the *vanitas*, but as a 'flattened' version of the *vanitas* it visually collapses into its shadow. In effect it is as if the effervescent *vanitas* has been simultaneously asphyxiated, memorialized and mourned[65]. The fossilized appearance of this still life infers that time has congealed at the point of death or perpetual stasis. In object form it

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[65] It was this configuration in *The Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* which alerted me to the fact that artists today are encapsulating loss/grief, dying/death and mourning/memorialization within singular works. Not only this but that each artist's uniquely personal narrative is nested within the wider social context of grief and mourning practices.

provides an impression of the past frozen within the present. Likewise, the layered signification of the objects themselves (as metaphors for the human body, psyche and sociocultural activity) reverberates around the death of the self as well as the other. Whereas the *vanitas* is an allegory concerning the restitution of one's soul on dying, my construction hints at the psychological effects of death for the survivor(s). Loss and mourning is therefore signified through a leitmotif encompassing negation, lacunae and negative space expressed either subliminally via processual losses or overtly by way of visual ennui. It is this accumulation of information signalled both explicitly and obliquely which creates an uneasy intuition in the viewer that this seemingly benign artwork has the potential to depress one's mood. The semiotic layering in this work has a latent ability to affect the viewer's disposition. This is registered rapidly and instinctively on a subconscious level and results in a disinclination to be present with the work.

Since this memorial has now been destroyed, its existence as a physical entity is momentary. The work itself is now permanently relegated to the past. What remains are descriptive, theoretical and photographic documents. It is the representations of the work in photographic form that I will explore next.

4.6 A photographic memorial work

I could argue that the production - the installation - was created solely in order to photograph it and that these images are actually the final work and the installation a necessary by-product. From this premise the photographs of *Here-and–Now; Then-and-There* are quite seductive and compelling (unlike the work itself). The three images presented in this thesis were selected from approximately sixty shots taken[66]. They depict three succinct viewpoints. One picture sets the work in context, another shows the table top in its entirety and the third presents the objects in close-up detail. The photographs serve to enhance the surface textural qualities of the work by representing a tactile appearance that looks like sandstone. Despite the limited monochrome palette it is very easy to discern a distinct range of tonal values moving from light grey through to charcoal; each object is in focus so that its shape, pattern and form is etched out. The objects in essence are distilled into their essential shapes and form. The spotlighting serves to intensify these images by heightening the interplay of positive and negative spaces. I have

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[66] The majority of the photographs that I took were of such poor quality that I jettisoned them. The shots that were successful were produced with Douglas Atfield using a digital camera, portable spotlight and silver reflector umbrella.

controlled the precise angles from which the work is now seen. This means that certain aspects of the sculptural work are either emphasized, downplayed or even falsified. For instance, it is no longer possible for the spectator to walk around the work so as to note its unpleasant gritty texture and unfolding dreary viewpoints. The photographs offer *selective* information so that boredom is easily circumvented. Although this is obvious, these observations are nevertheless significant because all the artists in my corpus have produced photographic works and/or documents; these artists' photographs have been carefully selected and edited.

The three photographs which I chose for the final exposition of *Here-and–Now; Then-and-There* have all been digitally altered using Photoshop image-editing software. Background imperfections were removed to create a uniform velvet blackness. Each print is 10 x 8 inches and produced on glossy photographic paper. The images are window mounted on black card and presented as a landscape format. The triptych is set inside a single black recessed frame and "invisible" anti-reflective glass 35 x 19 inches. This framing technique produces a sombre funereal effect very much in keeping with the works status as a memorial. The final artwork embodies a series of micro 'deaths' ranging from the passing of the *event,* the destruction of the sculptural installation and the eradication of photographic documents. In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*[67] Barthes discovers that the *noeme* or essence of a photograph in recording the previous existence of a subject/object is a portent of death. The *eidos* of a photograph is death (Barthes, 1980/2000: 15). The layered signification in my work produces a cat's cradle juxtaposing death, loss and stasis. As a photographic work, the signification of death is redoubled.

In its original form this work was built as a memorial to deceased family and friends. However, in its final presentation as a triptych can it still be considered a memorial? A dictionary definition for *memorial* states: 'a statue or structure established to remind people of a person or event' and 'intended to commemorate someone or something'. In this way the photographic work is a memorial not only on a personal level but also in generic terms. It is also a record of an event and pays tribute to the historical *vanitas*. Like the physical manifestations produced by the artists in my study, this memorial is a transitory work because it is not located permanently at a designated site.

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[67] Barthes wrote *Camera Lucida* when he was mourning the recent death of his mother and attempting to recover her quintessence by searching amongst family photographs. A desperate yearning to recover the lost loved one is a known symptomatic response of grief and mourning (Bowlby, 1980: 85; Parkes, 2009: 28).

As stated earlier, the Dutch *vanitas* artists laid bare their technical proficiency for the audience to see. However, visual practitioners today do not necessarily want the viewer to consider their work as crafted, because if it is seen as a genuine record of a given moment then it serves to amplify it. This may be especially so when artists are trying to convey intensely subjective issues. All photographs to some extent are mediated by the photographer according to their subjective stance, interpretation and intentions. Reality is both manipulated and constructed. Spence was fully aware of this type of conflict:

> *I now think about photography whilst I am undergoing anything at the hand of others, particularly when I consider myself to be powerless. At the same time as I am trying to work out how to take photographs of what is happening to me, I also know that whatever I am about to photograph isn't actually what is happening. That it is only the tip of the iceberg because of censorship and self-censorship, and because you can't show the structures which produce that situation. Nor can I show that my perception of it will be different from somebody else also involved in it.*

<p style="text-align:right">(Spence, 1986a: 25).</p>

Because all photographic images are an interpretative distortion of reality, Spence proposed that 'we should use photos to ask questions rather than to try to show facts' (Spence, 1986b: 98). However, when representing a traumatic event, as Spence herself discovered, the experience can so overwhelm the practitioner that the resulting narrative 'isn't an interpretation: it's the trauma itself or an extension of it' (Spence *et al*, 2005: 412). During the recording or re-presenting of deeply upsetting lived experiences the original wounding (psychological and somatic), may become inscribed or enmeshed within the work itself. By analysing *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* I have discovered that the materialization of grief and mourning can be hidden and registered covertly or subliminally through processual loss, negation, empty spaces, silence and slippage. Interestingly, these types of representational forms also mimic a symptom of trauma whereby part of the traumatic event evades assimilation into the sufferer's consciousness (Caruth, 1995: 152). By materializing the symptomatic forms of loss, grief and trauma through representations of elision, chaos, repetition and reverberation, artists are both narrating and conceptualizing their embodied experiences.

Each of the visual practitioners in my corpus have produced works that encapsulate *an event*. Death and dying is *an event*. Even though *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* is a memorial work it was nevertheless *an event* (a staged moment in time) and

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as such photographic and written documents provide an evocation of it. If this work is viewed as an event then are the photographs indexical traces?[68] In Marion Coutts' memoir *Iceberg* concerning her husband Tom Lubbock, she describes receiving the news of his terminal illness as having 'the status of an event' (Coutts, 2014: 1). She equates the acknowledgement of Lubbock's impending death as being like the survivor of an explosion:

> *After an explosion, if you are still conscious when a blast has happened, everything for you does not cease. There is a shift, a gap, between the impact and the first grasp of what remains and what remaining might entail. What has happened to your body, to the air, to familiar shapes or smells, noise or lack of noise, not like anything there was before? This intermediate time, this ebb, or whatever it may call itself, has a long, slow tail. It leaves a moraine of unconsolidated residue and debris behind. And the tail might last as long as your body continues. Something has happened. The new situation is embodied and you are its witness. This is what happens to me.*

(Coutts, 2014: 34-35).

Coutts uses this powerful metaphor to describe the enormity and virtual incomprehensibility of her experience. The psychosomatic wounding that results in a 'long, slow tail' of aftermath is symbolic of irrevocable damage. Whether a 'long, slow tail' can be said to lead back to the original trauma or a photograph is an indexical trace of its referent is a speculative activity. For instance, where exactly is the indexical trace tied to the referent in the selected photographs of *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There*? Is it the original event? Or is it the link with the historical *vanitas* or architectural funereal monuments? Or the shadows and silhouettes cast by the objects? Clearly it is all of these things and more. Indexical traces are embedded in symbols, metaphors, allegory, cultural constructs and material processes. Information embedded in artworks is hidden, layered and multivalent. Ultimately meaning-making resides in the contextual interpretation of the receiver[69].

4.7 Conclusion

Coutts likens the diagnosis of her husband's terminal illness to an explosion which wounds those at its epicentre. A blast sends out shock waves. Living whilst dying

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[68] Wilson Hurst in his paper *Indexical Context* provides a concise and informative argument concerning the indexicality of photographs (Hurst, n.d.).
[69] Ibid.

involves wounding not only for the one who suffers a direct hit but also for those who bear witness. My analysis of *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* raises some interesting questions and observations. Although my work is a memorial, it has nevertheless revealed to me that artists are expressing trauma, grief and mourning through *mimicking its symptomatic forms*. Lisa Saltzman, in her book *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*, observed a paradigm shift in memorial works associated with loss, grief and trauma. She theorized that loss is embedded at the core of such works either literally via a hollow space (casts and architectural memorials) or through indexical traces (shadow, profile, silhouette or light projections) (Saltzman, 2006). I visually formulated psychological emptiness through the layering of hidden signification centred on stasis and death. Not only do artists portray loss in this way, but increasingly artists are attempting to materialize *the grieving process* (or, as we shall see, grieving *processes*, for this is not a universally homogenous phenomenon). Trauma can be such an overwhelming experience that it actively resists and destroys language. This produces a paradoxical situation. How does one convey that which cannot be articulated? In the light of my experiments with covert layering and reiterative practice, I think that some practitioners are also evoking that which resists language by using subliminal methods such as negation. Living whilst dying may be punctuated/punctured by a series of wounds/hiatuses/losses. Coutts identified 'a shift, a gap, between the impact and the first grasp of what remains and what remaining might entail' (Coutts, 2014: 34-35). In what ways are artists conveying shifts, gaps or wounding? Are they triggered by an event? In all of the artists' work that I am studying there are complex intersections between the artists' formulation of their artwork, the performative embodiment of the work itself and audience reception.

The expositional construction and dismantling of loss in my work has provided some thought-provoking insights, especially with regards to the symptomatic embodiment of trauma, grief and mourning in contemporary artworks (for a Venn diagram of the salient findings please refer to Figure 38). This hypothesis still needs to be fleshed out further and substantiated on a wider basis.

In order to do this, I will now analyse a body of works produced by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Zoe Leonard and myself. I will carefully examine these works in order to reveal the artists' personal navigations of ongoing and associative loss. I wish to ascertain the ways in which *uniquely personal grieving processes* are materialized. This will include the manner in which these works convey traumatic and/or overwhelming

events. Are they communicating this through literality and/or by evoking the symptoms of grief and mourning as performative constructs within the work itself? In what ways are they reconfiguring the historical *vanitas* as a construct in order to materialize their loved one's lived experiences of suffering, death and dying? A major component of grief is the deployment of copying strategies and resilience. By what means do Gonzalez-Torres, Leonard and I signal repair, suture, and assimilation of a deceased loved one as a means to overcoming psychosomatic wounding?

I will once again deploy the four concepts: illness narratives, the abject body, grief and *ars moriendi* as a methodology with which to extrapolate information. The next set of artists' works to be explored fundamentally differ from Wilke's and Spence's in that they honour a loved one post-mortem, as opposed to Wilke and Spence, who were making their works pre-mortem.

Incurred

Investment of Time

Materials and

Functional objects
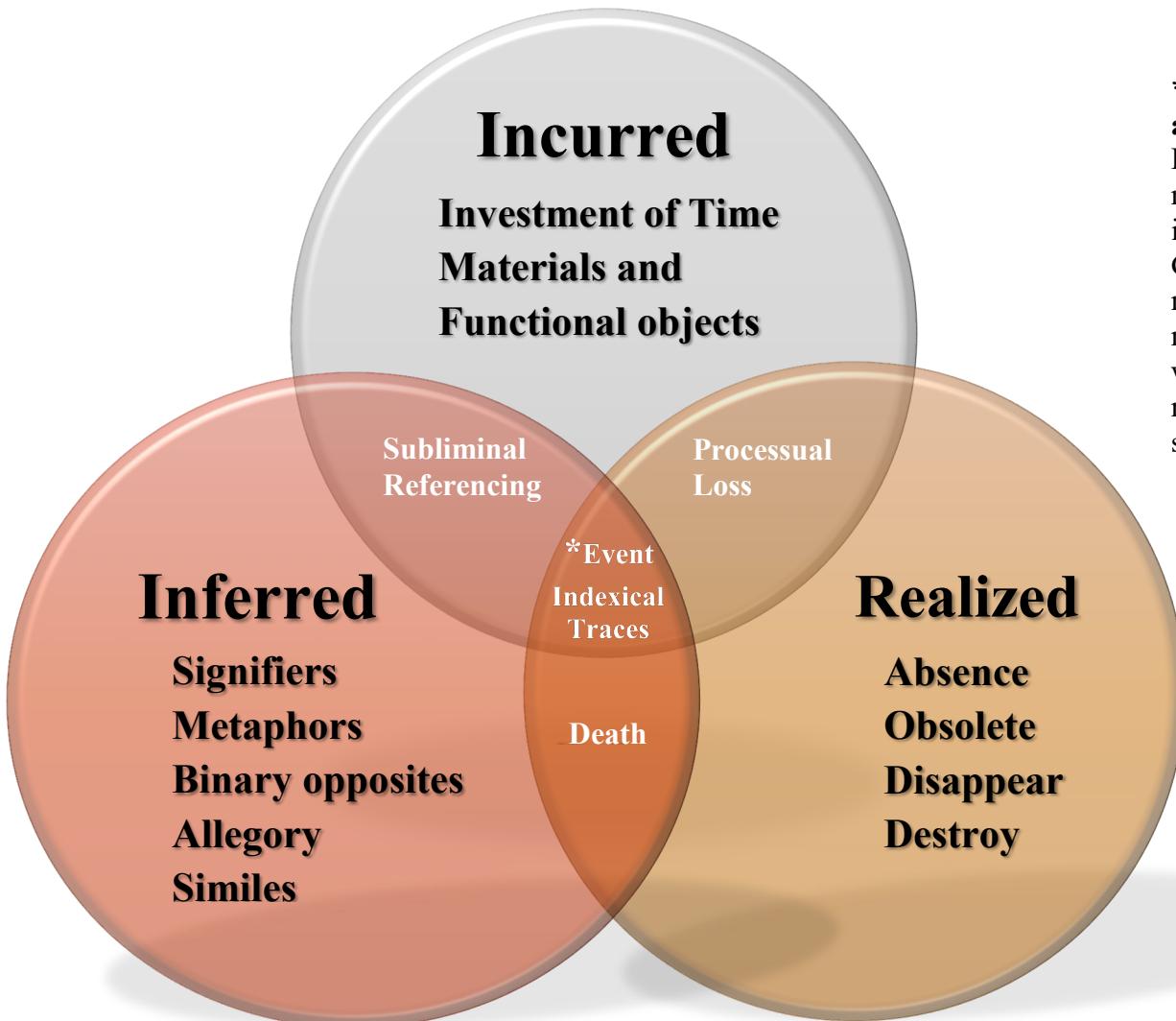
*Indexical Traces of an Event:
Hidden, silent, hiatus, recursive, repetitive, iterative, layered. Grief, trauma and mourning can be materialized in art work(s) through the mimicking of symptomatic form(s).

Subliminal Referencing

Processual Loss

*Event Indexical Traces

Inferred

Realized

Signifiers

Metaphors

Binary opposites

Allegory

Similes

Death

Absence

Obsolete

Disappear

Destroy

Figure 38. A Venn diagram of the salient findings with regards to the construction and analytical dismantling of *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There.*

Chapter Five

Vanitas: An exploration of grief and mourning as corporeal and durational experience

5.1) Introduction. 5.2) An overview of the *vanitas*. 5.3) The materialization of illness narratives. 5.4) The abject body 5.5) *Ars moriendi:* metaphorical enactments of death and dying 5.6) *Ars moriendi*: metaphorical holographic portraits of the dead – resurrective practice of the generic body in the *vanitas* and of specific individuals in the contemporary art cenotaph. 5.7) Grief and mourning: premonitions of mortality as elucidated through the *vanitas* and the actualization of grieving processes as materialized in the contemporary art cenotaph. 5.8) Ephemeral cenotaphs in art. 5.9) Conclusion.

5.1 Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have been mapping out networks between my art practice and the artists in my corpus, in which each speaks to and addresses the other. I have discovered that knowledge does not emerge in a linear or predictable manner[70]. It is the order in which these findings are presented that enables an argument to appear logical and cogent. The next work that I am going to analyse is entitled *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Although it was created before *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013), I only comprehended its relevance much later on in my research studies. It was the subsequent assimilation of *D(e)ad* that made me realize that the overt decaying materiality inherent in this work as a corporeal and temporally bound process actualizes *aspects of the grieving process itself.* Whereas Wilke and Spence reference grief and mourning as durational but do not perform its temporality in their works, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Zoe Leonard foreground grief's durational feature by replicating it through the performative plasticity of their chosen media. Like these artists' work, *D(e)ad* pays

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[70] Barbara Bolt observed:

> *The problem for the creative arts researcher is recognizing and mapping the transformations that have occurred. Sometimes the transformations may seem to be so inchoate that it is impossible to recognize them, let alone map their effects. At other times the impact of the work of art may take time to 'show itself', or else the researcher may be too much in the process and hence finds it impossible to assess just what has been done.*

> (Bolt, 2008)

homage to the historical *vanitas.* Producing, responding to and analysing my own art work gave me knowledge and insights enabling the testing and development of my research questions.

In this chapter I investigate the ways in which contemporary artists are re-applying established generic codes and tropes from the *vanitas* tradition in order to materialize their own personal grief and mourning. I also evidence another emerging phenomenon: the *transient* cenotaph. Whereas a traditional cenotaph is a memorial honouring a dead individual(s) located elsewhere, these personalised cenotaphs located on the Internet or as physical manifestations in an exhibition venue, encapsulate or 'play out' the artists' grieving process. This is done by incorporating metaphorical portraits of the dead loved one, aspects of their death and dying, along with mourning rituals. Conversely, in my art practice the *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* (2012-2013) and *D(e)ad* (2010-2011) are singular unrepeatable events which only exist now in the form of documents and photographic mementos. As stated before, grief and mourning take place in an inclusive framework which incorporates many different elements. For clarity, I deploy the four concepts to separate facets of each artist's grief and mourning as embodied within their artworks. The four concepts are sequenced as follows: **Illness narratives**, **The abject body,** *Ars moriendi* and **Grief**. Before my analysis of *D(e)ad,* I outline the common themes of the historical *vanitas* genre. I then cross-reference the *vanitas* with contemporary reconfigurations of this genus as seen in my work and that of Gonzalez-Torres and Leonard. By deploying this approach, the *vanitas* can be tracked from its origins to its remarkable re-emergence as a performative cenotaph in art.

5.2 An overview of the *vanitas*

Vanitas is one of the subcategories of the genre *still life*. This was originally considered a minor genre because it lacked the gravitas associated with historical painting and portraiture. Before its appearance as a discreet subject, still life arrangements were primarily located as decorative elements within grand narrative compositions. The still life genre emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Netherlands, Flanders, Spain and Italy, eventually proliferating throughout Europe. The *vanitas* offers an opportunity for allegorical thinking particularly with reference to mortality. Objects included in *vanitas* arrangements are symbolically concerned with transience, earthly pleasures, personal achievement and spiritual atonement. The Latin root *vanus* means

'empty' and as the biblical aphorism in Ecclesiastes 1:2 warns, *vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. Theologically the *vanitas* offers a review of ephemeral earthly indulgence and prioritizes the hope of eternal salvation. A secular interpretation questions how to live in the here and now concerning personal attitudes towards the negotiation of worldly success and pleasure. Representations of *vanitas* range from the austere depiction of a few carefully selected items to Baroque excess. When creating *vanitas* paintings, artists were free to select and juxtapose a range of objects in order to formulate their own interpretations concerning morality and mortality. *Vanitas* paintings such as those produced by the Dutch artists Pieter Claesz (1596/1597-1660) or Willem Claesz Heda (1594-1680) were monochromatic in style, emphasizing the more sombre and melancholic aspects which characterise this particular genre (Figures 39 and 40).

From the outset, artists' attempts to visually seduce and beguile the viewer resulted in superb feats of technical virtuosity based on the formal elements. Symbolic items were carefully arranged in order to create a state of tension between stasis and the passage of time or more profoundly, the contrary states of existence and nonexistence. The juxtaposition of objects allowed emblematic 'readings' to occur regarding human activity centred upon personal acquisition, the pursuit of pleasurable pastimes and the inevitability of death. **Durational time** is signified by such objects as an hourglass, burning candles, wilting flowers; **wealth** by lustrous silks, twinkling jewels and beautiful ornaments; the **pursuit of knowledge** by books, writing paraphernalia and scientific instruments; **personal pleasures** by a pipe and tobacco, musical instruments, food, drink and sparkling glasses, cards and games; **power and status** by a crown, mitre, laurel wreath and accolades; the **suddenness of death** by broken glass or china, air borne bubbles, a skull or more subtly, dust. Some of these objects, such as a clock, candle and skull, were also used in portraiture from the Middle Ages to the Baroque period as *memento mori* to signify the importance of living according to Christian values rather than in pursuit of materialism (De Pascale, 2009: 86). The *vanitas* evolved out of this art historical milieu.

Figure 39. Pieter Claesz, *Vanitas Still-Life* (1630). Oil on panel, 39.5 x 56 cm. Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague.

Figure 40. Willem Claesz Heda, *Vanitas* (1628). Oil on wood, 45.5 x 69.5 cm. Museum Bredius, The Hague.

A typical *vanitas* painting is *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* (c.1640) by Harmen Steenwyck (1612-1656) – it depicts a close-up view of a table stacked with a drift of objects (Figure 41). The side of the table runs parallel to the bottom edge of the picture frame. Time passing is represented by a chronometer, a delicate wisp of smoke lingering from an expired oil lamp, the play of light on different surface textures and the positioning of objects so close to the table edge that they seem in danger of falling. The careful selection of these objects and the artist's exquisite attention to detail convey a sense of materiality and sensual delight. A swathe of pink silk denotes luxury as does an expensive Japanese sword and opalescent shell, both sought-after collectors' items. The musical instruments - lute, recorder and shawm - allude to the gratification of music; physical sustenance is symbolised by the smooth stone vessel perhaps containing water or oil.

This composition can be divided by a diagonal line from the bottom left hand corner to the top right hand corner of the picture, thus dividing the rectangular plane into two identical right angled triangles. The bottom right angled triangle contains the table laden with objects whilst the upper triangle is composed of empty space. This image is a metaphorical representation of the body, with the objects piled on top of the table representing the soma and mind, whilst the empty space situated above the table suggests the spirit. The conveyance of spiritual essence is further enhanced by a beam of light (a traditional religious signifier) which emanates from the top left hand corner of the picture and is directed at the grinning skull, positioned centre stage in the foreground (Artyfactory, 2018) The *vanitas* sets up a pivotal conundrum: the core narrative centred upon moralistic protestations relating to the futile hoarding of wealth and self-indulgent pleasures is ironic: the paintings themselves are valuable objects which solicit desire, admiration and acquisition. These gorgeous works may comment on the transience of existence but they do endure long after their artisan makers have expired.

Whether an actual figure is present in the *vanitas* scenario or not, the compositional devices implemented follow a similar format. The objects are arranged for the spectator's delectation on a table, cabinet or shelf which is positioned close to a blank backdrop, black void or an interior wall. Albertian perspective is non-existent and there is no relief to be found in the space expanding illusion offered by the vanishing point (Bryson, 1990: 71). An exception to this rule would be *Large Vanitas Still-Life,* 1663 by Pieter Boel (1622-1674) (Figure 42). Even when the compositions are stuffed so full of objects that the parameters of the interior space are not discernible, the depth of field is

invariably shallow, in some instances suffocatingly so[71]. The objects themselves are rendered in minute detail and invite repeated scrutiny[72]. Objects are piled up in such a way that they appear unbalanced and about to topple over. Visually, this creates an uneasy centrifugal tug that hints at human folly and the inevitable collapse of the body leading ultimately to death.

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[71] When David Hockney experimented with a mirror-lens to create still-life works as an aid to analysing Dutch still-life paintings he observed that

> *My projections of still-lifes with a mirror-lens had a distinct look: objects seen head on, a unifying totality with strong highlights and dark shadows, a dark background and restricted depth - all characteristics imposed by the limitations of the equipment. As we have seen, artists found ways of overcoming these limitations by 'collaging' various elements together to make a larger painting - but those elements are still seen head on and close up. It is the artist's compositional skills that convince us everything is placed within a coherent space.*

> (Hockney, 2001: 113).

[72] The intense attention to detail captured by exponents of the Dutch still life genre in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was aided by the use of optical lenses, mirror-lenses, microscopic lenses and the camera obscura (Hockney, 2001) and as such this genre is a precursor to the photographic image produced in the nineteenth century, the photorealist movement that began in the late 1960s and the hyper realist movement of the twenty first century. Artists probably used a variety of methods combining technical processes with direct observation to build up the intense representation of minutiae. It is known from the inventories of artists' studios that they repeated motifs in their works using transferable drawings, colour studies, patterns, cartoons, and completed paintings. Sometimes assistants were responsible for producing monochromatic under paintings which could then be shown to prospective clients before being worked up into a final work. Although still life paintings may appear naturalistic, they were in fact contrived with compositional elements being 'recycled', 'reused', 'reshuffled' and 'reversed'. 'Many artists also lacked the means to own the expensive tableware and precious objects that appear in their work and instead they must have been compelled to draw them in the shops of goldsmiths or private homes or guild houses, or perhaps to borrow them for brief periods.'(Loughman, 2010: 50-51).

Figure 41. Harmen Steenwyck, *Still Life: An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* (c.1640). Oil on oak, 39.2 x 50.7 cm. The National Gallery, London.

Figure 42. Pieter Boel, *Allegory of Worldly Vanities* (1663). Oil on canvas, 207 x 260 cm. Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille.

Today artists are continuing to explore the complexity of loss, death and mourning through *vanitas* representations. For the purposes of this research, I am concentrating on the appropriation and utilization of the *vanitas* tradition by contemporary artists to materialize loss, grief and mourning in response to the death of a loved one. In the *vanitas* the body is represented generically. This does not mean that the original artists working within the *vanitas* tradition did not produce specific works as a testimony or homage to particular individuals known personally to them but that the conventions of this genre have subsequently meant that the majority of these works are 'read' as referring to a collective or generic body. Contemporary artists are reconfiguring aspects of this genre in order to represent a particular individual(s) which may also signify the universal or collective body. Whereas in *vanitas* paintings, transience/temporality was represented by a series of signifiers that represented various frozen hiatuses in time, for many artists today it is actualized. Artists are deliberately using unstable materials which disintegrate over time or working with temporal art forms such as performance, live art or relational aesthetics. By knowingly adopting durational art forms and/or using ephemeral materials, artists can actualize fragility, mutability and loss, and so materialize aspects of the grief and mourning process. Objects represented in the still life and *vanitas* genre are historically imbued with recognizable symbolism which makes them a rich source for appropriation in contemporary art practice. A marked difference is that artists will now use the objects themselves (fruit, shoes, sweets, clothes, flowers) as metaphorical substitutes for the body to enable discourse to unfold concerning identity, gender and sexuality, ageing, illness, mortality, grief and mourning.

By applying different conceptual lenses, I analyse the *vanitas* in one of its current forms: the transient cenotaph in art. Firstly I explore my work, Gonzalez-Torres' and Leonard's installations as illness narratives and review them again from the standpoint of the abject body so as to uncover further their unique and deeply personalised readings.

5.3 The materialization of illness narratives

Sheridan Horn; *D(e)ad* (2010-2011).

Felix Gonzalez-Torres; *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A*) (1991) and *"Untitled" (Throat)* (1991).

A table covered in crisp white linen is placed in front of a white background. Placed on top of the table is a shallow heap of wax coated apples. Reading the composition from left to right the fruit changes from rotten, semi-rotten and tired-looking to garden-fresh. The apples in no particular order are bitten into, half-eaten or cored. The majority of the apples remain intact. The fruits placed on the right hand side of the composition look varnished. As the produce decays, the wax casts become opaque and muted in colour. Displayed in this way, the cast apples look like daubs of paint on a palette. Shades range from luminous splashes of red, green and yellow, soft pastel hues to nut browns. The air smells sweet like slightly burnt sugar mixed with earthy undertones.

D(e)ad. September 2010 (Figures 43 and 44).

Figure 43. Sheridan Horn, *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Apples, wax, fruit flies, white linen sheet and table.

Figure 44. Sheridan Horn, *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Apples, wax, fruit flies, white linen sheet and table.

D(e)ad is a memorial to my father, Robert Geoffrey Webb who died on 10th February 1995 (aged 62) from multiple myeloma (cancer of the bone marrow). It is an experiment in using objects as a metaphor for the body and is indebted to Leonard. This memorial is a durational representation which was left to unfold naturally across twelve months. It was exhibited in the art studio where I work and was viewed by members of the school community throughout this period. Every week for six weeks in the early autumn of 2010, windfall apples were picked and gathered. When a small pile of apples had been collected, each one was painted with white wax and laid out in a discreet heap on top of a linen covered table. Each week another mound of apples was placed alongside the previous one. The piles accumulated from left to right across the starched white table cloth rather like a sentence written onto paper. This sculptural line charted the metamorphic change in an apple from rotten to ripe or if 'read' in the opposite direction, fresh to mouldering. After *D(e)ad* had been set up it began to performatively unfold, exuding an aura of descending malaise as the apples began to degenerate. The spread of decay as it undulated through the pile of cast apples mimicked aggressive disease processes. In terms of a body substitute, the work metaphorically 'enacted' or expressed the havoc/chaos that terminal illness wreaks on a person's selfhood.

The action of the bacteria and mould in its consumption of the apples inside their wax shells is analogous to cancer which literally eats the body alive, causing dramatic weight loss. This idea of self-ingestion is reiterated through the presentation of the artwork as a feast or harvest offering nourishment that is neither appetizing nor appealing because of its cosmetic wax coating and necrotizing undertones. The title of this work, *D(e)ad* is a pun, containing the words *dead* and *dad*. Not only this, but nestling within *D(e)ad* is a visual encryption - *(e)* - a tiny coiled worm lodged inside an apple or a hieroglyph of cancer which begins within the genes of a cell. This is reminiscent of the "invisible worm" in Blake's *The Sick Rose* which

> *Has found out thy bed*
> *Of crimson joy:*
> *And his dark secret love*
> *Does thy life destroy.*

> (William Blake).

The rose may be seen to symbolise the body (physical, mental, emotional, sexual and spiritual) which is corrupted by disease, death and angst, symbolised by the worm. The

bacterial corruption taking place in many of the apples in my work is masked by the pristine wax skins[73]. Numerous cancers grow silently inside the body's tissues, bones and organs. This creates an anomaly whereby individuals living a protracted death may look remarkably healthy and lead active lives whilst cancer wreaks havoc from within[74]. As the apples in *D(e)ad* decomposed, some of the wax casts collapsed resulting in cavities which resembled rotten teeth or the honeycombed structure in bones. In multiple myeloma a pathological fracture(s) of the bones may occur. This is not produced by a specific trauma, but is caused by the disease itself which results in demineralized bone. The bone has a characteristic 'honeycomb appearance' and is thus is more susceptible to breakage (Velcelean, 2011). As the apples decayed, the collapsing wax casts simulated this core instability. My deployment of festering apples contrasts with Gonzalez-Torres' evocative use of sweets to produce a tribute to his partner Ross Laycock, who died of an AIDS related illness in 1991 - *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A*) (1991), (Figure 45). As my artwork evolved, its intensifying stench and structural failure also began to figuratively materialize the more unpleasant aspects of death and dying[75]. In his work Gonzalez-Torres materialized his experiences on both a personal level and in terms of challenging sociocultural prejudices towards those living with HIV/AIDS, especially within the gay community.

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[73] As the apples decayed the wax casts became an opaque white. The wax partially hid and contained the rotting process that was occurring beneath its milky surface. This is rather like the European fashion in the eighteenth century whereby elite men and women painted their faces with white makeup to hide skin imperfections such as spots and pock marks. Unfortunately these makeup products contained lead which is highly toxic and caused blackened skin, baldness, the removal of enamel from teeth and even death (Chambers, 2005).

[74] Marcy Westerling, in her article 'What I Learned about Living from Dying of Cancer', observed that: 'The current rules of polite conversation make the journey toward death more challenging. One woman said to me, "It is like we are standing in a different room." We are avoided or jollied up. ("You look so good you can't be terminally ill" is the most hated and common of compliments). These approaches insulate people in our culture from sitting with death, sadly but comfortably (Westerling, 2014).

[75] Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) died of mouth cancer caused by smoking. It left a necrotizing bullet-shaped hole in his cheek which exuded an unpleasant smell. He had to sleep under a mosquito net at night because insects were attracted to the scent of decay. Even more upsetting, his beloved dog Lun refused to come near him:

> *This rejection is terrifying, because it is the rejection of the living world, of nature itself. The dog will act on knowledge that the people who love Freud will not act on; they will supress, overcome, but the dog will not. This is evidence that death is already in the room. The smell is of rotting, of corpses; it would more decently have waited, but it does not wait.*

> (Katie Roiphe, 2016: 80-81).

Figure 45. Felix Gonzalez-Torrez, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A)* (1991). Individually wrapped sweets in multi-coloured cellophane, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation, ideal weight: 175 lb. The Art Institute of Chicago; promised gift of Donna and Howard Stone. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York and The Félix González-Torres Foundation.

Gonzalez-Torres' elegant and succinct work "*Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A*) (1991), consists solely of shiny individually wrapped sweets. The arrangement of this glittering confection is left up to the discretion of the exhibition curator(s) and can be shown in several different formats in the same venue or in diverse exhibition centres, simultaneously. Each manifestation of sweets initially weighs 175 pounds (Laycock's ideal body weight index when healthy). Participants are invited to take a sweet as a gift, an act which may significantly reduce the work over time or even make it void. This evokes the gradual emaciation of Laycock's body and a lingering death thus 'enacting' a characteristic feature of this disease. It is a performative substitute for a direct social interaction with Laycock. Through predetermined and chance encounters, we live on in others. The participants fleeting encounter with this body substitute will eventually result in the works physical diminution, pointing to a serious political subtext. A signature of Gonzalez-Torres' oeuvre is that it is viral. In this instance though, the artist was commenting upon the contamination caused by the destructive HIV virus. By prompting Laycock to be consumed/subsumed by the general public, the artist highlighted the indiscriminate nature of disease and the genuine neglect and disappearance of individuals suffering from HIV/AIDS within subcultures, such as the gay community because of homophobic resistance.

Gonzalez-Torres' succinct evocation of an illness narrative within his work is also evident in his metaphorical portrait of his father, who died three weeks after Laycock. *"Untitled" (Throat)* (1991) consists of his father's white linen handkerchief, upon which are placed a few of Luden's honey lemon cough drops like a humble votive offering (Figure 46). His father died of throat cancer and this medicinal sweet helped to temporarily soothe his chronic condition. This heart-rending portrait could so easily be overlooked in the vastness of a gallery space, because of its small size and seeming insignificance. Despite being unassuming it pinpoints in object form his father's suffering. This intimate work may be an anti-memorial to his father, but it is nevertheless a distillation of pathos. This is one of the few candy artworks in which the viewer is not allowed to take one of the cough sweets.

Figure 46. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled" (Throat) (1991). Cough drops, individually wrapped in blue and white opaque wrapping and handkerchief. Endless supply, dimensions 4 x 40 x 40 cm. Courtesy of the Astrup Fearnley Collection/Museet, Oslo.

A salient feature of *D(e)ad* which is inherent in all of the artists' work in my corpus is the simultaneous materialization of individualized and generic modes of death and dying as related to specific illness narratives. Furthermore, artists such as Wilke, Spence, Gonzalez-Torres, Leonard[76] and myself also address the ways in which those suffering from diseases such as cancer and AIDS may be stigmatized.

5.4 The abject body.

Sheridan Horn; *D(e)ad* (2010-2011).

Zoe Leonard; *Strange Fruit (for David)*, (1992-1997).

Felix Gonzalez-Torres; "*Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A*) (1991).

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[76] Leonard was a member of the international ACT UP (the AIDS coalition to Unleash Power) a political group formed in New York, 1987 to help fight against the lack of positive legislation at government level in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Her artwork *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997), composed of hundreds of sewn desiccated fruit shells scattered across the gallery floor alludes to corpses. It is a protest work against the American government's failure to act swiftly enough in order to stop the vilification of homosexuals and to provide medical research funding.

The stench of fermenting apples fugs the air. It is a suffocating combination of sickly sweetness laced with fetid vinegar. On approaching the work a miasma of fruit flies silently drift up and cascade down again, eager to bloat themselves on the soft pulp and juices. The majority of casts are a milky colour. A few apples remain visible through the wax glaze. The casts are an assortment of insipid greens, yellows, orangey-pinks, ochres, browns and greyish blues. Green mould is growing on exposed mushy tissue. This artwork is very unpleasant and yet the active decomposition is equally compelling. Most of the wax shells remain intact. The putrefying apples have caused some of the casts to fracture, splinter or implode. The liquefying contents imperceptibly dribble out of these ruptured forms, staining the white table cloth. The stains vary from coffee coloured washes to dark chocolate browns. Juices have trickled over the side of the table soiling the linen.

D(e)ad. March 2011 (Figures 47 and 48).

Figure 47. Sheridan Horn, *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Apples, wax, fruit flies, white linen sheet and table.

Figure 48. Sheridan Horn. *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). White linen sheet impregnated with traces of decayed apples and wax. Detail. Top image September 2010. Bottom image March 2011.

This performative work is not only a metaphorical portrait of my father's death and dying but also of the larger social body. The horizontal composition of *D(e)ad* offers a metaphorical stand-in for the recumbent body; as wounded, abject, ill or dying. By covering the apples with wax skins, each of the fruits original contours are captured and delineated. Inside the casts the apples continued to bruise, rot, dissolve or shrivel up. As the apples decomposed, some of the wax shells were unable to maintain their integrity and collapsed or shattered. The performative tension between containment and spillage offers another level of resonance especially when viewed in terms of the abject body. When acutely sick, it is not always possible for the sufferer to maintain physical and/or psychological control. Bodily integrity (physical, mental or behavioral) may be impossible to uphold or sustain. The abject body in exceeding the boundaries of social acceptability becomes transgressive. James Elkins in his analysis of images portraying cut flesh in art commented on this notion of bodily transgression as represented metaphorically though objects:

> *If we look for signs of viscera in fine art, then one of the best places would be Dutch still-life painting, where meat and fruit are commonplace reminders of the body's ingredients. Pieter Aertsen, Frans Snyders, Willem Kalf, and other painters have an affection for objects that have both skin and "viscera": peeled oranges, torn bread, mincemeat pies with flaky crusts, translucent sausages, melons with dried rinds and juicy insides - not to mention freshly butchered joints. There are also reminders of the body's fluid insides: carafes of red wine, pats of butter, tubs and basins of lard, pitchers of milk, bowls swimming with egg yolks. Just as Balthus's still lifes reveal relationships between bodies, any of the Dutch still-life painters could be studied for their ways of setting out the relationship between elements in the body.*

(Elkins, 1999: 126).

During this era, Dutch still-life painters approached the analysis of organic objects as a form of scientific enquiry evidencing the acknowledged practice of anatomical dissection whereby the cadaver was laid out, flayed, cut open, sliced, chopped and minutely inspected as a means to gain understanding of its internal structures. The recording of this type of scrutiny can be seen in the anatomical illustrations produced by Andreas Versalius (1514-1564). It is this notion of food equating with dissected bodily elements which contemporary artists have reconfigured to act as performative stand-ins for specific individuals. Still-life objects such as fruit, flowers and sweets with their epidermal

boundaries and fleshy contents offer metaphorical substitutes for the human body. Just as fruit and flowers change colour and shape as they mature, bloom and age, our personal histories leave surface traces – the epidermis is constantly being shed and bodily contours imperceptibly change until death and even beyond death as the body decays.

Whilst mourning the death of many friends, especially the artist David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), all of them from an AIDS related illness, Zoe Leonard produced her iconic work *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997)[77] using discarded fruit skins (Figure 49). The psychological processing of her profound loss was at times solicited whilst she performed the task of sewing up empty fruit skins. She ended up sewing approximately three hundred skins - bananas, lemons, oranges, grapefruits and avocados - with coloured thread, wire, plastic, sinew, needles, buttons and zips (Figures 50 and 51). Leonard's hollowed out, sutured and decorated husks are displayed in a random arrangement on the gallery floor. These eviscerated and mummified rinds are traces, inverses or 'echoes' of the fruits former existence as fresh bright produce with delicately perfumed skins of vivid hues containing juicy edible contents. The artist's mindful sewing and adornments of these fragile organic membranes and their subsequent decay, serve to make these fruits 'strange'. Her careful additions of threads, zips and buttons allude to clothing and accessories and with the fruits inherent denotation as previously soft and fleshy objects these collapsed and shrivelled carapaces are uncanny metaphors for the diseased, wounded and ageing body as well as the corpse. The skin of a fruit is like the human epidermis in that it is easily bruised, cut or damaged. Words used to describe the skin and meat of fruits are equally applicable to human skin: polished, glowing, smooth, soft, flushed, plump and fragrant. An individual's health and age is signalled through the condition of their skin and flesh; emotional states such as grief, anger, fear and shame are visible in the colour and surface of the epidermis.

Leonard's sewing-up of fruit skins suggests the sterile suturing of wounds, whereas the fermenting collapse in my work is malign. The materiality of *D(e)ad* is one of structural fatigue. This, combined with the horizontal posture of the wax casts on the table, makes it analogous to that of an invalid lying down on their sick bed. The colour and texture of the decaying soft fruit flesh encased in fragile wax shells as it began to suppurate, fungate, ulcerate and become gangrenous is analogous to the diseased body.

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[77] The title *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997) refers both to the offensive term 'fruit' meaning a male homosexual and a song released by Billy Holliday entitled *Strange Fruit*, 1939 which exposed racism in America and the grotesque lynching of African Americans.

Figure 49. Zoe Leonard, *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997). Orange, banana, grapefruit, lemon, and avocado peels with thread, zippers, buttons, sinew, needles, plastic, wire, stickers, fabric and trim wax. Dimensions vary with installation. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Figure 50. Zoe Leonard, *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997). Detail. Orange husk and white cotton thread.

Figure 51. Zoe Leonard, *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997). Detail.

The leaky shells produced faecal coloured gravy which seeped into the table cloth. My work borders on the repellant. Like the abject, it results in an urge to recoil and a simultaneous fascination to stare intently: it both repels and attracts. The ebbing away of organic matter through decomposition mimics the enervative decline associated with illness. The build-up of fluids in the casts and the general leaky nature of this work symbolises my father's gradual bodily decline ending in haemorrhaging, coma and death.

The abject body is a foreground feature in *D(e)ad* whereas in Gonzalez-Torres' and Leonard's work it is present but materializes less obtrusively. Gonzalez-Torres' glittering representation of Laycock and Leonard's zesty fruit skins as symbolic of Wojnarowicz capture the jouissance of these two characters and this heightens the sense of their enervating decline as the work 'performs'. Exploring these works from different conceptual angles, uncovers the web of meaning-making concerning each artist's materializations of loss, grief and mourning. In the next section I hone in on the types of mechanisms being used to express individualized, metaphorical aspects of death and dying.

5.5 *Ars moriendi*: metaphorical enactments of death and dying

Sheridan Horn; *D(e)ad* (2010-2011).

This still life composition is a morass of putrefaction which clots the air. The waxy colours and textures are reminiscent of gangrene, necrosis and adiopocere – black, muddy greens, red browns and pale grey whites. Fruit flies fornicate, gorge and when disturbed rise and fall in undulating clouds. Layers of rotten sediment and marbling the result of liquefaction is visible through the semi-opaque casts. Fruit liquor has pooled and coagulated on top of the table forming deep brown stains. The gaseous activity occurring inside the casts has resulted in more breakages. Shards of wax litter the display. Inside the broken wax shells are the shrivelled remains of mummified apples.

D(e)ad. July 2011 (Figures 52 and 53).

Figure 52. Sheridan Horn, *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Putrefied apples, wax, fruit flies, white linen sheet and table.

Figure 53. Sheridan Horn, *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Detail. Putrefied apples, wax, fruit flies, white linen sheet and table.

These atomized apples and their casts combined to produce a metaphorical dead body laid out on a bed/gurney/mortuary slab or tomb. As the work progressed, the fruits shrivelled up or disappeared, but despite this, the majority of wax casts continued to maintain the overall integrity of the original assemblage albeit in a slightly shrunken state. The artwork performatively enacts 'death' and 'dying'[78]. It evolved from being a predominately rosy-hued, clean and aromatic composition to one that became progressively foul-smelling and messy, evidencing death and the rotting cadaver. The last time that I saw my father, he was laid out in a coffin wearing a pale-blue satin burial garment. He was waxen, felt ice cold and was visibly shrunken. He looked eviscerated - *D(e)ad*. This corpse was a simulation of my father, a waxen body shell. The wax casts of the apples whilst tracing the fruits original form simultaneously present the actual fruit housed within as rotting. This produced an incongruous doubling effect that is analogous to that of the corpse.

It is the durational performative aspect of these types of artworks that allows the narratives of death, dying and mourning to unfold. In *D(e)ad* the wax casts evidence a futile attempt to halt time rather like the process of taking a photograph[79]. Not only do the

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[78] Aileen Mackeogh's cenotaph *Deadheading* (1993) also enacts the 'death' and 'dying' of her infant son, Luke (Mackeogh 1995: 96-101). The viewer is met by a long line of wilting lilies, their heads pressed between glass and their stems and bulbs left to trail limply onto the ground. Although presented as an ensemble, each flower head is isolated on an individually raised platform. Interestingly the lilies are caught between a state of preservation and deterioration. They are evocative of flower pressing, cryosection images such as those produced by slicing a frozen cadaver, or microscopic slide specimens. As with Leonard's discarded fruit skins and Horn's decaying fruit, the process of the lilies' decomposition is actualized in real time so that the pristine white petals faded and became translucent like a series of sepia coloured x-rays. Death is premised upon this enactment of decay which is brought explicitly into the immediate reality of the viewer. This dying organic matter is also an oblique reference to the embalming power of memory: that of trying to preserve the memory of the one who has left even if that memory is a fiction reworked in the present. One can interpret each part of the flowering lily plant as reminiscent of different aspects of Luke Mackeogh's death. The flower, although decaying, is beautiful like her son. The bulb also alludes to another aspect of his death which is that of regeneration, because his organs were harvested and then used to sustain new life in others. In this way Mackeogh's work brings the process of death and regeneration full circle as suggested by the title, *Deadheading*. Lilies are also associated with funerals and white lilies are a symbol of purity and innocence. Thus the artist weaves a web of associations within the work causing the viewer to become embroiled in the contentious stages of the life cycle.

[79] Another common art form that produces a posthumous portrait is the death mask. This is created by taking the cast of a dead person's face in either wax or plaster. The fashion peaked in 1820-1830's. The process is still undertaken today. On receiving a death mask of her partner Sebastian Horsley delivered in a shoe box, the art critic Rachel Campbell-Johnston said, 'The corpse is heartbreaking in its banality. But the death mask belongs to that limbo land between the animate being and its inert mass. It is less a face than an interface. It opens a pair of doors, leads you away from the living presence and into that long corridor that carries you towards the land of the afterlife perhaps. What will I do with it? I still don't know. For a while I might talk to it. I will certainly cry a lot. But, in the end, it is only an object. Anything that consoles is fake, Sebastian always insisted. All our most precious things are just junk that has not broken yet' (Campbell-Johnston, 2010).

casts momentarily pause time but the rotting apples housed within simultaneously display the flow of time towards entropy. In the *vanitas* there is a cognitive elision that occurs between the synchronous representations of temporality - that exquisite moment of hushed stillness, the slower recognition of gently passing time and then the acknowledgement of a vertiginous telescoping of time towards putrefaction and mortality. Ephemerality is depicted through the representation of vases packed full of diaphanous arrangements of flowers with a delicate wilting blossom(s) placed or fallen to one side: bruised fruit, soap bubbles, fragile butterflies and the slide of precious objects at the exact tipping point of falling and breaking. Time is contemporaneously represented as lingering, cyclic, transient, speeded-up, never-ending and non-existent. In contemporary works of mourning, time is *actualized*. The performative spectacle of apples rotting, sweets being offered as a gift or fruit skins/flowers withering, time is durational - the arrow of time flies in one direction from past to future. Leonard did explore the possibilities of preserving *Strange Fruit* with the conservator Christian Schedemann who took two years to find a suitable solution. However, upon seeing the results, Leonard rejected this outcome because she realized that the works integrity was not the appearance of decay, but the actualization of its disintegration. 'The very essence of the piece is to decompose. The absurdity, irony, pain and humour of it is that we attempt to hang on to memory, but we forget. All elements wear down in time, change form.' (Leonard, 1997: 18). Nevertheless, approximately twenty five fruits have been preserved for posterity[80].

It is the durational tempo of these works as performative 'dying' that metaphorically re-enacts the death of a loved one. However, this raises another intriguing feature with regards to these types of performative artworks because in order to 'act out' an individual's 'death' and 'dying', it is equally necessary to symbolically resurrect and materialize that particular person or generic body. This raises an interesting question: Can the *vanitas* be 'read' as a metaphorical portrait of a historic generic body that the viewer through their cognitive and phenomenological engagement resurrects or reanimates?

5.6 *Ars Moriendi*: metaphorical holographic portraits of the dead – resurrective practice of the generic body in the *vanitas* and of specific individuals in the contemporary art cenotaph

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[80] O'Neill, 2007 provides more information regarding the problems posed by the acquisition of Leonard's work for The Philadelphia Museum of Art, namely the challenges encountered when preserving, curating, and housing ephemeral artworks in galleries and museums. See also Temkin, 1998.

Sheridan Horn; *D(e)ad* **(2010-2011).**

Felix Gonzalez-Torres; *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A)* **(1991).**

Zoe Leonard; *Strange Fruit (for David)* **(1992-1997).**

Davis Wojnarowicz; *A Fire in My Belly* **(1986-1987).**

Compositionally *D(e)ad* is similar to the *vanitas* with objects being positioned on a horizontal plane set within a very shallow depth of field. Traditionally, the *vanitas* depicts spotlit arrangements of ordinary and expensive merchandise located inside murky and airless interior spaces. Like the apples in *D(e)ad*, the objects in the *vanitas* are reminiscent of the body (a symbolic generic body) placed in a tightly sealed space like a sarcophagus or crypt. The inertness of these objects, temporally frozen in time, especially when viewed retrospectively, metaphorically materialize not only the living generic body, but also the corpse (as signified by skulls, bones, dust, illustrations of an ecorche, insects and decaying flowers).

The generic body as symbolically represented in *vanitas* paintings refers in the main to merchants (mercantile consumerist items), members of royalty (crowns, sceptre, ermine cape, portraits), soldiers (armoury, weapons), bishops (mitre), members of parliament (treatises), artisans (fine crafted goods), artists (palette and brushes and portraits of the artist in reflective surfaces), writers (quill and ink) actors (mask), musicians (musical instruments), poets (laurel wreath), family (portraits of men, women and children) and scientists (mathematical equipment, globes). Pleasurable pastimes are evidenced in the form of objects associated with smoking, drinking, hunting, reading, listening to music, travel and gambling. These activities represent pleasures associated with solitude as well as communal socializing. Sensual delights are shown in abundance evoking erotic, cognitive and spiritual desires. Symbolic representations of the generic body in historical *vanitas* paintings, centred upon such issues as lascivious consumerism, bodily gratification and spiritual integrity, continue to resonate profoundly with audiences today. In essence these works are encoded holographic representations of bodily apparitions from a bygone era and/or encrypted fragments of consciousness.

The layered temporality (past, present and future) recorded in these works, becomes activated by the cognitive engagement of a spectator(s) who metaphorically bring the generic dead body or bodies back to life. This allows for the possibility of a discourse to unfold whereby a tiny aspect of the historical past is cited in the present moment. Or, to put it another way, encrypted knowledge from the past is projected into

the present. The term hologram comes from the Greek words *holos*, "whole" and *gramma*, "message". A hologram is a three-dimensional free-standing projected image of an object(s), figure(s) or scene:

> *Creating the illusion that things are located where they are not is the quintessential feature of a hologram. As mentioned, if you look at a hologram it seems to have extension in space, but if you pass your hand though it you will discover there is nothing there. Despite what your senses tell you, no instrument will pick up the presence of any abnormal energy or substance where the hologram appears to be hovering. This is because a hologram is a <u>virtual</u> image, an image that appears to be where it is not, and possesses no more extension in space than does the three-dimensional image you see of yourself when you look in a mirror. Just as the image in the mirror is located in the silvering on the mirror's back surface, the actual location of a hologram is always in the photographic emulsion on the surface of the film recording it.*

<div align="right">(Michael Talbot, 1991: 25).</div>

Obviously the *vanitas* is not a hologram but it is a distant precursor. One of the properties of a hologram is that if it is cut up into pieces, each section will contain the entire original object or scene, but viewed from a slightly different angle. Although this is not a property of a painting, the idea of viewing an object or scene from several different perspectives within a singular work is a commonplace feature in the Dutch still life and *vanitas*. In addition, mimesis and aesthetic pleasure is conveyed not only tacitly but also phenomenologically. Like the hologram, the *vanitas* is located in the representation of illusionistic surfaces[81]. The illusionistic rendering of surfaces through the careful depiction of drawn objects and the sheerness of the paintings patina are almost fetishised[82].

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[81] Sveltlana Alpers in her book *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (1983) discusses the Dutch painters' intense obsession with surfaces. She pinpoints its origins to the subtle dichotomy between southern and northern concepts of pictorial perspective. In 1435 Leon Battista Alberti published *De pictura* a treatise on painting used as a reference material by the Italian Renaissance artists and in 1505 Jean Pélerin, known as Viator, published *De Artificiali Perspectiva* used primarily by northern artists. In Alberti's treatise on perspective he places the viewer's eye at an external distance in front of the picture plane, whilst Viator locates the spectator's eye 'on the very picture surface itself' (Alpers, 1983: 53). Whilst Italian painters set about conveying the 'unity of a body in space' as seen by the authoritative position of a single viewer, the Dutch painters were more interested in portraying a multiplicity of viewpoints to disrupt and disaggregate the viewing experience (Alpers, 1983: 58-59).

[82] Attention to surface detail is an integral aspect of these works from concept, production to resolution. During production, the raw stretched canvas on a frame or wooden panel surface was carefully primed and sanded in order to create a glass smooth ground upon which the composition could be mapped out. Objects were materialized using brushes to delicately apply thin washes, daubs, dots and globules of oil paint across

Sveltlana Alpers astutely observed that the Dutch artists' fascination with the materiality of the object coincided with the mediation of the world via scientific technological analysis. Aspects of objects hitherto unseen by the naked eye became visible through the use of micro, macro and telescopic lenses. This intensified visual perception so that objects became vigorously interrogated and catalogued in new ways. The revelatory magnification of objects allowed for the scrutiny of minute surface details. The object could be dissected, sliced, divided and opened up or drawn out to reveal interior mechanisms. Exterior and interior aspects could be mapped and miniscule variations discerned. This type of intense objective scrutiny is evident in *vanitas* paintings such as the scoping exercise of a skull depicted from six different angles by Aelbert Janz van der Schoor (c.1603- c.1672) in *Vanitas Still Life* c.1640-1672 (Figure 54) (Alpers, 1983: 83-84):

> *Whether it is edibles such as cheese, a pie, herring, fruit, and nuts, or collectibles such as shells, vessels, and watches, we are offered the inside, or underside, as well as the outer view. Cheeses are cut into, pies spill out their fillings beneath the shelter of crust, herring are cut to reveal flesh as well as gleaming skin. Shells and vessels of precious metal or glass topple on their sides (occasionally we even see the jagged edge of a broken goblet), and watches are inevitably opened to reveal their works. Objects are exposed to the probing eye not only by the technique of flaying them, but also by reflection: the play of light on the surface distinguishes glass from metal, from cloth, from pastry, and also serves to multiply surfaces. The underside of a vessel's foot is doubled by its reflection in the pewter plate. Each thing exposes multiple surfaces in order to be more fully present to the eye.*

(Alpers, 1983: 90-91).

The rich abundance of surfaces and the fetishistic attention paid to the materiality of objects in the *vanitas* makes them works of heightened visual opulence. Through their application of oil paint onto canvas, the Dutch artists created astonishing illusionistic surfaces such as luminous shells, reflective glassware, frayed books, soft leather, starched linen and fine bone porcelain. Infinite care was taken to describe the precise play of fluctuating light impressions upon differing surfaces. The finished painting was then glazed with shellac to produce a thin translucent patina. The aesthetic veneer of the *vanitas* is designed to seduce the viewer. A holographic object deceives the spectator into thinking an object is real because the object appears different when the viewer moves position.

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the planar surface (Woodall, 2013: 126-127).

Figure 54. Aelbert Jansz van der Schoor, *Vanitas still life* (skulls on a table) (c.1640-1672). Oil on canvas, 63.5 cm x 73 cm. Rijksmuseum.

Whereas the holographic image delights the spectator by tricking them into thinking an object is *real*, the *vanitas* draws attention to its artifice; since the objects are *known* to be unreal they enchant through their play of mirage like surfaces.

Knowing that the era when these Dutch *vanitas* paintings were executed has long since passed makes the plaintive holographic-like messages encoded within them even more poignant and disquieting. These 'Marie-Celeste' environments whereby individuals seem to have momentarily left the room[83], perhaps to be espied in the reflective surface of an object, seem hauntingly familiar. Figures and faces of groups or individuals flicker like ghostly presences outside the picture frame on the periphery of one's vision or within the mind's eye. Tables of detritus evoke rituals, pastimes and lives all interchangeable with experiences today. The layered signification embodied in these paintings make them agents for discourse which oscillate and circulate around contradictory subjective/objective issues such as excess and loss, greed and frugality, purpose and futility, transience and permanence, life and death. These concerns from a previous epoch still reverberate in the present and will continue to do so. Like the mirror, a symbol of vanity, the *vanitas* reflects back to the spectator an opportunity for self-awareness regarding personal desires, flaws, yearnings and wants.

Contemporary artists have referenced back to the *vanitas* in their recycling of its pictorial and cultural imagery. It has evolved from a Christian concept into many different outcomes such as the personalised art cenotaph. Like the *ars moriendi* texts, a core tenet of the historical *vanitas* is the abandonment of earthly desires in favour of Christian salvation and everlasting life. In contemporary art memorials individuals 'live' again as metaphorical holograph-like characters. This 'resurrection' is a secularized form which takes place in this life rather than the next. It is evidenced in Gonzalez-Torres' *"Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A)* (1991) whereby a replenishment of sweets allows Ross Laycock to metaphorically 'live' once more. Like the traditional *vanitas* paintings, this artwork is sensual and alluring. The sweets can be touched, sifted through, removed as mementos, carefully unwrapped and slowly sucked, rapidly gobbled up or offered to someone else. To live we must consume. The devouring of another's body for the purposes of sustenance is associated with breastfeeding, cannibalism and transubstantiation. To consume the

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[83] Dutch artists capture the sense of someone within the immediate vicinity through their portrayal of recent human activity such as the depiction of glowing embers, a snuffed out candle, oil lamp or taper, blown soap bubbles, recently peeled fruit, cracked nuts, a full glass of wine or beer and arrangements of fresh fruit and flowers or a smashed glass and disarray.

body of a lover is a delicious sexual pleasure:

> *Cause I would give sweets for my sweet, sugar for my honey*
> *Your perfect kiss thrills me so*
> *Sweets for my sweet, sugar for my honey*

(Lyrics by: Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman, originally recorded by The Drifters, 1962).

Much like the Drifters lyrics, Gonzalez-Torres' sugary temptations evoke the fun, laughter, glitz and kitsch glamour associated with queer culture. 'Sweetheart', 'sweetness', 'honey' or 'sugar' are affectionate forms of address. The use of the term 'sweet' as an endearment or an allusion to erotic delight is gloriously evident in *"Untitled" (Lover Boys)* (1991) where the pile of sweets equals the ideal weight of both artist and partner commingled (355 pounds) and thus metaphorically conjures up their joyful loving union[84]. The knowledge that both these lovers died prematurely of AIDS related illnesses makes this work profoundly moving.

While the *vanitas* painting is an illusional feast for the eyes, Gonzalez-Torres' tantalizing eye-candy banquet literally delivers an actual taste bud frisson[85]. The general proviso when viewing artworks in a gallery is the direct link between custodial preservation and the prohibition of physical touch. In the *vanitas*, objects were carefully selected to appeal to sensual memory activated by mimetic visual cues: **smell** the perfume of flowers or a burning taper; **touch** the form, weight and texture of objects; **taste** aroused by items of food and drink; **sound** via musical scores and instruments. *Vanitas* paintings solicit sensual engagement via mimetic clues in contrast to Gonzalez-Torres' candy 'spills' which ignite a direct experiential engagement - the sight of a treasure trove of confectionery, the buzz of temptation, the feel, sound, smell of the sweet being unwrapped and the burst of sweetness upon the tongue. This provides a social interaction with the holographical Laycock which is fun and enjoyable. These types of performative encounters are experienced directly through the senses and alter as the work unfolds. An early metaphorical encounter with Robert Webb is pleasing and perfumed

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[84] Felix Gonzalez-Torres' immense love for Ross Laycock is obvious in the fact that he made the majority of his works for Laycock both before and after his partner's death. As he stated in an interview with Robert Storr, 'When people ask me, "Who is your public?" I say honestly, without skipping a beat, "Ross". The public was Ross. The rest of the people just come to the work' (Storr, 1995: 24-32; Cattelan, 2007).

[85] Equally, although the notion of bad odours is represented in historical *vanitas* painting through the depiction of rotting matter, it is nevertheless a sanitized version because smell is evoked through visual association. In my work, on the other hand, the reek of putrefaction at times predominated to such an extent that the visual element of the work was overwhelmed.

(soil/honey/wax) reminiscent of autumnal walks in the woods or gardening. He comes across as a warm, genial character. This contrasts with an interaction with him months later when the visual hysteria of flies agitating around putrefying matter mimics the psychological ferment that death and dying entails - not only for the one who is living whilst dying but also for people who are closely involved. The performative aspect of this work evolved soundlessly, mirroring Webb's silent and dignified acceptance of escalating enervation and bodily collapse. The artist David Wojnarowicz is actively conjured up in Leonard's *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997) (Figures 55, 56 and 57). This is because there is a direct connective thread that links Leonard's act of sewing up fruit skins with Wojnarowicz loosely stitching two-halves of bread and his gesture of sewing-his-mouth-shut with red thread. I will briefly expand on this link because Wojnarowicz's work is nested within Leonard's.

In 1986-1987 Wojnarowicz produced two silent films (super 8mm) entitled *A Fire in My Belly*, a 13 minute (film in progress) and a 7 minute (excerpt) found in the artist's collection of film reels[86]. These reels are spliced from footage taken on a trip to Mexico and explore what it was like for him to live with AIDS in the late 1980s. They convey his sense of grief, despair and outrage. The films portray a collage of photographs and moving images that comment upon cycles of life and violent death. The 7 minute (excerpt) combines and recombines images which portray human disability, suffering and religious iconography and a sequence of two halves of bread being loosely sewn together, interspersed with Wojnarowicz suturing up his mouth with red twine (Figures 55, 56, 57, and 58). These are potent statements which allude to the Last Supper and the Crucifixion combined with the pernicious and silent suffering of AIDS victims. Wojnarowicz's bleeding mouth, juxtaposed with images of a sewn-up loaf represent aspects of woundedness. His friend, mentor and lover, the photographer, Peter Hujar (1934-1987) was dying of an AIDS related illness having been diagnosed as HIV-positive in 1984 and Wojnarowicz himself was also diagnosed as HIV-positive in 1987. By sewing up the skin around his mouth he symbolically opens up and exposes the wounded self, whilst simultaneously sealing it back up again. This sealing-in of pain formulates a powerful political statement. When the mouth is sewn shut the voice becomes muted and without an intake of nourishment, the body will become emaciated and die. Wojnarowicz's representation exposes the government's refusal during this period of time to grant funds

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[86] Wojnarowicz, (1986-1987). 'Electronic Arts Intermix: A Fire in My Belly, David Wojnarowicz'.

and practical support for HIV/AIDS victims resulting in an escalating pandemic. Leonard's suturing of fruit skins on the other hand is a reparative gesture. She is trying to mend the un-mendable. Nevertheless her mindful act of restoration references Wojnarowicz's artwork. Towards the end of his life Wojnarowicz wrote in his diary

> *All I feel today is sorrow. All I feel is loss. I'm a glass human disappearing in the rain standing away from all of you waving my invisible arms and hands shouting my invisible words. I'm disappearing but not fast enough. I feel this blank spot, a great emptiness inside of me and for a while it made me nervous. Maybe because of my sense that I may never work again, never have reason or substance to work or paint or make photographs or make things that have meaning outside of myself. In that state what I make has meaning that circulates inside rather than outside, which defeats communication other than with myself. I move through landscapes or among people and all I see are echoes, echoes of what was familiar not too long ago, but the echoes are a skin of what was once an experience or a moment of living while now I can't feel the experience any longer. With Phil's death and maybe my own in front of me I am left with threads, threads of intellect, of emotion, of desire, of impulse, of survival, of need.*

[David Wojnarowicz August, 1991 (Scholder, 1999: 262-263)].

In an uncanny intimation, Wojnarowicz could almost be describing Leonard's metaphorical landscape of vulnerability: sutured, fruit husks scattered across a gallery floor. These expressions of his loss and grief are mirrored in the humble eulogy created as a tribute to him. He is both conceptually and subjectively materialized within Leonard's cenotaph. Because Wojnarowicz is embedded within this work, aspects of him can be holographically resurrected by means of cognizant interaction.

Figure 55. David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (bread sculpture)* (1988–1989). Bread, string, needle, newspaper, 3 x 13 x 6 in. (7.6 x 33 x 15.2 cm). Courtesy of The Estate of David Wojnarowicz; photograph provided by P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York.

Figure 56. David Wojnorowicz, [a still frame] *A Fire in My Belly* (1986-1987). Shot in Mexico and New York, housed in *The Fales Library and Special Collections*: *New York University*, TRT 13:00 Super 8mm silent. 20:56 mins. Colour/ black and white.

Figure 57. David Wojnorowicz, [a still frame] *A Fire in My Belly* (1986-1987). Shot in Mexico and New York, housed in *The Fales Library and Special Collections*: *New York University*, TRT 13:00 Super 8mm silent. 20:56 mins. Colour/ black and white.
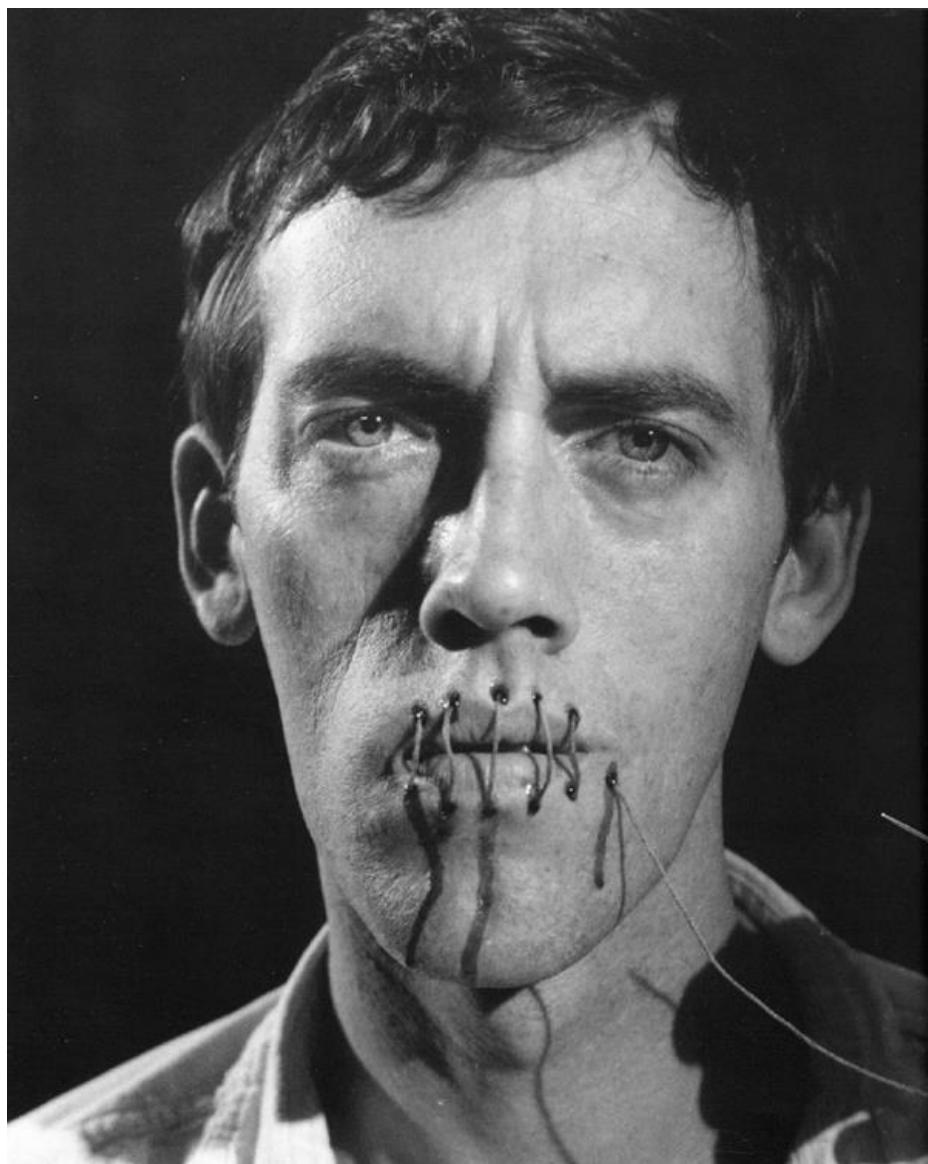
Figure 58. David Wojnorowicz with a sewn-up mouth. Poster image for the Rosa von Praunheim film *Silence=Death* (1989), photographed by Andreas Sterzing.

In art it is easier to trace the seeds or genus of a new art form retrospectively rather than predict its evolution pre-emptively. The *vanitas* is a sophisticated form of encrypted holographic knowledge appertaining to human agency. Its rich eidetic representations of wealth, rituals and pastimes serve to evoke haunting impressions of bygone lives which conflate with lived experiences today. Taking the *vanitas* as a performative depiction of the generic body, it is possible to track its present day re-emergence as a holographic-like cenotaph honouring a loved one. Because these works are durational, they offer the viewer a direct social interaction with that individual so that they momentarily resurrect them. As testimonials, these works also materialize the artists' grieving processes. In the next section I continue to explore the ways in which loss is evoked in the *vanitas* through aesthetic rendering. I then proceed to use this information to discover how artists today are reconfiguring these representations of loss to express their own grieving processes.

5.7 Grief and mourning: premonitions of mortality as elucidated through the *vanitas* and the actualization of grieving processes as materialized in the contemporary art cenotaph

Sheridan Horn; *D(e)ad* **(2010-2011).**

Felix Gonzalez-Torres; "*Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A*) (1991).

Zoe Leonard; *Strange Fruit (for David)* **(1992-1997).**

The still life has been removed. A linen sheet is laid out on the floor containing an imprint left by the decaying liquefaction of apples. The trace is one of shadows - circles, ripples and stains depicted in hues of ochre, black-browns and pale blue-greys.

D(e)ad. July 2011 (Figures 59 and 60).

Figure 59. Sheridan Horn, *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Detail. White linen sheet impregnated with traces of decayed apples and wax.

Figure 60. Sheridan Horn, *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). Detail. White linen sheet impregnated with traces of decayed apples and wax.

The leaky casts signify the weeping/wounded body. The metamorphosis of the apples locked inside the wax casts as they became bruised and oozing, mimicked/materialized the pain and woundedness of grief. Stains resulting from the decomposition of fruit on the white cloth created an elusive image of apples. The fluid brownish marks are suggestive of caked dried blood. This trace or after-image recalls the Shroud of Turin which is purported to have wrapped the dead body of Christ so that a faint image of him is imprinted into the cloth, seemingly produced by the absorption of his blood and sweat. In my artwork, the cloth remnant is a figurative memento of my father's death and dying. Religious icons such as the Shroud of Turin or *ars moriendi* texts or the *vanitas* encourage Christian beliefs through the presentation of allegorical evidence of transcendent redemption. However, the cloth in my work with its imprints of organic putrefaction is a secular equivalent which metaphorically alludes to the messiness of death without any promise of salvation. Loss and grief are performatively 'played out' in *D(e)ad* through the weeping liquefaction of decaying matter.

In the *vanitas*, affective sensual desire and gratification is aroused by the careful arrangement of mimetic visual cues. However, these signifiers also act as doubling agents simultaneously indicating the opposite - in this instance, the cessation of pleasure and the inevitability of profound loss upon death. The perceived loss of one's performativity, status, knowledge, achievements and accumulative wealth is underscored by the tantalizing objects which reflect back the vacuity of narcissistic pride. Emptiness or life ebbing away is also signalled by an upturned or broken glass. Within the formulation of these alluring objects nestles a kernel of melancholy, heightened by the compositional device of placing some objects at the exact tipping point before collapse and possible breakage, thus mimicking the psychological process and anxiety associated with imminent or actual loss.

In his essay *On Transience* (1915-1916), Freud linked beauty, transience and mourning. He surmised that because beauty is transient it can result in two possible trains of thought: being ephemeral, beauty leads to an enhanced sense of appreciation and delight in the beholder or conversely, that precisely because beauty is fragile and temporal, it arouses unpleasant sensations of prescient mourning. He believed that the creation/appreciation of beauty is a psychological mechanism to sublimate grief and overcome loss. Freud concluded that it is the human capacity to create/appreciate aesthetics, even with its attendant evocations of fragility, loss and mourning that ensures

cultural survival after death. These presentiment observations were made by Freud during the destructive trauma of the First World War.

Kristeva builds upon Freud's astute observations. She elucidates *how* enigmatic beauty as communicated through the arts, sublimates grief and posits that it is the 'language' of art (prosody, rhythm, semiotics, signs, symbols, allegory) which provides the subject with an opportunity to commune with and possibly transcend 'our unspeakable anguishes' or 'the depressive void' (Kristeva, 1989: 14, 97-99). 'The beautiful object that can bewitch us into its world seems to us more worthy of adoption than any loved or hated cause for wound or sorrow' (Kristeva, 1989: 100). But as Philippe Ariès discerned, even when the corpse/death is presented as a beautiful object 'this apotheosis should not blind us to the contradiction it contains, for this death is no longer death, it is an illusion of art' (Ariès, 1981/2008: 473). This is in essence the same conclusion that Kristeva postulates concerning the enigma of beauty in art: 'Beauty is an artifice; it is imaginary' (Kristeva, 1989: 100). Although it offers the potential to convey 'meaning to the very meaning where it is lost in death and/or nonmeaning', this subjective process is based solely upon an exercise in 'self–illusion' (Kristeva, 1989: 103). And it is these notions of self-illusion that the *vanitas* so magnificently reveals and conceals. Discourse circulates around the articulation of the void/death/non-meaning. Whether the void is represented compositionally by a shallow blank space, negated by Baroque excess or by the foreboding collapse of teetering objects into emptiness, it is ever present (Grootenboer, 2005: 86-90). The beautiful rendering of objects in the *vanitas* whether commonplace or precious elevates them to a state of parity, worthy of intense contemplation. These objects designed to enthral, are an illusion, a mirage, stand-ins, a mirror held up for personal delectation and meditation. The objects depicted are null. From illusion to self-illusion the allegorical conundrums embedded within this genre, offer tantalizing glimpses of the sublime through a beguiling interplay between the materialization and concealment of the void/death/non-meaning.

As beautiful illusions, they not only have the potential to produce an affective melancholic quickening, but also a vague sense of menacing or malignant unease. This is because the *vanitas* alludes to the core paradox of what it actually means to be a conscious sentient being: in order to live, humans need to suppress, deny and sublimate the utter futility of their existence. As Thomas Ligotti candidly puts it, 'This is the tragedy: consciousness has forced us into the paradoxical position of striving to be unself-conscious of what we are – hunks of spoiling flesh on disintegrating bones' To maintain

this illusion individuals stuff their minds with distractions, routines, rituals and self-deceptions as 'defense mechanisms' with which to avoid the yawning abyss of meaningless/nothingness (Ligotti, 2010: 28-29). The *vanitas*, with its multiplicity of illusionary surfaces and object significations, enabled artists to create twinkling patterns of meaning that emerge and submerge upon 'reading' them. Whether the objects are valuable or mundane they all received equal artistic attention so that banal objects became sublime. This meticulous attention to detail created images of breathtaking beauty. But like the tragic conundrum of human consciousness itself, these painted artifices of object collapse are uncannily prescient of the mental fabrications utilized by the human mind to forestall unsolicited plunges into states of chronic depression, suicidal despair, insanity or episodes of acute death anxiety.

The traditional *vanitas* painting represents a collective form of loss produced according to specific codes as established within that genre. As observed by Alpers in her analysis of Dutch seventeenth century painting, artists were obsessed with surfaces, textures and tactility (Alpers, 1983). A similar fascination with textures and tactility is also to be found in Gonzalez-Torres', Leonard's and my work in the exploration of skins and fleshy substances. Each artist respectively manipulates their various epidermises be they organic or synthetic. In *D(e)ad* the apple and wax skins allude to flesh, bone and bodily fluids which through decay and disintegration suggest both physical and psychological malaise. In turn, Leonard disembowels each fruit, re-stitching their skins into new, yet hollow forms. As for Gonzalez-Torres' work, the sweets are figuratively speaking skinned from their wrappers and ingested by the viewer, thus passing through another (this time living) epidermis only then to exit it again when excreted. In their differing methods, each artist explores the porous boundaries of their materials and even hint at fleshy porosity of their viewers. In my work organic matter is enveloped and entombed inside a wax skin. In Leonard's work organic contents are discarded and skins are preserved and remodeled, whereas in Gonzalez-Torres's candy spills it is the contents which pass from one 'skin' to another, when it is unwrapped and eaten. In this way there is an interesting exploration of fleshy epidermises: their appearances, what they hold and how they can both rescind and accommodate differing contents. It is the evocation of the body's mutability in these works in which loss, grief and mourning resides. Each work encapsulates the notion of 'disappearing' which Wojnarowicz used to describe himself whilst grieving.

In my work the material changes that occurred took place in real time and the

cenotaph itself is lost (except for a few punctual photographs and remnants). This is an important aspect, because it *feels* as if the work itself is lost. This notion that the work itself is disappearing or that loss is being actualized is a core element in all of these memorials which is what makes them so poignant. Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A)* (1991) metaphorically presents his lover as literally a sweet and irresistible character who gradually 'disappears' in the company of spectators who meet and engage with 'him'. Although Leonard's *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997) as an installation remains static, it is imperceptibly collapsing and disintegrating into dust so that it too will eventually 'disappear'. The materials used in *vanitas* paintings will invariably age and degenerate over the passage of time causing changes in colour and texture. Moreover, the artist may well have been aware of this process and even noted its apt significance to the genres themes and motifs. However, the disintegration or 'loss' of materials in the *vanitas* is more inevitable than intentional. The performative enactment of processual loss in contemporary artworks 'plays out' aspects of each artist's lived experiences of grief and mourning.

Tony Lake noted that the act of grieving 'is something you *do*, not something which happens to you - an active process, or pathway for you to follow, a journey for which you are responsible, and not a passive event caused by circumstances beyond your control. *You* are the only person who can identify and then carry out the purposes of your own grieving' (Lake, 1984: 9). Whilst mourning, Leonard felt the need to be alone. She moved to Provincetown during the winter months and then relocated to an even more isolated spot in Alaska where she lived for approximately two years. She observed that

> Over the year that I was in Provincetown I started sewing these things, obsessively, by myself. At first, it was a way to think about David. I'd think about the things I'd like to repair and all the things I'd like to put back together, not only losing him in his death, but losing him in our friendship while he was still alive. After a while I began thinking about loss itself, the actual act of repairing. All the friends I'd lost, all the mistakes I've made. The inevitability of a scarred life. The attempt to sew it back together.
>
> This act of fixing something broken, repairing the skin after the fruit is gone strikes me as both pathetic and beautiful. At any rate, as intensely human. You can try to fix it, but the fruit is gone. And yet, we need repositories for our grief. We need eulogies. And relics. Monuments and mementos.
>
> This mending cannot possibly mend any real wounds, but it provided something for me. Maybe just time, or the rhytm [sic] of sewing. I haven't been able to change anything in the past, or bring back any of the people I love who have died, but I've been able to experience my love and loss in a

measured and continuous way; to remember. Once the fruit is eaten, I sew it closed, restore its form. They are empty now, just skin. The fruit is gone. They are like memory; these skins are no longer the fruit itself, but a form reminiscent of the original. You pay homage to what remains. We bury the body of the person we love, the person is gone but we bury their body. We have their memories, their clothing, we have their books, and we hang onto these things. It's both a preposterous and beautiful thing to do, and we're drawn to it, like animals, we don't have a choice but to do this.

[Zoe Leonard interviewed by Anna Blume, (Leonard 1997: 17)].

The therapeutic act of sewing up empty fruit skins provided the artist with a private, meditative space in which to literally and cognitively undertake the reparative task of stitching her personal narrative back together again. This work took her five years to complete. 'Grief is probably not continuous beyond the first few days or weeks, even after a major loss' (Rosenblatt, 1996: 45). However, grief work is an exhausting, durational process which takes time measured in months, years or even a lifetime. Grief work necessitates confronting loss, assimilating memories and the restructuring of one's thoughts all whilst continuing to fostering bonds with the deceased (Rosenblatt, 1996: 52-53). By encapsulating voids within sewn-up skins, Leonard places absence literally at the centre of her work. By presenting Wojnarowicz as atomized she simultaneously expresses her sorrow both at his death and that of the hundreds of victims through AIDS related illnesses.

In contrast to Leonard, my work was not at all therapeutic. I found *D(e)ad* very difficult to engage with. Once the work had been set up and began to 'perform', it reactivated memories and feelings in me concerning my own father's death and dying and I began to grieve again. My thinking behind *D(e)ad* was that the death of a loved one means that the survivor is irrevocably altered as a person. One has to adapt and change. Hence, as the apples disintegrated, the wax hollow casts became fragile traces of the apples original forms as did the stains etched into the linen sheet. My father is still very much in my life but my relationship with him continues to evolve. For Gonzalez-Torres his candy spill works acted as a pharmakon which is a Greek word ambiguously translating as both "remedy" and "poison". Describing his motivation behind his work he stated, 'So why not punish myself even more so that, in a way the pain would be less? This is how I started letting the work go. Letting it just disappear' (Gonzalez-Torres cited by Spector, 2007: 156). He also observed, 'This work originated from my fear of losing

everything. This work is about controlling my own fear'[87] (Gonzalez-Torres cited by Spector, 2007: 122). The cyclic or recursive nature of grief and mourning are incorporated into Leonard's and Gonzalez-Torres working methodology explicitly through the repetition of gestural actions.

5.8 Ephemeral cenotaphs in art

Theories in grief and mourning commonly recognize that the bereaved continue to foster bonds with the deceased loved one(s). This is achieved through the maintenance of dynamic inner representations, memories, imagery and constructions. Despite the absence of the deceased, this relationship is interactive and continues to develop as part of ongoing daily life (klass *et al.* 1996: 16, 73, 181 and 349). Memories of the deceased may be fostered by thinking about them or talking to or about them with others (klass *et al.* 1996). Part of grief resolution for the mourner is the integration of the deceased not only into one's private life, but also socially as part of a communal memory (Walter, 1999: 119). Today, new technologies offer opportunities for virtual memorials, shrines, cenotaphs and sites of remembrance, located on the Internet for either private or public access. It is possible to visit the physical location of the actual remains of the deceased whilst simultaneously linking up to their 'living' persona. A plaque inserted into a gravestone, memorial or headstone inscribed with a QR code and/or website address can be scanned or typed into a smart phone or tablet (Ropchan, 2013). This then allows access to an online site which holds tributes, obituaries and archival information such as text, music, photographs and film detailing the deceased's personal profile and life story[88]. This form of memorial website is interactive, allowing survivors to share memories, receive condolences and celebrate a loved one's life. The plaques are designed to last for hundreds of years allowing information to be accessed by future generations. Other forms of living memorials include social media sites such as blogs, Myspace and Facebook[89]. Upon death,

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[87] C. S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed,* begins 'No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing (Lewis, 1966: 5).

[88] Keep Their Memory Alive, n.d.

[89] Debora Harding, whose son Kardian tragically died in a cycling accident aged 14, relives moments of his life through Facebook and YouTube. She wrote:

> *If I ever want to share Kardian with people who didn't know him, I send them links. I often hear it's easy to get a strong sense of his energy, to mistake the experience for knowing him.*

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the deceased's online profile status can be either deleted or preserved. If their profile status is protected then it becomes a living memorial site which can be visited by family and friends. These sites of remembrance offer a virtual space in which to honour the dead, share memories, grieve, post messages and establish a mutually supportive network based on a communal bond, centred upon the dead loved one. Digital memorials provide the survivors with a conceptual space in which to commune with the departed. These interactive sites provide tangible affirmation that the deceased continues to play a significant role in the survivors' ongoing lives.

Digital cenotaphs are also emerging in contemporary art practice as evidenced by the photographic narratives located on the Internet by Pedro Meyer: *I Photograph to Remember,* 1991 (Figure 61) and Briony Campbell: *The Dad Project,* 2009 (Figure 62). Both of these visual practitioners accompanied and documented their parents' dying trajectories[90]. For more examples of digital photographic/film cenotaphs please refer to (Figures 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69 and 70). Wilke and Spence also executed their own self-styled memorials which exist in physical and digitalized forms. The ephemeral manifestations as produced by Gonzalez-Torres, Leonard and me are also examples of this new phenomenon. Although these artworks are not interactive in the same way that a social media site operates, they still offer opportunities for discourse, meditation and reflection. The memorialization of individuals through social media sites and in exhibition venues means that the term 'death' needs to be redefined. Bodily death does not necessarily equate with social death. The persona continues to evolve through the evocation practices of others. The idea of being kept 'alive' through socially interactive cenotaphs is interesting. In this sense, a secular society is undermining/denying the

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I have asked myself how much value there is to triggering these emotions over and over again. Do I imagine that if I replay these things enough, he is going to remain as real as he was when he was with me? I can't help but wish. [...]I'm glad for this record, and for the huge library of digital memories. They are powerful and valuable (Harding, 2013: 3).

[90] The audience for these works as long as they remain on the Internet is limitless, along with the discourses they evoke concerning terminal illness, premature death, parental death, grief, medicalized dying and memorialization. For Campbell the continued accessibility of *The Dad Project* meant that her father is being kept 'alive':

...he is in that project and the fact that it is being seen by new eyes does keep him 'alive'...as close to alive as a dead person can be .[...] I don't think he's still there anymore but he's in me and a tiny bit of him is in you and anyone who sees it. That's without believing in an afterlife - is as close to one as I think is possible.

Campbell, B. (2012) Interviewed by Sheridan Horn at Campbell's London home. Wednesday 25th July.

significance of the body; in the same way, conventional religious understanding claims that the 'mortal remains' are not what is important after death because it is the soul or spirit which lives on and which (theologically) 'transforms' the body. In secular terms an 'afterlife' no longer takes place in a celestial realm, but is more likely to exist in a network cloud or within the hallowed space of a gallery. Just as the twinkling manifestations of Ross Laycock may be on view simultaneously (in various gallery spaces) so that he materializes and dematerializes like an apparitional presence, so a deceased's digital persona continues to 'live' in perpetuity.

Figure 61. Pedro Meyer (1991) *I Photograph To Remember*. Curated by Johnathan Green. 35min (5.3Mb).
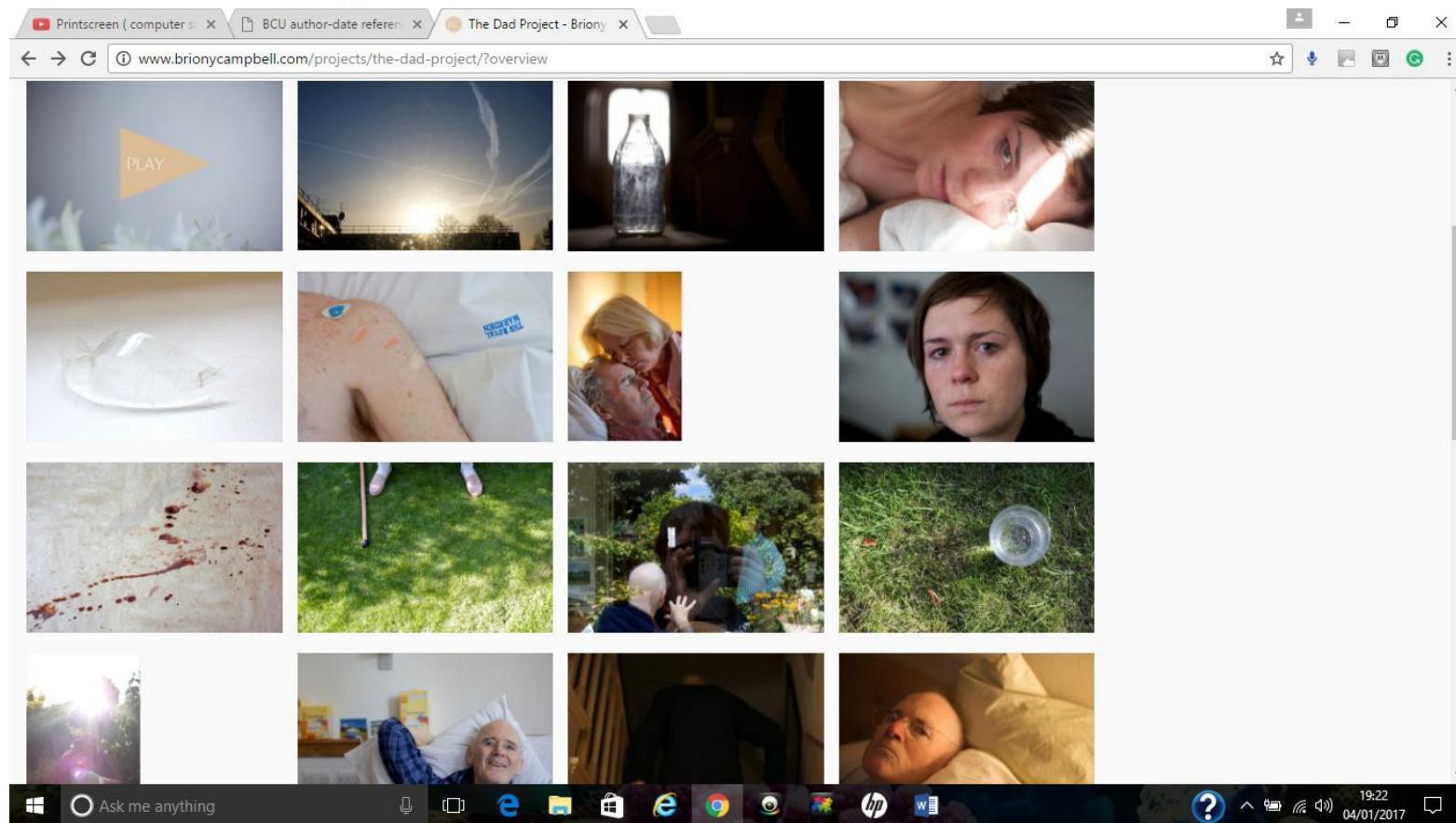
Figure 62. Briony Campbell, (2009) Filmmaker and photographer, *The Dad Project.*
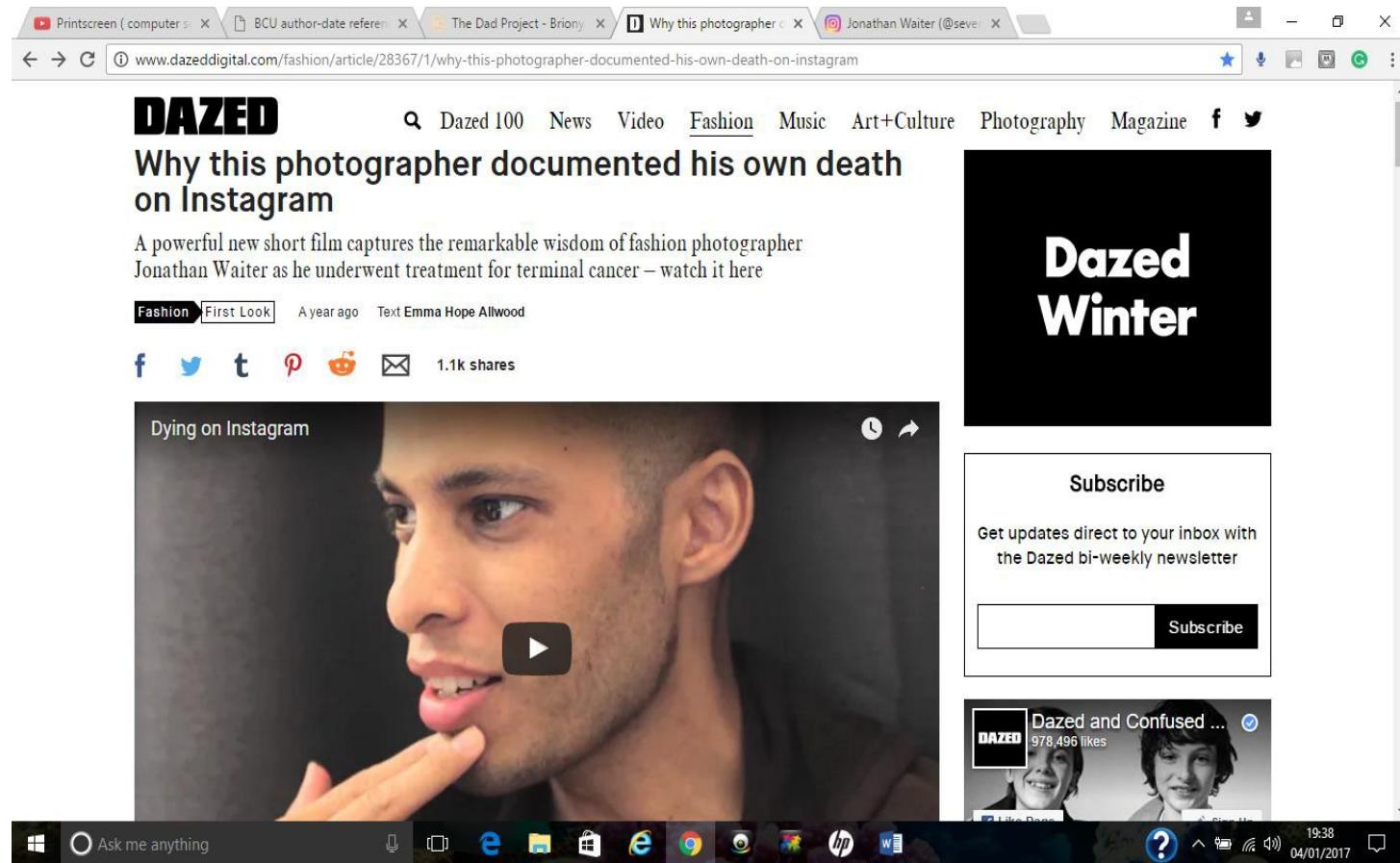
Figure 63. Emma Hope Allwood (2015). Why this photographer documented his own death on Instagram: A powerful new short film captures the remarkable wisdom of fashion photographer Jonathan Waiter as he underwent treatment for terminal cancer. *Dazed: Fashion.*
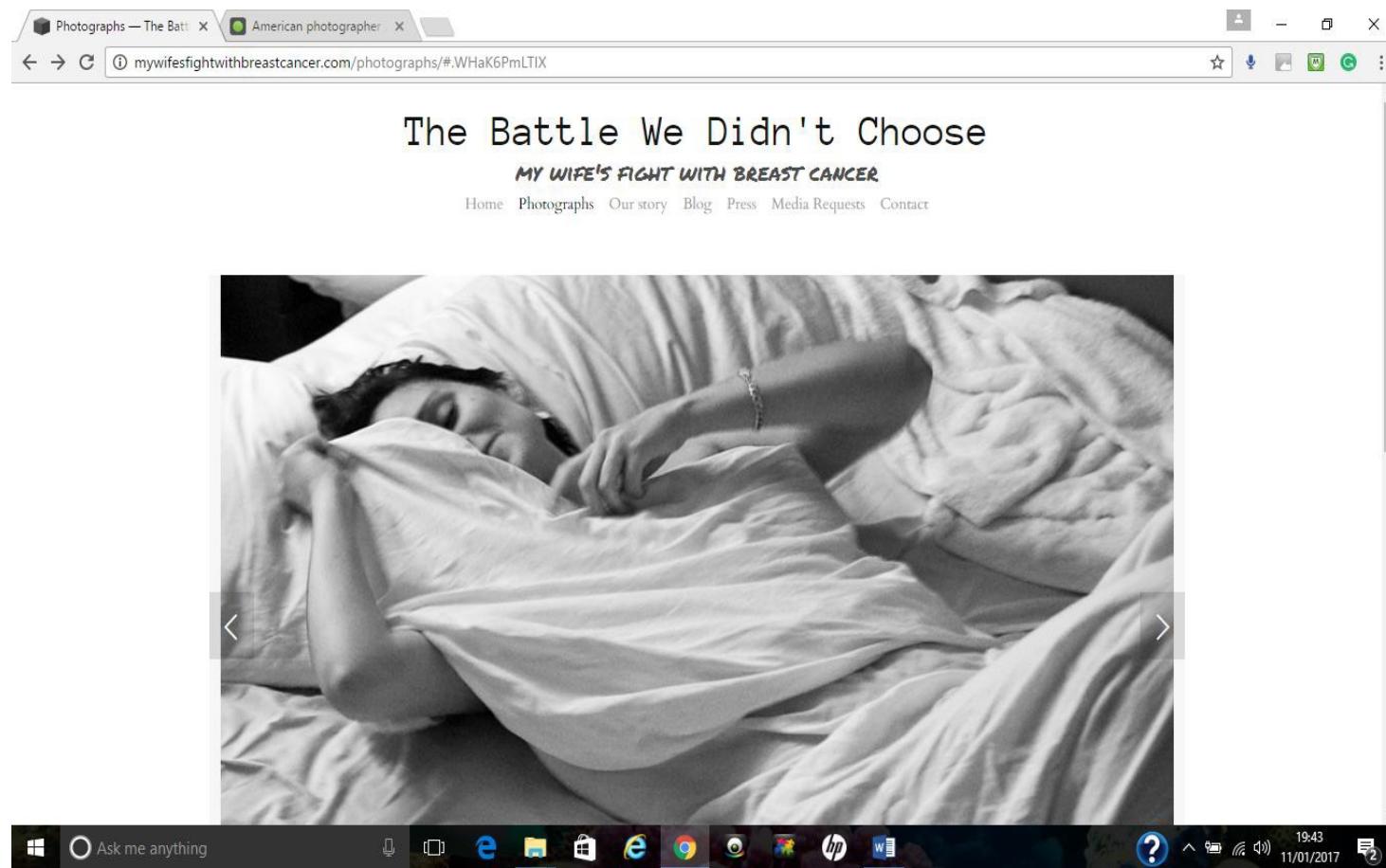
Figure 64. Angelo Merendino. The Battle We Didn't Choose: My Wife's Fight with Breast Cancer (2008-2011).
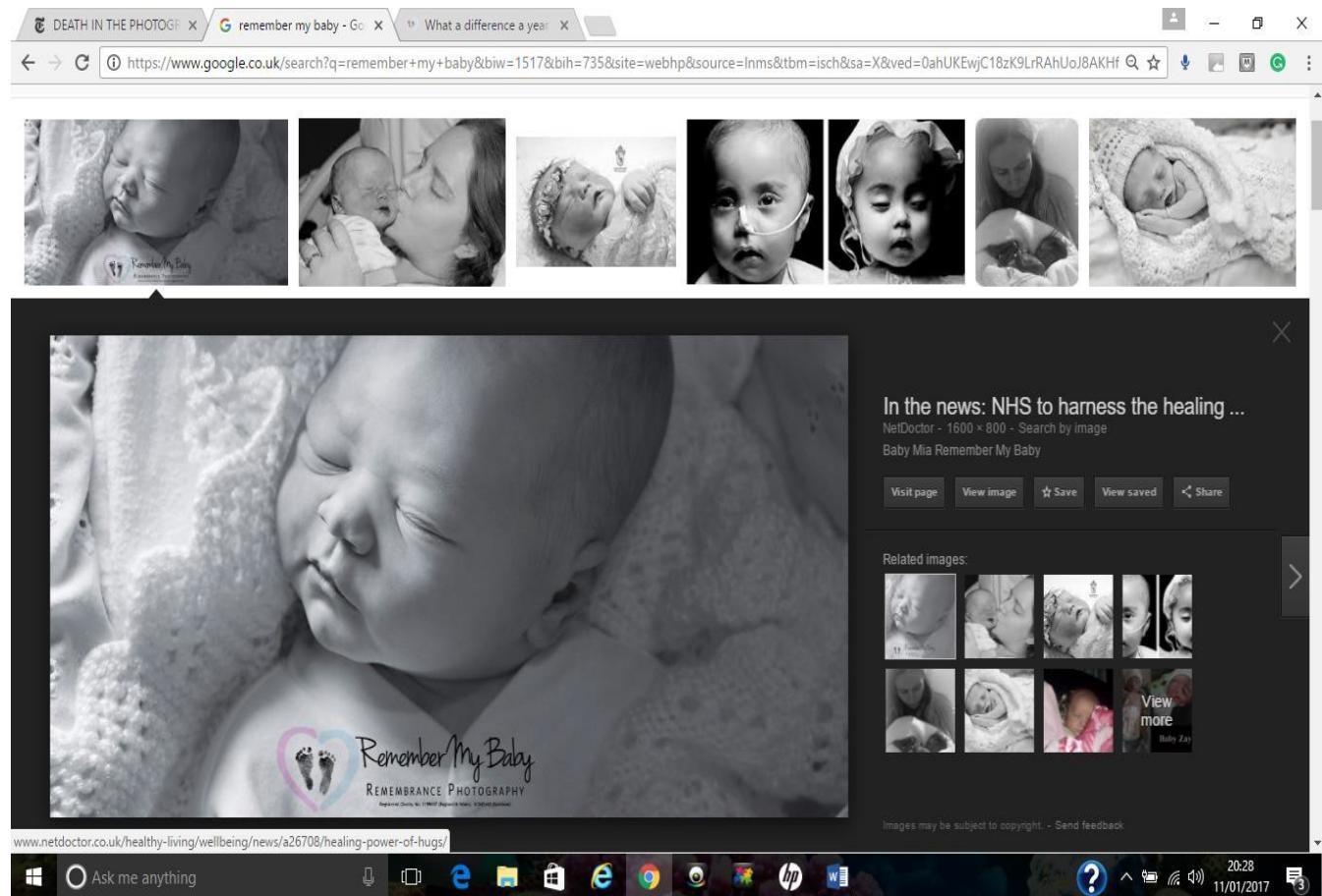
Figure 65. *Remember My Baby. Remembrance Photography.*
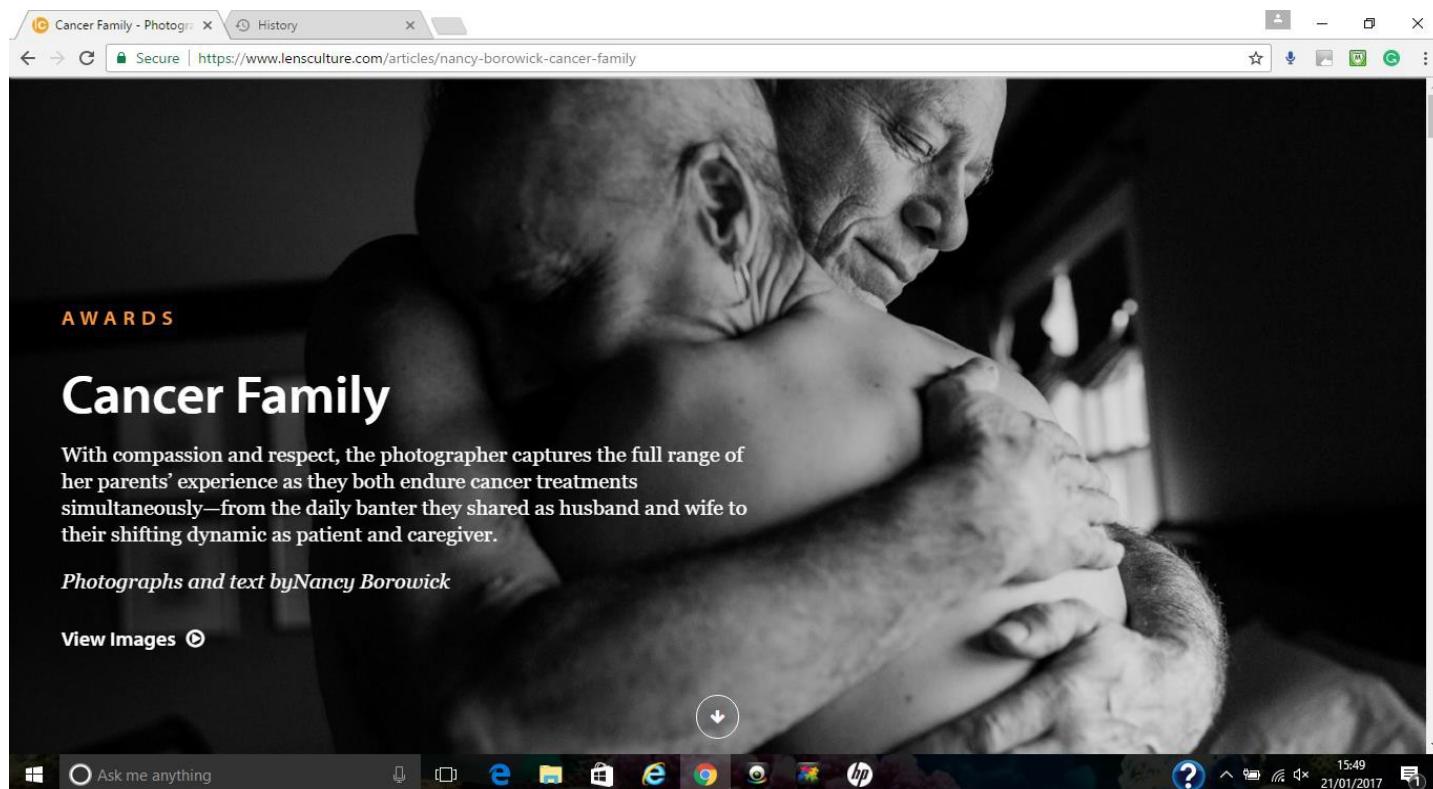
Figure 66. Nancy Borowick, (2014) Cancer Family *Lensculture.*

'I photographed my parents to hold on to their memory, and to capture their essence and strength in such a trivial time. Everyone wants to find purpose in his or her life. My parents' final purpose was found in this moment, in this gift that they gave to me: allowing me to tell their story—a love story—and the story of our family and the legacy they have left behind. When time stops, what was all of this for? They did it for us.' (Borowick, 2013-2014).
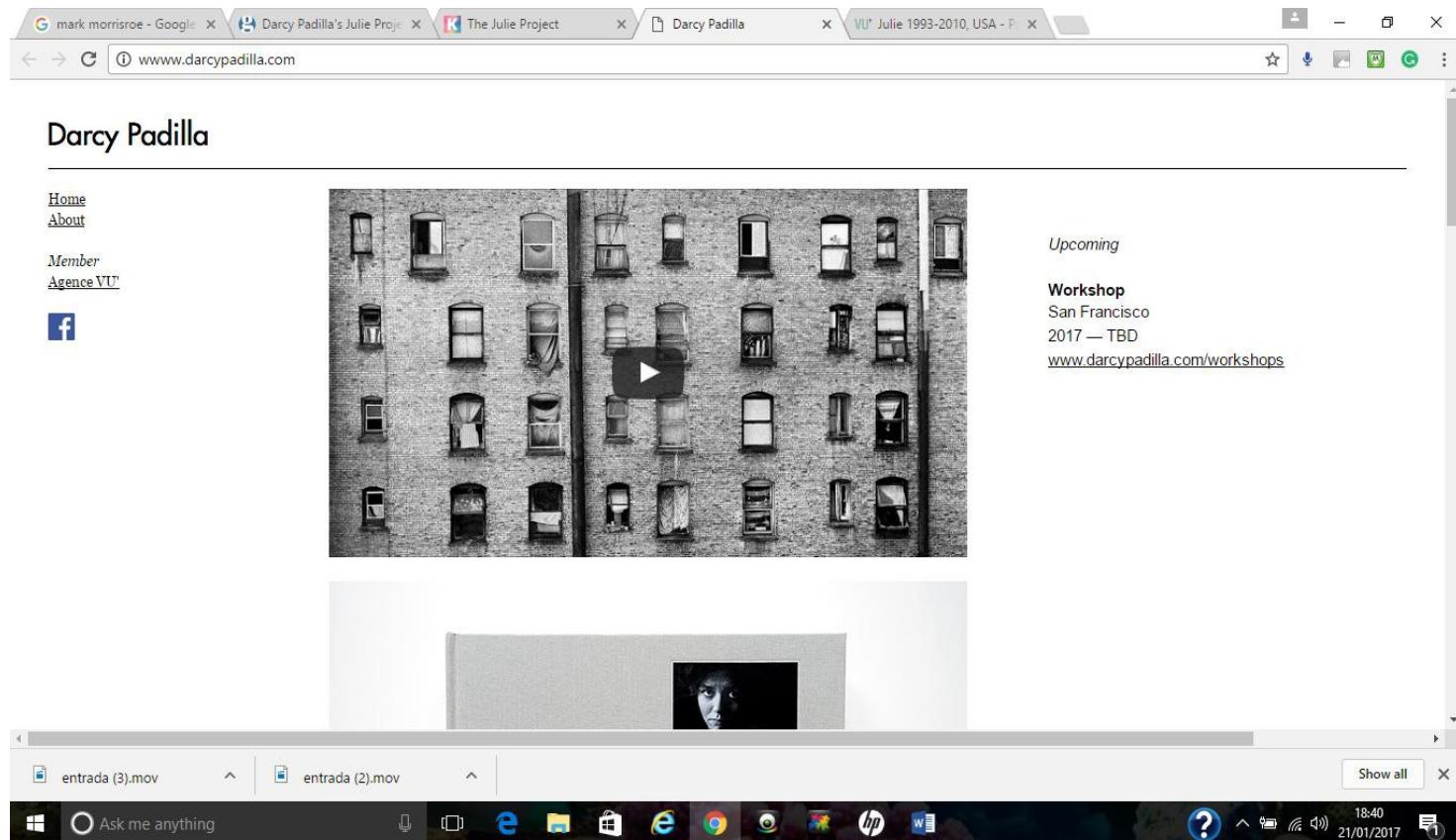
Figure 67. Darcy Padilla. *The Julie Project* (28 February 1993 - 21 September 2010).

Darcy Padilla photographed Julie Baird across 18 years, recording a life dogged by grinding poverty, AIDS/HIV, multiple pregnancies, births, abusive relationships and immense loss. Padilla held vigil during the final weeks of her life and carefully documented her death and dying (Padilla, 1993-2010).
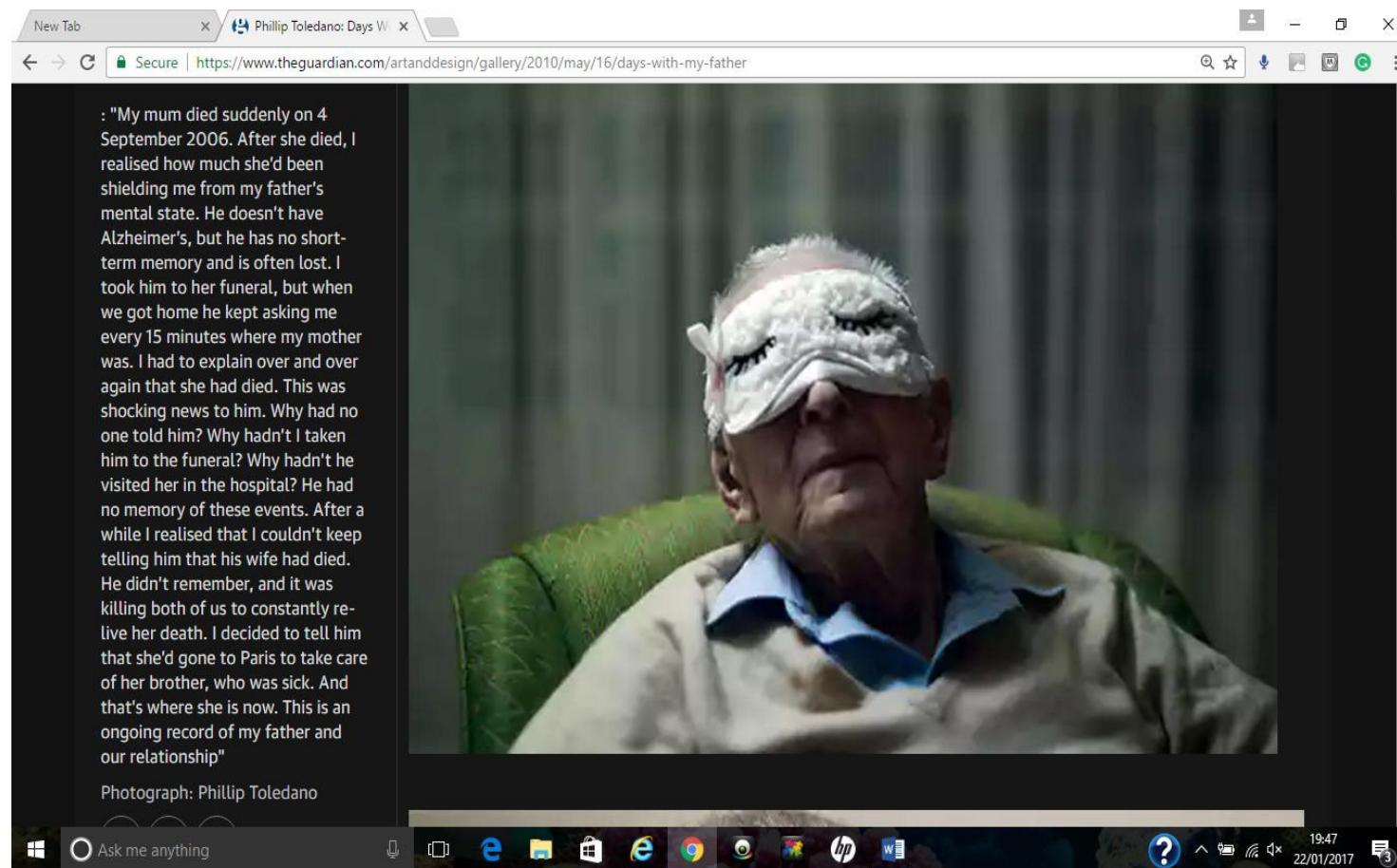
Figure 68. Philip Toledano: Days With My Father (2010) *The Guardian: Art and Design: Photography.*
'In a series of intimate portraits taken over three years, Phillip Toledano recorded the final chapter in his father's long life – his sense of humour, his struggle with memory loss and above all his unfailing spirit' (Toledano, 2010).
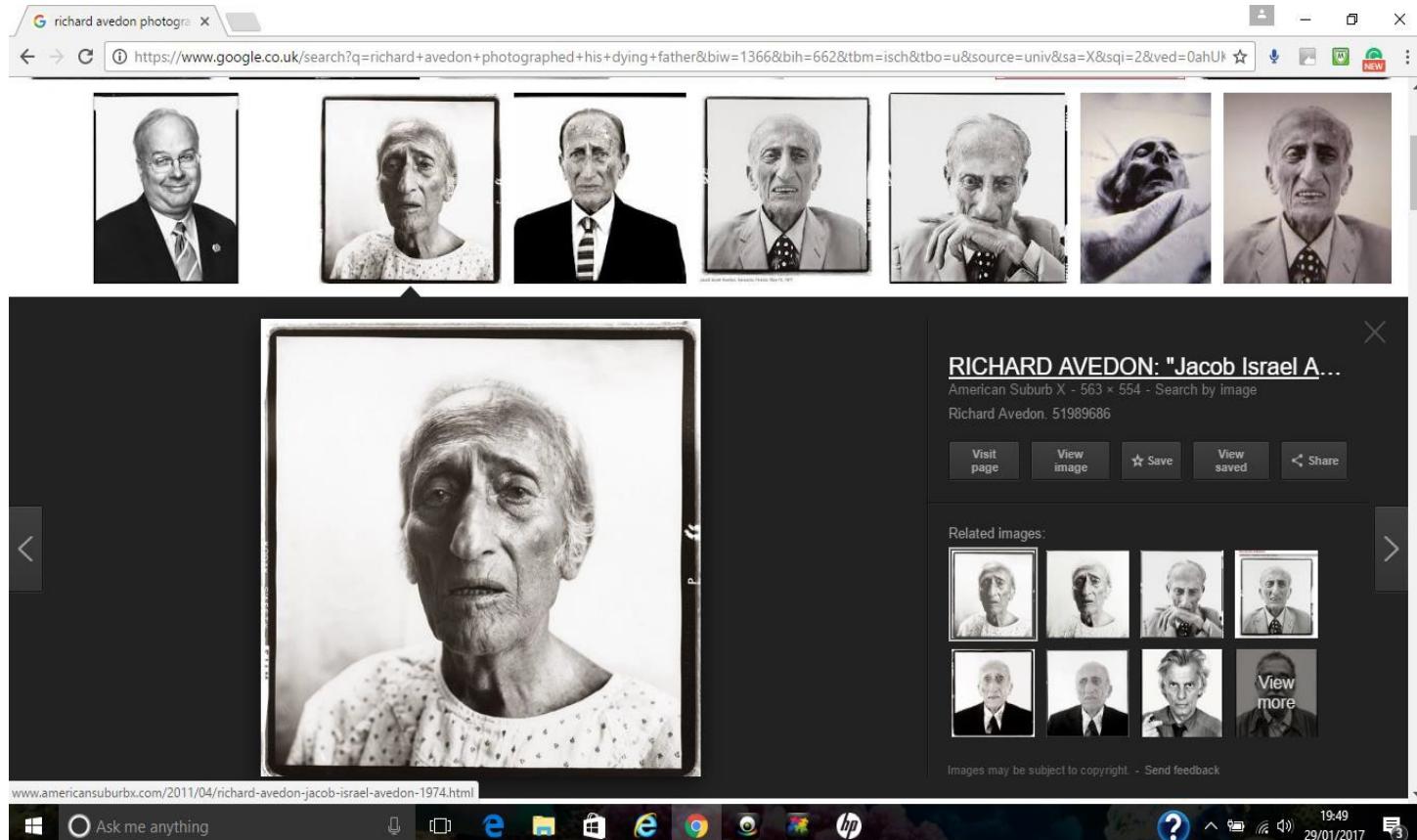
Figure 69. Richard Avedon 'Jacob Israel Avedon' (1974). *American Suburb X: Photography: Essay.*
Avedon Photographed his Dying Father (2010) Fine Art, Photography: Non-Prison, Rehabilitative. 20 June. Link
to Richard Avedon: Darkness and Light (7/9) 9:35. You Tube 9 Jun 2009 - Uploaded by mikebridge.
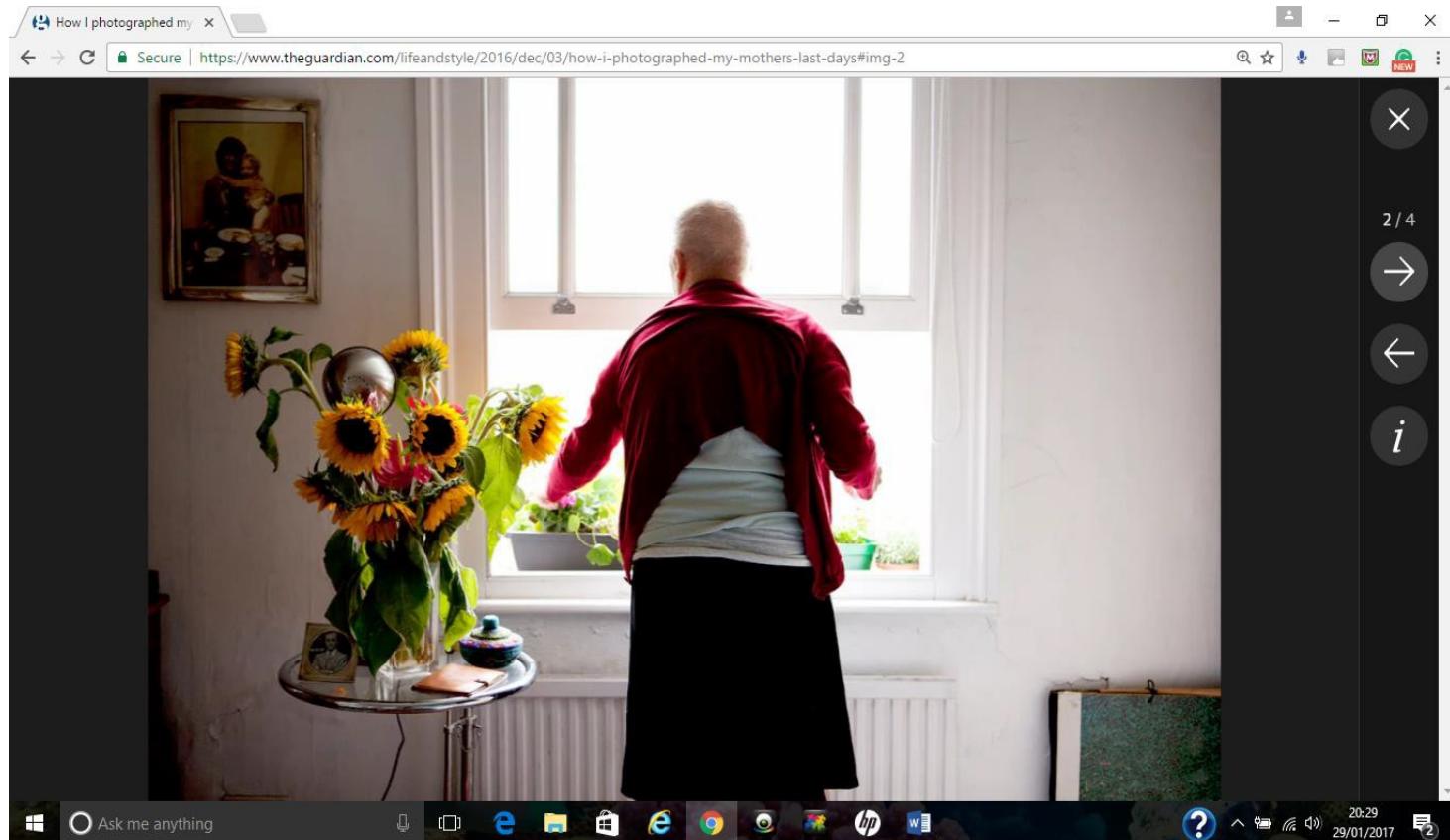
Figure 70. Celine Marchbank. *Tulip* (2009-2010).

'When she knew her mother was dying, Celine Marchbank wanted to capture memories of her. She talks about how the photographs became something they could share' (Khaleeli, 2016).

5.9 Conclusion

A Venn diagram depicting the salient findings with regards to the application of the four concepts to the works of Gonzalez-Torres, Horn and Leonard is provided in (Figure 71). The amalgamation and reconfiguration of the historical *vanitas* by contemporary artists into works of memorialization are compelling not least because they lock-in and build upon discourses already established within that genre. The performative plasticity of these works 'play out' not only corporeal and durational aspects of illness, death and dying affecting the deceased but also the *actualization of grieving processes*. My work, Gonzalez-Torres' and Leonard's are all volatile: they leak out, spill and degrade. Loss and disappearance is placed at the core of these cenotaphs both figuratively and through processual performativity. Furthermore, for the bereaved person the *how* and the *way* in which the loved one died is of singular importance and this concern is foregrounded in these works. Plus the mode of that individual's death is located within a wider sociocultural context. Gonzalez-Torres' and Leonard's symbolic atomized representation of Laycock and Wojnarowicz through sweets and fruit comments not only on their deaths from AIDS related illnesses, but also on the stigmatization of the gay community at a time of thousands of needless deaths. My work, in its heightened degradation, resulting in an infestation of fruit flies and the stench of putrefaction, drew attention to the stigmatizing effects that death and dying can entail.

Ephemerality is enacted not only through material depletion and decay, but also through connotative impressions of the abject. The 'language' of art means that by way of social interaction the individuals honoured by these cenotaphs may be (like a hologram or chimera) symbolically resurrected to 'live' and 'die' again. In a secularized society the bereaved are expected to navigate their own grief and mourning pathways. People today are not obliged to adhere to religious funeral rituals and customs if they do not wish to. Cenotaphs in art evidence a currently unfolding cultural shift which is the deployment of unique and individualized forms of grief and mourning. It is not surprising therefore to discover contemporary artists utilizing and reworking pre-established Christian rituals and emblems of faith, such as the *vanitas* and *ars moriendi*. Gonzalez-Torres' offering of Laycock as a gift to others is an equivalent to the re-enactment of the Last Supper in the ritual of the (Catholic) mass. Leonard's mindful act of sewing is rooted in meditational religious practices. The stains left on the altar cloth of my work is reminiscent of the

Shroud of Turin or the veil of Veronica as relics of faith. In this way, elements of the constellations which formulate memories, thoughts and feelings that reverberate in the bereaved are skillfully encapsulated within each of these cenotaphs; they have the potential to produce affective feelings of poignancy and mourning in the viewer precisely because they are materializations of the artists' actualized grieving processes.

Grief

Actualization of individualized grieving processes including the deployment of coping strategies

Abject body

Leaky
Woundedness
Stigmatization
Spill
Degrade
Viral

Performative enactments mimic:
- Disease processes
- Grieving processes

Durational

Illness narratives

How and *way* in which the loved one died as located in a wider sociocultural context

*

Medicalized
Dying trajectory

Ars moriendi

Social interaction with the artwork offers the potential for the loved one to metaphorically 'live' and 'die' again

*

Living with loss

Disappearance

Object(s) as stand-in for the body

Metaphorical holographic portrait

Resurrective practice/cenotaph

Vanitas

Figure 71. Venn diagram depicting the application of the four concepts to works of grief and mourning by Gonzalez-Torres, Horn and Leonard.

Chapter Six

Articulating the void

6.1) Introduction. 6.2) Null and void. 6.3) *Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows*. **6.4 Cenotaphs in art. The circle closes:** *as art is bent on imitating life, life imitates art* **6.5) Conclusion.**

6.1 Introduction

Contemporary art cenotaphs are very sophisticated forms of encrypted human consciousness. They encapsulate a wealth of information including self-portraits (Wilke and Spence) or metaphorical portraits of the deceased, the manner of their death and dying as well as aspects of the artists' unique grieving processes including rituals, coping methods and commemorative practice. At the core of these representations of grief and mourning is the articulation of profound loss or the void left within the self, caused by the loss of the other. Wilke and Spence reveal their experiences of loss and trauma (cancer as a threat to life) by revealing 'the hole in the narrative that cannot be filled in', whereas Gonzalez-Torres, Leonard and I created works which performatively 'play out' loss (Frank, 1995: 98). The work itself begins to 'disappear' as it unfolds. Equally important is the representation of *changing material states* such as the documentation of bodily collapse in Wilke's and Spence's work, the atomised dispersal of sweets in Gonzalez-Torres' representations or the decaying organic matter in Leonard's and my own work all of which allude to the *processing of intense emotional feelings*. These artworks materialize each artist's *individualized grieving processes* through changing states. I questioned the extent to which I might create an artwork which materialized the synergism of grief and mourning processes without the work itself changing states through representations of the pictorial, plastic or processual? The result of this endeavour is *Grief Shadow*[91] (2014) which is a live art tableau. It does not rely on the portrayal of changing states in order to portray the dynamic processes of my grieving but on their opposite: that

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[91] Not to be confused with 'shadow grief' a medical term which refers to: 'Unresolved 'background' grief associated with perinatal loss of a stillborn infant' (The Free Dictionary By Farlex, 2003).

of stasis and inference. This work was influenced by Briony Campbell's use of subliminal referencing in *The Dad Project* (2009) which I briefly reference as a counterpoint.

Prior to this work, I had produced performance works during which the material states of objects were radically altered as an attempt to try and 'enact' the grief and mourning process. I will concisely outline these three experiments because, despite my lack of success, they do demonstrate the ways in which visual signification can easily confuse the clarity of one's intentions. Furthermore, as a result of these unsuccessful trials, I decided to adopt an entirely different strategy.

6.2 Null and void

My initial performance work entitled *Grief and Mourning* (three hours long) was performed in 2010. It consisted of a mute woman who sat, spotlit in a chair in a blacked out space. Placed beside her chair was a pile of clothes which she dismantled one by one with a pair of scissors. She then carefully arranged each unpicked, cut or unraveled item of clothing on the floor around her (Figures 72, 73 and 74).

In *Strange Fruit (for David)* (1992-1997), Leonard's mindful act of stitching together organic skins evokes the narrative processes by which we give meaning to the world; these means of making the world intelligible rely on our continuously connecting and comparing events. Like Leonard, we must weave threads between different experiences so as to create a personally coherent narrative. When someone dies, this process is intensified because the life story has to be reviewed or 'unpicked' and reassembled in the light of this event. In my work, the performer took apart items of clothing as a materialization of the grief and mourning process in which the person's selfhood is irreversibly changed; whilst the clothing items are essentially the same, they are nonetheless irrevocably altered. The dismantled or torn clothing also symbolically represents the internal pain of being ripped apart by grief[92]. Her repetitive actions

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[92] As part of the Jewish mourning ritual there is a rending of garments called *Keri'ah*, which is a Hebrew word meaning 'tearing'. This act is based on biblical teachings whereby individuals were so overcome with grief they tore up their clothing:

Genesis 37: 34

And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

Samuel 1:11

Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him:

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reference the deconstructive and reconstructive processes that occur in the bereaved as they assimilate and reconfigure the loss of the deceased back into their lives. Performance art is an ephemeral art form which 'lives' in the present moment and then 'dies' upon viewing. I realized it is this notion of something being performatively lost that is a core component in visually actualizing the grief and mourning process. In this representation, my use of a visual vocabulary was ineffectual. The dismantling of clothing more clearly referenced domestic chores or a recycling factory unit rather than the actualizing of a psychological process.

Rather than trying to materially reconfigure an object so as to depict an altered state or process, I continued to experiment with the idea of actualizing loss through the processual and performative. In order to do this, I produced two films.

Job 1:20

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped (*The Holy Bible,* The King James Version, 2000).

As a mark of respect for the deceased, this ritual is performed standing up. Those who are expected to perform this ritual are close relatives - parents, children, siblings and spouses. It is seen as a direct expression of pain, anger and sorrow. For the death of a parent, the outer clothing is torn over the heart region. For other close relatives, it is torn on the right-hand side of the chest. This outer garment is worn throughout *shivah* (Hebrew word literally meaning 'seven') when close family gather together, preferably in the house of the deceased for seven days. After this intense period of mourning the ripped garment may be loosely mended, thus signifying the idea of a gaping wound that is in the process of healing (Kurshan, 1995; Jewish Funeral Guide, n.d.).

Figure 72. Sheridan Horn, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Performance: 3 hours. Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.

Figure 73. Sheridan Horn, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Performance: 3 hours. Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.

Figure 74. Sheridan Horn, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Performance: 3 hours. Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.

In the first film, a female model (aged 21 years) wears a long white, sleeveless dress made from water soluble fabric. Out of camera shot, water is flicked at the model and then in a second version, it is trickled over her head. The water causes the dress to disintegrate, revealing her nude body. The resulting silent film lasts 5.51 minutes and contains three separate sequences. It is shown on a loop. In sequence one the model stands full length, front view, against a white background on a white floor. Water droplets are flicked onto her body. The dress disintegrates rapidly (a speeded up version). The camera pans in, stops and repeats panning (several times) to allow a more careful viewing of this disintegrating process (Figure 75). The second sequence depicts a speeded up version of the camera panning up and down the body. This shot is then repeated in actual time allowing the viewer to see the hole-ridden, dripping, disintegrated fabric, revealing her naked body underneath (Figure 76). The third sequence is shot from above at an oblique angle. Water is poured over the model's head in a steady stream. The shots alternate between actual time, a speeded up version and then back to actual time again. Throughout the entire sequence, the model remains impassive (Figure 77).

When someone dies, a hiatus or dislocation occurs in the narrative of the survivor's life. Events and memories concerning the deceased, as well as associative loss are revisited by the survivor in a bid to assimilate the countless losses back into the fabric of their daily life. In my film, the cyclical disintegration of the dress re-enacts loss and the process of assimilating loss back into the self. As the dress dissolves and disappeared it creates a trace/memory of what had occurred. This same event is referenced in varying tempos: speeded-up, repetitive, disjointed and in actual time. I did this to imply that for the grieving individual, the perception of time can become radically altered and may be experienced as durational, elongated, speeded-up or disorganized. In making this film I discovered that in this instance the female nude figure signified biological life cycles like regeneration and decay or menstruation as well as cleansing rituals and the disfiguration of women by violent and abusive acts (throwing acid over a woman's face).

Figure 75. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 5.51 minutes, [screen shot].

Figure 76. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 5.51 minutes [screen shot].

Figure 77. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 5.51 minutes [screen shot].

In the second film, I explored the same idea of actualizing loss by using an item of clothing to symbolise the body. In this instance, I referenced the body or bodies by using casts of shoes made out of white wax, which I created prior to filming. This film is 13.44 minutes in duration and includes sound. It starts with an opening shot depicting a close-up view of fifteen pairs of wax shoes (Figure 78). In the following sequence the bare legs of a young female move across the screen and she attempts to put the shoes on (throughout the entire film only the model's bare legs are visible from the thigh down). Because the shoes are made out of wax, they shatter (Figures 79 and 80). The only sound in the film is that of breaking wax which during the editing process was reconfigured so that it is deliberately uneven; it becomes silent in places and loud in others. The sound of the hollow wax cracking is odd - it reverberates, snaps, pops and crumples. At one point, when one of the shoes breaks, throwing up a shower of white dust, it is overlaid with the sound of a tiny bomb exploding. Gradually, the model becomes surrounded by broken wax fragments (Figure 81). Sometimes the camera remains static as the feet move across the frame; at other times the camera pans in arcs following the walking feet. Close-ups of the feet reveal tiny dark cuts (like pencil marks) caused by the sharp wax fragments. The model keeps trying to put on the shoes until they are all broken. As she steps out of shot, the final image is one of broken shards which resemble ash (Figure 82).

The sound of the wax shoes cracking creates a sense of tension. The futility of the model's repeated absurd actions becomes annoying/upsetting. In terms of the grieving process it represents the mind's inability to comprehend the finality of the initial object loss (the deceased) and its constant return to imagining that this loss has in fact not actually occurred. This film is successful in that the repetitive actions of the model trying to put on fragmenting shoes, creates a series of mini losses which result in the final obliteration of the objects at the end. However, by using edited film the performativity of this work did not occur in actual time which is a salient feature of the artworks produced by Gonzalez-Torres and Leonard. Rather than trying to *evoke* states of change through video performances, I realized that I needed to allow material changes of state to occur naturally as part of a durational process. This resulted in *D(e)ad* (2010-2011). However, equally it also occurred to me that I may not need to performatively 'enact' the processual elements of grief and mourning in order to materialize my own lived experiences of grief and mourning.

Figure 78. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 13.44 minutes [screen shot].
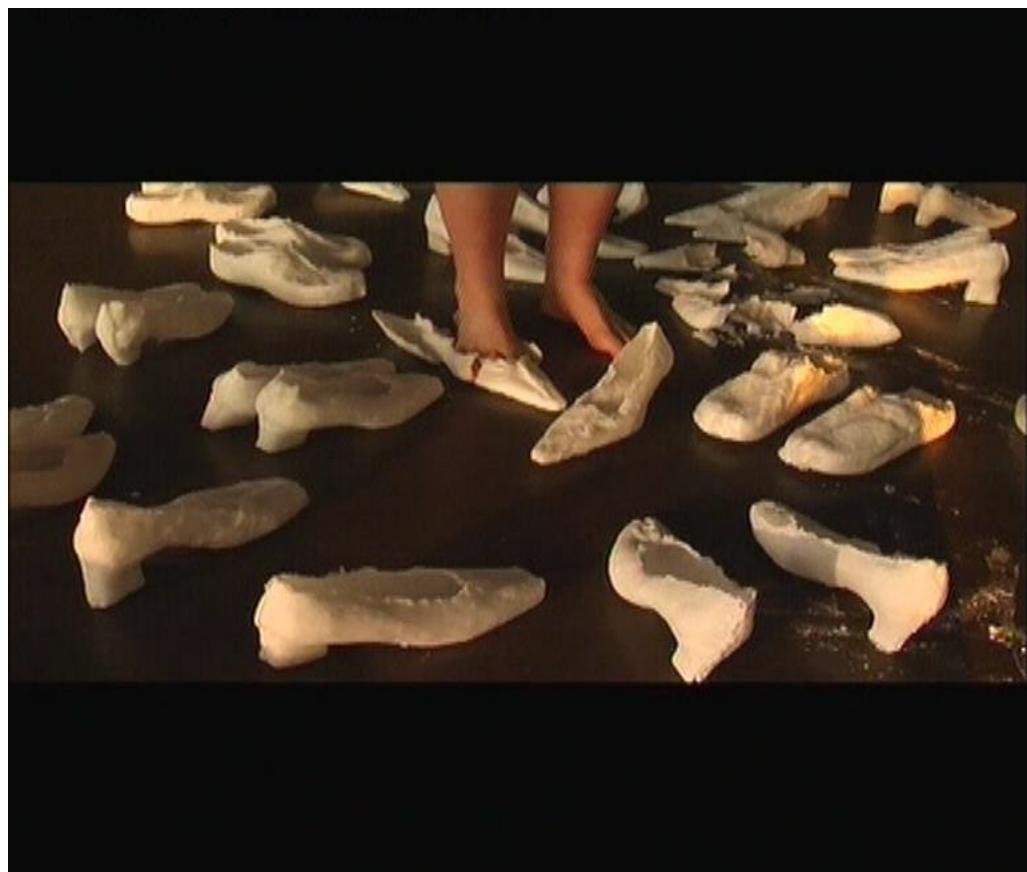
Figure 79. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 13.44 minutes [screen shot].

Figure 80. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 13.44 minutes [screen shot].
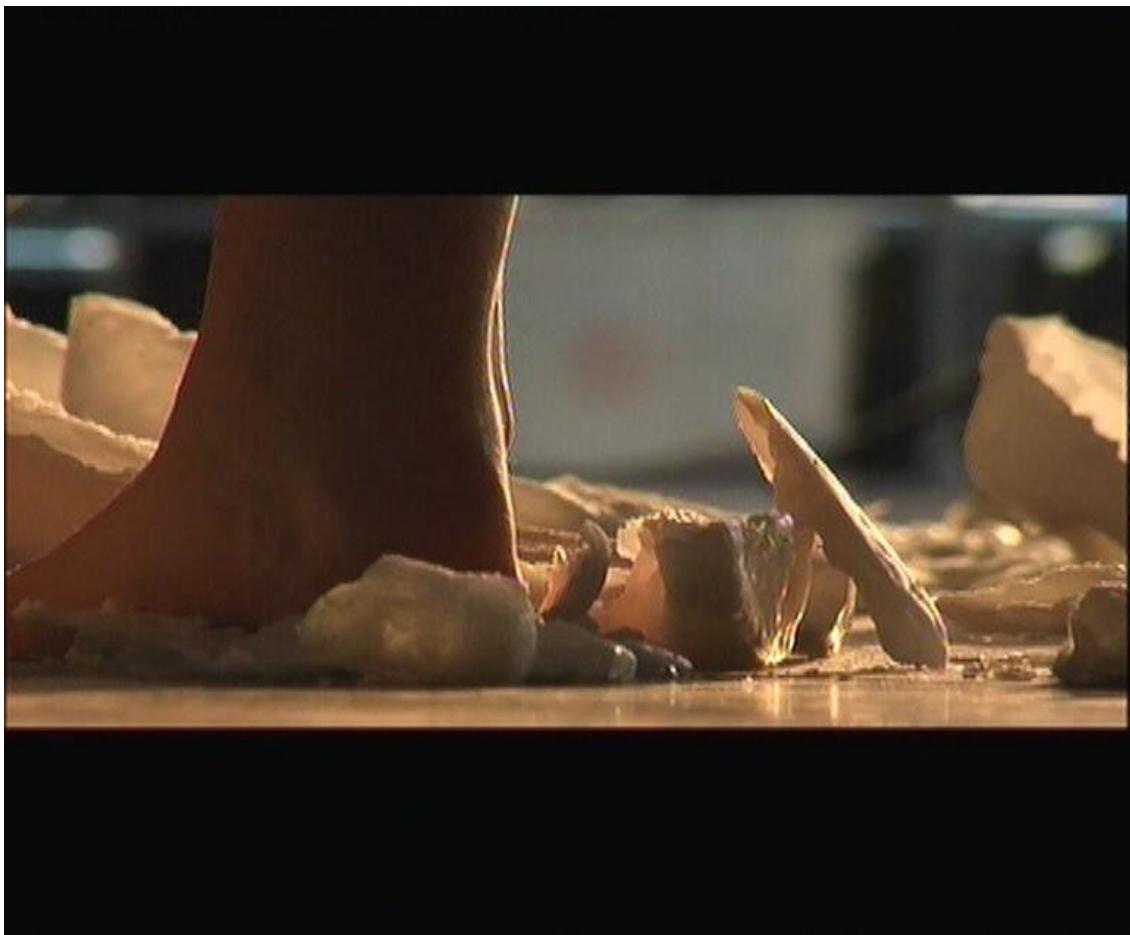
Figure 81. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 13.44 minutes [screen shot].

Figure 82. Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia, *Grief and Mourning* (2010). Film: 13.44 minutes [screen shot].

I therefore decided to produce an exposition whereby 'the object of study' did not change state through a process of reconfiguration or disappearance - this culminated in *Grief Shadow* (2014), a live artwork that remained unchanged during the entire time that it was exhibited. It was displayed at Trinity Catholic School, Leamington Spa across the span of a week following the anniversary of my father's death (11th - 15th February). It was performed once a day for between one and two hours. The work operates obliquely through symbolic inference. This idea was inspired by Briony Campbell (b.1980) a British photographer who produced a digital cenotaph in honour of her father David Campbell who she accompanied during his death and dying:

- Campbell (2009). Filmmaker and Photographer. *The Dad Project*, Available at: http://www.brionycampbell.com/projects/the-dadproject/ [Accessed 15 January 2017].

The Dad Project is a first person account communicated directly to the viewer, via photographs which are used to establish the verisimilitude of these events with accompanying text. The tone of this work is an intimate one, established through the use of particular presentation formats, which are akin to that of looking at photographs in a family album or slide show. Campbell's approach is one of marked discretion[93]. She highlights the nature of her father's illness obliquely. Her cenotaph contains ordinary snapshots that feature in many family albums such as the top of a building silhouetted against an expanse of blue sky, a close-up picture of sunlight cascading through leaves and a family gathering in the back garden. More ominously, these are interspersed with

images of David Campbell's failing health as he spends his last days at home and finally in a hospice. The predictability of some of these images creates a poignant contrast between the mundanity of everyday life with the profound awareness that human existence is fleeting and transitory. The overriding theme in this visual narrative is one of sadness and longing as the family tries to preserve a sense of routine normality during a time of vigil.

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[93] Having viewed Pedro Meyer's - *I Photograph to Remember* (1991) which 'really affected' her but left her with no desire whatsoever to see it again, Campbell consciously decided not to 'photograph nasty, stressful things' in a bid to produce a visual narrative that was 'soft' thus enabling her to 'engage' with a wider viewing audience (Campbell, 2012). Meyer's narrative which documents his mother's and father's death and dying immediately sears itself into the spectator's consciousness and acts like a violent jolt to the psyche. The effects of Campbell's narrative is latent and mournfully diffuse. It is a subtle, quiet work that seems to act upon the psyche retrospectively.

As both performers and spectators, human beings act out a myriad of rituals and performances until death. Daily routines create a sense of stability and actions gain significance by being repeated; this enables one to conceive an action in the past, perform it in the present and visualise it in the future. In Campbell's work, family routines are evidenced by pictures of an empty milk bottle, a discarded glass tumbler left on the lawn and delicate strands of hair collected on a curl of sellotape (Figures 83, 84 and 85). By photographing everyday trace elements, Campbell maps out the daily routines of eating, drinking and grooming, as well as signalling both a presence and its corresponding absence. In the context of this narrative these images gain enormous significance because they mirror David Campbell's ongoing but tenuous hold on life. He is also photographed being tenderly kissed by his wife, sitting in the garden, sleeping, chatting animatedly, and eating a meal. The artist's awareness that her father is dying means that each seemingly mundane activity that has been captured becomes a potentially unrepeatable precious moment in time. The inevitability of her father's death renders what in essence it means to be alive.

Campbell's recording of objects as a method in order to represent the severity of her father's terminal illness is *tacit* but effective. It seduces the viewer into a false sense of security. The potency of her visual narrative is its deceptive quality. On initial viewing, it may appear to be banal, but the gradual and accumulative effect of looking at seemingly ordinary shots representing her father's living whilst dying is, in fact, profound. It is Campbell's deployment of implied or inferred signification which influenced my work *Grief Shadow*.

Figure 83. Briony Campbell, *The Dad Project* (2009). Photograph 2/33.

Figure 84. Briony Campbell, *The Dad Project* (2009). Photograph 11/33.

Figure 85. Briony Campbell, *The Dad Project* (2009). Photograph 4/33.

6.3 *Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows*[94]

Influenced by Campbell's understated approach, *Grief Shadow* presents a commonplace scene of a young man sitting in a domestic setting possibly having his breakfast, reading a book. It is based on memories of my father quietly reading in the family kitchen. Over time these memories (probably because of their routine familiarity) have fused together in my mind so that this scene now drops into my thoughts at odd moments like a single 'snapshot'. Below is a description of *Grief Shadow* in situ collated from conversation, with the viewing public, critiques with students and my observations and notes:

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Everything is black: the walls, the ceiling and the doors. The
floor is grey. It is windowless and airless. This is a black-
cubed-space. Set up against a far wall is a monochrome tableau
vivant in coal black/in kohl black/in charcoal black. It is
landscape in format and spotlit. Centre stage is a table covered
with a cloth arranged with objects for a meal such as a coffee
pot, milk jug, glasses, plates, cutlery and a bowl of fruit. Above
the table are two shelves positioned like an equals sign (=). On
the shelves are placed incongruous domestic objects including a
kettle, toaster, jug of utensils and knickknacks. Posed on the
left-hand side of the table is a young man, who reads a book.
Throughout the entire duration of the performance he is mute and
does not engage with the viewer. Although the table is set for
two people there is only one chair and that is already taken by
the seated figure. From a distance, the objects look like a
collection of uniform black carbon forms. Close up it is possible
to discern a rich difference in hues, tones and textures. The black
objects range in their blackness from soft, shadowy, velvet, deep,
sombre, dull to etched, shiny and metallic. The models painted
skin is dusky, he has jet black hair, clothes the colour of slate
and shoes like polished obsidian. One can walk in an arc around
this dark constructed scene. The depth of field is shallow. The
isolated figure is sealed off in his own world. When spectators
walk in front of this work they appear incredibly colourful
in comparison. This tableau is reminiscent of a black and white
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[94] Shakespeare. *Richard II*. Act 2: Scene 2.

photograph which has been tonally darkened towards the black end of the spectrum. This is not a real domestic space but a constructed fictive one. It reads like a framed moment in a narrative or stage play. It alludes to an imagined realm of that which lies beneath or lurks in the shadows. It is an inverse of the world of colour: a live art painting in raven black.

Is the figure the one who is sorrowful or is the viewer, as protagonist, the one who is sad? Is the young man looking at a picture of someone he loves in a photograph album? The overall mood of this work is sombre. The figure is preoccupied.

Grief Shadow, February 2014, (Figures 86, 87, 88 and 89).

Figure 86. Sheridan Horn, *Grief Shadow* (2014).

Figure 87. Sheridan Horn, *Grief Shadow* (2014). Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.

Figure 88. Sheridan Horn, *Grief Shadow* (2014). Detail.

Figure 89. Sheridan Horn, *Grief Shadow* (2014). Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.

In this work all the objects (glassware, cutlery, china, food and kitchen ware) were painted with black acrylic, the walls and shelves were coated with matt black emulsion and the ceiling was blacked-out with heavy stage drapes. The model, whose hair was naturally black, wore black clothing and his exposed skin was blackened-up using theatrical cosmetics. Signification in *Grief Shadow* is clearly deducible with the all-black chroma indicating death, funeral ritual and mourning[95]. This black palette also builds on the *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* in presenting an image of the world as lacking in colourful vibrancy thus alluding to a psychologically depressive or negative state. The lack of colour is in and of itself a representation of loss. *Grief Shadow* portrays a visual anomaly. A shadow is created on a surface when an object blocks out rays of light. Darkness is the direct result of an absence of light. In this instance, however, the light illuminates the shadow as object. The shadow is inverted. Additionally, the shadow as object casts yet more dark shapes. All the elements of the shadow are rendered visible in this work: profile, contour, silhouette, shape, outline, penumbra and umbra. All these pictorial devices are used to delineate negative spaces, loss or voidness (Saltzman, 2006). This interplay between the shadow as object and shadows, fact versus fiction or the familiar and constructed has the potential to produce a frisson in the spectator. Freud (1963) referred to this uncanny effect as the 'unhomely' or 'unheimlich'. The 'homely' or 'heimlich' is equated with that which is 'known', 'familiar', 'agreeable', 'private' and 'hidden'. The uncanny is therefore associated with that which is familiar but has been repressed. This doubling effect, whereby something that is frightening stems from that which is deemed familiar, creates an uncanny sensation in the recipient. Brian Collinson, a Jungian analyst, observed:

> *It is a symbollic [sic] truth that grief does make us leave home, in a very real psychological sense. Grief can make that which has felt familiar and safe feel alien, sterile and full of pain. This can be the effect on one's own personality or on one's familiar personal space. […] In a very real sense, grief can evict us from our own lives.*

> (Collinson, 2011).

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[95] In the beginning of the seventeenth century, black became linked to mourning rituals with the widespread wearing of black clothing and the use of drapery in home furnishings. 'Increasingly codified customs were put into place: the articles of clothing involved, the dimensions of the cloths, paintings, or hangings for the home and furnishings, the length of the mourning period, with a calendar that sometimes shifted from black to purple (half-mourning) and then light gray (quarter-mourning). But it would not be until the nineteenth century that such colour coding really entered into mourning practices. Before that time it appeared primarily in compendia of customs, etiquette books, and tracts on (good) manners. Death itself remained black' (Pastoureau, 2008: 135).

Colin Murray Parkes refers to grief as a major loss which disrupts an individual's internalised construct of their assumptive world. 'It arises from awareness of a discrepancy between the world that is and the world that 'should be'' (Parkes, 1988/2006: 326). One's sense of self is socially constructed through dynamic interchanges with others. When a loved one dies, the aspects of the self which evolved through that interpersonal connection cease to exist in the same form. Aspects of the self are literally lost in the death of the other. Furthermore, the deceased may be the very person whom the survivor would normally confide in during a crisis, leaving them utterly bereft. 'The familiar world suddenly seems to have become unfamiliar, habits of thought and behaviour let us down, we lose confidence in our internal world' (Parkes, 1988/2006: 327). The obviously constructed nature of *Grief Shadow* as depicting an imaginary scene, hints at the tenuous fictional, symbolic and intersubjective constructs erected by the psyche as a protective measure, which are uprooted by death.

Grief Shadow does not make explicit precisely who is grieving or what they might be grieving for. This is left to the viewer. Read symbolically as being grief which foreshadows something, it suggests that one might be living in the shadow of an unfolding, deeply unpleasant situation. If the work is seen as symbolising an overshadow it alludes to an all pervasive pall of fear, anxiety or bad news. If the shadow is perceived as being cast from the past (a back shadow), it implies a sudden darkening of one's mood, tempo or day because of an event which has already occurred. Grief cast from a significant loss in the past may overcome one unexpectedly and erupt at random moments throughout a lifetime. By framing the work as a snapshot, scene or picture from a story or play, the work embodies many different aspects of the grieving process, depending on how it is being read and by whom. From my standpoint, it encapsulates states, moods and elements concerning my personal grief and mourning experiences. It also captures the quieter, calmer more elegiac tonal quality imbued in works of commemoration with the longer recognition of mourning as suffused melancholy. The figure seems to *sit in* his grief or sadness to the exclusion of all else. Through my own experience I have discovered that if one is attentive and stays with or *sits in* incredibly painful feelings as and when they arise, important information or messages are revealed[96]. This notion of being immersed in one's

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[96] This approach is borne out by Geoff Warburton who advocates:

> *If we let love be there, for the ones we have lost. We settle…we find peace…scintillating*
> *beautiful peace and if we let it…if we let grief run its course, it will open our hearts…it will*

sorrow to the exclusion of all else as represented by the introspective figure is a universally recognized one. Since this work is comprised of a black palette, it throws into stark relief members of the audience as being colourful and inhabiting a different world. The spectators themselves are presented as being from the land of light and colour. This is important because it sets up binary oppositions or a visual oscillation between differing psychological states with the colourful audience as representative of joyful life and the black chroma tableau as sombre subject matter. In his book *The Other Side of Sadness*, George Bonanno explains that grieving is a process of 'oscillation' in response to a 'stress reaction' or 'the perception of a threat to our wellbeing' (Bonanno, 2009: 40). According to him,

> *Relentless grief would be overwhelming. Grief is tolerable, actually, only because it comes and goes in a kind of oscillation. We move back and forth emotionally. We focus on the pain of the loss, its implications, its meanings, and then our minds swing back toward the immediate world, other people, and what is going on in the present. We temporarily lighten up and reconnect with those around us. Then we dive back down to continue the process of mourning.*

<div align="right">(Bonanno, 2009: 40).</div>

In the same way, *Grief Shadow* sets up a sense of fluid or discursive interaction between two different states as represented by the work itself, and the spectators. *Grief Shadow* is static, monochrome, silent and introspective whereas the audience is mobile, colourful, lively and expansive. Changing states are therefore inferred by the presence of the viewer.

Campbell's photographic narrative affects the viewer by a steady suffusion of latent anxiety-provoking signs and signifiers, which are so subtle that much of this

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> *liberate us [...] grief can illuminate your life [...] Let loss be a life adventure and the way to do that...just stay with it...grieve...and let your inner experience guide you.*

<div align="right">(Warburton, 2012).</div>

This notion of *sitting in* one's grief is also advocated by Julia Samuel who uses the term 'embracing':

> *But there is a paradox at the centre of loss, and it is this. Grief is the most intense pain there is, and we will do anything to avoid pain. So we run away from it; we run away from our own grief, and we run away from others' grief.*
> *And yet, says Julia, running away from it means we will never recover from it. Embracing it, moving through its agony, and allowing ourselves to just be while it washes over us, is the only way to survive it; because we have to feel the worst of it in order to let it change us, and then we can start to find out who we are going to be in the wake of it.*

<div align="right">(Moorhead, 2017).</div>

information is imparted subliminally. Because of this it embodies buried potential which has the power to affect the spectator retrospectively. The fictive nature of my work made it seem harmless and beguiling. It is necessary to view it for a while in order to comprehend or *feel* its covert significance. As a work of stasis it successfully engenders aspects of my grief and mourning processes especially in relation to my prior attempts as materialized in film and performance. It depicts my experiences of making the familiar seem unfamiliar, moments of introspection, oscillation between intense sorrow and a return to the immediate world, plus the residual melancholy that occurs after mourning. By presenting *Grief Shadow* as live art the notion of ephemerality was implicit in the work itself. Changing states were also signalled by the same methods deployed in the *vanitas* through binary opposition or dualism. Equally, the depiction of a fictional scene allows the spectator to narrate the 'story' for themselves and bring it 'alive' through imaginative interpretation.

This work could be extended further through the production of an all-black domestic environment or series of black homely environs. The viewer would then be free to walk, sit or stand within these surroundings and thus become totally immersed. Mute black figures may also occupy the space by walking through the installation or sitting for a while in contemplation but they would never interact with the spectator. In this way the viewer would then become the focus or psychological centre of the work, thus allowing them to be enveloped by the *feeling* tone of it (Bishop, 2005: 27-28).

Grief Shadow was successful because it encapsulates my processes of grief, mourning and melancholy without the work itself having to change states. The change of state was activated in part by the viewer. My use of visual signification was easy to comprehend and did not confuse my intended readings of the artwork. Unlike *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There*, viewers were also prepared to engage with this installation possibly because the addition of an inanimate figure provides intrigue.

Whereas *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* articulated loss through an interplay of signification, metaphor and the representation of time as existing in the past or rooted in death, it did not actualize the grieving process itself. This is because it did not portray changing states. Conversely, *D(e)ad* was effective because it actualized grieving processes through the metaphorical 'playing out' of changing vegetative states as measured across many months. *Grief Shadow provided affirmation that it is possible to embody the synergistic and dynamic processes of grief, mourning and melancholy through a static work which does not in and of itself portray pictorial, plastic or processual*

changes of state. The performative element was provided by the viewer who 'activated' the work. This exposition extends my previous analyses and adds to the repertoire of transient art cenotaphs. While my commemorative cenotaphs are short-lived physical manifestations in a gallery space, Campbell's digital cenotaph is permanently available on the Internet. Works like Campbell's and mine evidence that grieving is not a homogenized experience but an individualized one. These cenotaphs are secular forms of ritualistic behaviours which give symbolic expression to intense feelings and emotions. They provide personal, familial, communal and collective discourses about memorial practices in secular society. Transient physical manifestations in the form of art cenotaphs or memorials are evolving in fascinating and unexpected directions. In the next section I will be analysing a new cultural phenomenon which is emerging that of extreme embalming.

6.4 Cenotaphs in art. *The circle closes: as art is bent on imitating life, life imitates art[97].*

The first representation of extreme embalming occurred in Puerto Rico and has since been witnessed in New Orleans and Ghana. It began in 2008 with the death of Angel Luis Pantojas Medina, a 24-year-old murder victim. Whilst alive, Medina expressed a wish not to be laid out in an open casket according to custom, but to be presented standing up. Medina's family honoured his preference and during a three-day wake his corpse was posed (in the corner of his family's living room next to his coffin filled with flowers) *el muerto parao* or dead man standing (Borreli, 2016; *Extreme Embalming* 2016). When posted on the Internet this unconventional funeral ceremony went viral, heralding a novel form of commemoration. Deceased individuals are presented at their wake in personalised vignettes as if still 'alive'. For instance, Mickey Easterling, a New Orleans socialite and philanthropist who died in 2014 aged 83, was presented at her wake in the vestibule of the Saenger Theatre. In cameo, she reclined on a garden seat as if relaxing at a party. She held a vintage cigarette holder in one hand and a glass of champagne in the other. Other memorials include David Morales Colón astride his Honda motorcycle, Christopher Rivera Amora, a boxer, standing inside a makeshift boxing ring, Miriam Burbank posed as if sitting in her living room (Figure 90), Lionel Batiste, a jazz and blues musician

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[97] (Kaprow, 1996/2003; 111).

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(Figure 91), and Edgardo Velazquez, a paramedic, sitting in his ambulance. Like *Grief Shadow*, because these vignettes are available for viewing only for a short period of time and they contain a real figure, they too provide a sense of vitality and immediacy. Whereas *Grief Shadow* is a sombre, introspective work, extreme embalming vignettes are in contrast, 'pictures' of exuberance. The deceased are presented in technicolour tableaux as if momentarily freeze-framed in the bustle of their ongoing daily lives. This is a radical departure from the traditional epitaph and the sentiments enshrined in the prayerful request 'rest in peace' from Christian funeral liturgies, commonly seen on headstones from the eighteenth century onwards and often abbreviated to 'RIP' (Gill, 2018).

In portraiture, individuals are represented with codified objects which serve to characterise and animate them. Because extreme embalming is a form of post-mortem portraiture, objects and staged activities which personify the deceased play an important role. For example, Miriam Burbank's tableau was designed to evoke her pleasures and pastimes (Figure 90). She enjoyed socialising and her favourite drink was a cold beer and an occasional whisky. She liked to smoke menthol cigarettes. Being a keen supporter of the New Orleans Saints, Burbank was presented at her wake dressed in her team's colours with her fingernails painted black and gold. On the table in front of her are two miniature souvenir football helmets, again evidencing her status as an avid fan. Burbank was seated at a table on a raised platform framed by two floor level disco balls. In tribute to her memory, with colourful strobe lights and music playing, guests danced in front of her podium.

Whereas the historical *vanitas* signals the fleeting nature of life through the depiction of recently vacated environments as represented by a snuffed-out candle or the detritus left after a meal, the opposite is true in extreme embalming tableaux which imply the all-pervading presence of the loved one who has gone. In these contemporary versions of the *vanitas,* the emphasis is placed on the pursuit of personal pleasure and pastimes and in these scenarios it is the social gathering of family and friends who 'resurrect' the deceased through a shared communal activity.

Although these vignettes bare an uncanny resemblance to the hyper-real sculptural dioramas produced by Duane Hanson, they have emerged through a different lineage[98].

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[98] Since 1996, the artist Gregor Schneider has wanted to display a person dying naturally in an art gallery or somebody who has just died 'to show the beauty of death' (Schneider, 2008). With the advent of extreme embalming, I think that it is not inconceivable that a contemporary post-mortem portrait comprising the deceased could equally be exhibited as a work of art in a gallery.

Figure 90. Miriam Burbank, died aged 53, 1 June 2014, embalmed and posed as if sitting in her room at home.

The roots of extreme embalming can be traced back to the Christian cult of saints' relics and European and American post-mortem photography from the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. By 400 AD, established Christian doctrine maintained that the corpse of a saint was incorruptible, having transcended the process of putrefaction through divine intervention (Lutz, 2015: 19). Instead, (if left intact and not dismembered for relics) the saint's body appears as it did in life, resting in an eternal state of preservation[99]. Likewise, embalming also imbues the dead with a sense of incorruptibility because at the point of death, bodily decomposition is chemically arrested. The staging of the deceased in a familiar pose and/or setting is also analogous to post-mortem photography in that it provides the bereaved with a 'final memory picture' or even a 'Beautiful Memory Picture' (Mitford, 1965: 58-59). An accessible 'picture' of the deceased as 'alive' can provide comfort for mourners amidst the chaos of death[100].

The existence of a dead loved one posed in an unchanging vignette introduces the notion of a different realm, one which hovers on the threshold between the living and the dead. Located in a continuous present, the deceased are momentarily linked with the eternal. Their liminal animate and inanimate status affords a valuable opportunity for the living to commune with them, touch them and say their final goodbyes. Extreme embalming has allowed mourners to engage socially with the deceased through such activities as partying, joining them for a beer or a final bike ride, playing a game of cards and capturing them for posterity in videos and photographs. A representation of the deceased as existing contiguously as active but dead offers the hope that they continue to 'live on' for eternity.

As mentioned previously in Chapter Three (section 3.8) the invention of photography led to the production of memorial portraits[101]. In these post-mortem

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[99] 'To demonstrate the sacredness of its elite, the Catholic Church publicly displays the incorruptible bodies of its saints. The good do not rot; they remain in a continuous present. The idea proved irresistible to even the godless regimes of Communism. Preserved under glass for public display are the remains of Vladimir Lenin, Ho Chi Minh and Mao Tse-Tung.' (Kearl and Jacobsen, 2013: 60).

[100] If the death of the deceased was violent or traumatic the representation of the body as being restored to its former integrity can provide solace. Angel Luis Pantojas Medina, David Morales Colón, Christopher Rivera Amora, Fernando de Jesús Díaz Beato, Jomar Aguayo Collazo were all victims of shootings. Henry Rosario Martinez died from a fatal overdose of drugs and alcohol. As these individuals evidence, extreme embalming is currently popular with male youth urban subculture(s) in Puerto Rico. This new form of memorialization may be seen as a mark of defiance or bravado, humorous/fun/sensational, fashionable, and/or an acknowledgement that family and friends may need to see their dead loved ones physically restored to their former selves.

[101] Post-mortem portraiture significantly increased with the invention of the daguerreotype in 1939, making

representations the deceased are depicted as if 'alive' usually sitting or sleeping, either alone or with family members. In this way, through tangible, portable pictures the deceased is fully integrated into a family's history (Figure 92). They continue to 'live on' in a state of limitless temporality. These earlier posthumous portraits are exactly the same as extreme embalming portraiture in all but context. The photograph of Lionel Batiste standing as part of a group portrait (Figure 91) is similar to the image of the parents sitting with their deceased daughter in a family portrait (Figure 92). Both of these photographs capture the deceased for posterity as an act of continuing social and familial bonds.

Taking photographs is now a common form of currency. Lived experiences are being captured quickly and informally. As stated previously, photography is now recognized as not necessarily being a direct representation of reality - it can 'be highly ambiguous and open to potentially misleading interpretation' (Salkeld, 2014: 93). 'Photography develops, rather, *with us*, and in *response to us*' (Silverman, 2015: 12). Extreme embalming tableaux are set up in the knowledge that they will inevitably be photographed and that they are romanticized illusions. It is this inbuilt ambiguity which offers the bereaved a modicum of solace. These tableaux are presented as 3D stop-motion photographs in the knowledge that when the bereaved view, interact with or photograph their loved ones from certain angles the resulting 'pictures' or memories will make them seem 'alive'. For example, compare (Figure 93) of Miriam Burbank with (Figure 90). In (Figure 93) she is clearly sitting on a stage at the Charbonnet Funeral Home in New Orleans. In (Figure 90) she looks as she did in life. As one of her friends remarked at her wake, 'When I walked in I feel [*sic*] like I was in her house and I don't hurt so much, because there is more of her…it's like she's not dead, it's not like a funeral it's like she's just in the room with us'[102]. Close-up photographic representations of Burbank 'frame' this mourner's fervent wish as reality. Burbank genuinely appears to be a woman simply enjoying herself sitting at a party in a domestic setting. This type of illusion is enhanced further in the images of Jomar Aguayo Collazo who is located not in a funeral home but

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it an affordable option for the middle classes. The daguerreotype was invented and named after Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre who discovered that treating a polished silvered copper plate (after exposing it to light) with mercury vapour would develop the latent image traced on its surface. Each daguerreotype is a unique, delicate object and as such is usually displayed behind glass in a folding case lined with either velvet or satin so as to enhance and protect its precious status. Viewed from a certain angle, the object looks mirror-like but when viewed from another, the detailed image imprinted on its surface is thrown into sharp relief (Salkeld, 2014: 16). The invention of the carte de visite by André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri in 1854 and the mass production of duplicate prints meant that photographs became more affordable.

[102] WGNO: News and Politics, 2014.

Figure 91. Lionel Batiste aged 81 who died on 8 July 2012 posed at his wake greeting visitors.

Figure 92. Unknown Photographer. A posthumous family portrait. 'Long exposures when taking photographs meant that the dead were often seen more sharply than the slightly-blurred living, because of their lack of movement' (Bell, 2016).
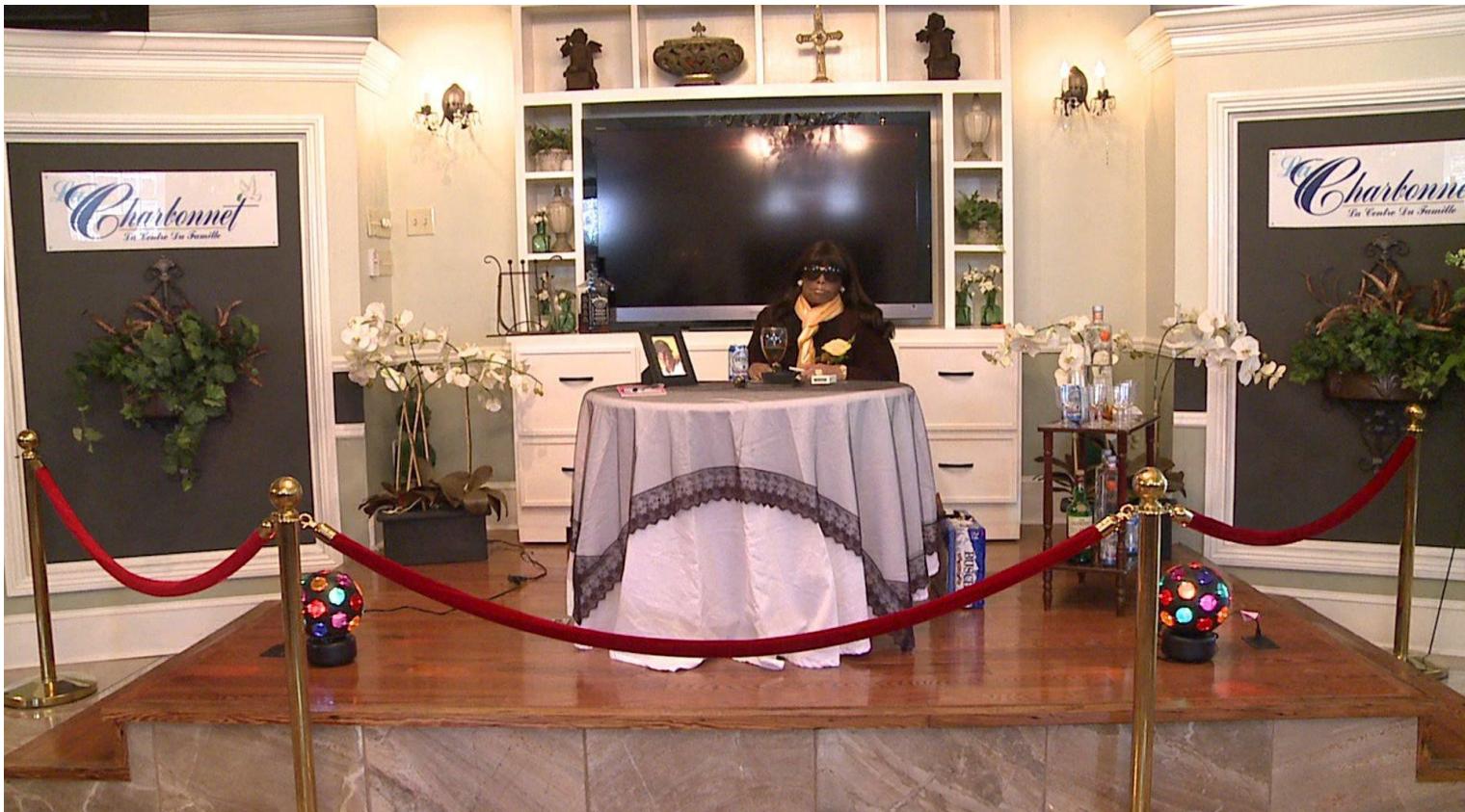
Figure 93. Miriam Burbank embalmed and sitting on a stage at the Charbonnet Funeral Home in New Orleans.

posed playing dominoes inside his mother's bar in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico (Figure 94). These astonishing illusionary mechanisms by which the deceased is simultaneously seen as 'dead' and 'not dead' offer the bereaved a 'gap' in which to acknowledge what seems incomprehensible**.** The sensational aspect inherent in this new form of memorialization means that the resulting digital cenotaphs located on the Internet have gone viral exponentially raising the profile status of these individuals post-mortem. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the deceased can continue to 'live' in perpetuum digitally through networks of wider social engagement. It is interesting to note that the images which compromise these particular cenotaphs embody intricate mirrored referents. This is because the corpse as a double referent (simultaneously signifying both a presence and absence) is posed as if 'alive' in a 'picture' and then subsequently re-presented as a digital image(s). As a copy of a living person, presented in a facsimile which is duplicated again, the resulting images circulate around articulations of the void. However, paradoxically, these images also produce the opposite effect in that the deceased are exponentially becoming more 'alive' and 'active' through the proliferation of wider social discourse. The ways in which culture reproduces itself means that art forms will continue to migrate across time, place and location. Contemporary cenotaphs in art are emerging in a variety of different registers and forms. As we have seen, they can be surprising, complex and challenging. Nevertheless, whether they are transient cenotaphs like *Grief Shadow* or more permanent ones such as those located on the Internet like extreme embalming posthumous portraits, they are all expressions of living with loss. A Venn diagram regarding the exposition of *Grief Shadow* in relationship to extreme embalming is located below at the end of this chapter (Figure 95).

6.5 Conclusion

Traditionally, individuals in Europe and America have derived meaning and purpose in their lives from believing that they are part of some larger cosmic plan designed by God the ultimate authority. All human rites of passage such as christening, confirmation, marriage, death, dying and burial were governed by religious ceremonies and rituals. 'God's role as the source of meaning and authority was not just a philosophical theory. It affected every facet of daily life' (Harari, 2015: 222). The definitive battle at death was a

Figure 94. Jomar Aguayo Collazo embalmed and posed playing dominoes in his mother's bar in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico.

summation of an individual's lived experience as they sought to relinquish all their earthly desires in a quest to secure resurrection. Customarily guidance was available with regards to grief and mourning rituals and observances which 'gave the bereaved person some meaning, security, predictability and control' (Rando, 1991; 5). Today in secular societies after the ritualistic internment of the dead enabling public displays of grief, the process of grief and mourning is expected to be conducted in private often 'in a more isolated fashion' (Rando; 1991: 6; Cann, 2014: 1-10). Nowadays people are free to choose their own forms of memorialization[103]. To some extent artists have always been mediators with regards to the materialization of grief and mourning within communities[104]. Today living in secularized societies means that the how, where and when one grieves and mourns has changed. These changes have occurred as a direct result of living in a secular, pluralistic society. People are now expected to find their own meaning and purpose in life rather than fulfilling the will of God.

As a secondary school teacher (of 11-18 year olds), I have always included my expositional works or art practice alongside those of my pupils' practice for the purposes of critical studies or as part of a group critique (Horn, 2006, 2008, 2009). I know that if students are able to experience works directly for themselves, it helps them to articulate very complex issues (Horn, 2009: 167). My works of grief, mourning and melancholy were particularly revelatory because they provided an opportunity for young people to discuss very difficult experiences concerning death, dying, love and

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[103] As a consequence of this, an entire industry has grown around the disposal of cremated remains. Ashes may be scattered in a personally significant place, launched into space, made into a diamond pressed into a vinyl record, mixed with ink for a commemorative tattoo or with paint to produce a portrait of the deceased. 'Celestis makes it possible to honor the dream and memory of your departed loved one by launching a symbolic portion of cremated remains into Earth orbit, onto the lunar surface or into deep space. Missions into space that return the cremated remains to Earth are also available' (Funeral Portal: Похоронный портал, 2011). 'The LifeGem is a certified, high-quality diamond created from the ashes of your loved one as a memorial to their unique and wonderful life' (LifeGem-Ashes to Diamonds 2001).
(Andvinyly: Press your ashes into vinyl, n.d.; MailOnline, 2011; Fields, 2014).

[104] For example, during the sixteenth century in Europe, artists painted mourning portraits of the deceased laid out in repose on their deathbed. Examples of deathbed portraits include: *William the Silent* (1584) by Christiaen Jansz van Bieselingen; *Mourning portrait of K. Horvath-Stansith, née Kiss* (1680-1690) artist unknown, Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava; *A Child of the Honigh Family on its Deathbed* (1675-1700) artist unknown.

Posthumous portraits were fashionable until the early nineteenth century, especially among the bourgeoisie. Examples of painted posthumous portraits, include: *Valentine Godé-Darel* (1915) by Ferdinard Hodler; *The Death of Casagemas* (1901), Pablo Picasso, Musée Picasso, Paris, France. The posthumous portrait records the dead before rigor mortis sets in. This practice continues to this day despite the advent of photography as seen in the work of Maggi Hambling who has produced sketches of her dead mother (1988), father (1998) and her lover Henrietta Moraes (1999).

life. Stephen Jenkinson asserts that Western societies are not only 'death phobic' but also 'grief illiterate'. He believes that grief is a skill which cannot be taught but is acquired through being 'radiated by it' or 'exposed to it' through genuine relational experiences involving living, death and dying[105] [106]. I agree with Jenkinson that grief and mourning is not an instructive process about which an individual can be taught to do or perform but nevertheless that 'death education' should be accommodated within the national school curriculum[107]. Having provided forums for discussion[108] about these subjects, I have discovered that young people are very keen to take full advantage of these opportunities and partake in them with an astonishing maturity, which often belies their age. Through discussions with my students we have come to understand that contemporary cenotaphs in art are very important, because ultimately they are expressions of profound love and affirmations of life.

The beauty of cenotaphs in art is that they do not 'speak' of stages, phases or models of grief and mourning. Instead, they express an ancient heartfelt recognition that there is no 'quick fix' or simple cures. These are visual testimonies, acknowledgements and exposal of the vastness of the human capacity to love and what it means to be alive. Although each of these works embodies an articulation of the void, haunting absence, trace or fleeting impression, they simultaneously express love in the midst of their continual dying. They are the secular equivalents of laments, eulogies, rituals, votive offerings, prayers, contact relics, gifts, shrines and tokens of love and grace. They also embrace moments of joy, happiness and laughter:

Loving and grieving are two sides of the same coin: we cannot have one

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[105] 'Stephen Jenkinson Way of Grief', [radio programme] 2013.

[106] Isabella Laws believes that it is unfair to expect junior doctors to have to learn about death on the job. In 2000 the average time spent in medical school on teaching students about palliative care was on average 20 hours, a figure which Law surmises from her own experience as a medical student in 2017 has not altered. She therefore decided to visit a death café (founded in the UK in 2011, based on the Swiss model café mortel) which promotes conversations and awareness about death. On arriving she realized that as someone in her twenties she was the youngest person there. 'Death cafes aren't a solution to lack of teaching, but I think they make a good start. All medical students should attend one. It's something all of us, without exception, will be affected by. Only through practising these skills can we hope to be effective and sensitive communicators when the time comes for us to break bad news.' (Laws, 2017; Sleeman, 2013).

[107] 'We aren't taught dying in school. If you think that sex education in schools was an uphill battle, try getting death education into the curriculum. I have, and it should be in the dictionary entry defining "futile". Kids are taught the life cycle, but it's usually the life cycle of frogs. They aren't often taught that it includes death, and they're rarely taught that it includes them' (Jenkinson, 2015: 154).

[108] For example, Briony Campbell provided inspirational lectures and discussion forums about *The Dad Project,* at Trinity Catholic School, Warwickshire in the art department on 16 October 2013.

without risking the other. Only by understanding the nature and pattern of loving can we begin to understand the problems of grieving. Conversely, the loss of a loved person can teach us much about the nature of love.

(Colin Murray Parkes, 2009: i).

For the purposes of my research and understanding, I have had to theoretically dismantle the artworks in my corpus and break them down into their constituent parts so as to unlock the mechanisms by which they function. However, by doing this, there is a danger of forgetting that these art cenotaphs are not just objects of study, but exquisite fleeting materializations of the human spirit. They are tender, vulnerable acts of love. Not only do they honour the deceased and keep them close by, but they also honour the precious nature of life itself.

Grief Shadow

Monochromatic

Oblique referencing

Shadow

Obsolete

Silent

Tableau
Fictive
Static

Oscillating states
Binary Opposites
Feeling tone

Extreme

Embalming

**Good memory picture /
digital photographs and
films placed on the
Internet.**

Animate / inanimate.

**Embalmed deceased
posed as if 'alive'.**

Limitless temporality.

Incorruptibility.

Cenotaph

Social event

**Continuing
bonds**

Grief Shadow

- Audience

Mobile

Colourful

Overt

Event

Figure 95 A Venn diagram comparing the exposition of findings of *Grief Shadow* with representations of extreme embalming.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

7.1 A summary of the aims and significant contributions made to knowledge

I will briefly revisit my aims, original contributions and achievements of my practice-led research and the implementation of a new methodological approach with reference to loss, grief and mourning. I will also look at possible directions for future work.

The aims of this research have been to investigate the ways in which artists are forging new approaches to the portrayal of grief and mourning; how these have arisen in an increasingly secular society; to explore through my own art practice, created in response to loss, grief and mourning (including the use of ephemeral materials and genres) how art might assume new forms and meanings in the context of contemporary society.

The knowledge, conceptual insights and practices developed through this research provide significant contributions to discourses taking place in art practice, practice-based research, art history, psychology and sociocultural studies with reference to loss, grief and mourning. By responding to the aims of this research I am now able to evidence significant contributions to knowledge. Practice-led research facilitated the formulation of two central hypotheses:

- Firstly, that contemporary artists are *materializing and/or actualizing aspects of their unique grieving processes*; and/or *mimicking the symptoms of loss, grief, mourning and trauma* in their artwork(s)

- Secondly, that these artists' works evidence a new phenomenon which is currently emerging: that of the transient cenotaph (either as a physical manifestation or digitally on the Internet).

Evidence that contemporary artists are materializing and/or actualizing their *unique* grieving processes is a significant contribution to theory. When discussing these types of artworks critics, researchers and writers have previously expressed homogenized viewpoints. For instance, there is a common recognition that ephemeral materials which dissolve, decay or disappear can be seen to mimic human processes such as death, dying

and grieving. This uniform approach when discussing grief and mourning artworks is understandable and necessary because these works undeniably encapsulate familiar and culturally recognizable customs and habits. However, artists are also conceptualizing their embodied experiences of loss, grief and trauma in more covert ways through the materialization of shifts, gaps, elision and hiatuses. Similar to the grieving process, the specificity of these unique patterns can be layered in such a way that they are hidden or conceal one another. The shape and form of the artist's trauma and/or grieving process(es) may not be exposed in a singular work but revealed gradually across the span of their production. In the fields of psychology and psychiatry it is now common knowledge that although grieving is a universal phenomenon, an individual's grieving response is unique. I have demonstrated in my thesis that the works featured here embody distinctive aspects of each artist's grieving/trauma/mourning processes as well as their coping mechanisms (Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six). A new approach is required when discussing or theorizing about such artworks; it is one which acknowledges a considered, particular and nuanced account – in other words, an approach which searches for the unique aspects of the materializing/actualizing/embodiment/processing of the artist's lived experience. The individualized responses of living with loss encapsulated within contemporary works provide a valuable source of information not only about the prevalence and complexity of these processes but also opportunities for greater understanding, compassion and healing. Wilke's and Spence's oeuvre produced whilst living with dying also bears testimony to the fact that one can experience grief and mourning pre-mortem. By including these artists in my corpus I have helped to extend the rubric for this area of study with regards to art research and criticism.

Another contribution I have made is that of piloting a new methodological approach entitled 'the four concepts'. This methodological approach offers the potential for new insights and knowledge when applied to contemporary works of grief and mourning. The application of the four concepts enabled:

- the re-contextualization of Wilke's and Spence's work not as polemic feminist critiques or autopathographies but instead as documents of grief and mourning

- the re-contextualization of the ways in which Gonzalez-Torres, Leonard and Horn re-applied established generic codes and tropes as originating in the *vanitas* to materialize personalised secular works of living with loss in response to the death of a loved one. The utilization of the four concepts produced new

'readings' of these artists' works.

None of the findings above would have been possible without my art practice, public exhibitions, methodological approaches (Triangulation, The Iterative Cyclic Web and The Four Concepts) and academic research. As a methodological approach, the four concepts facilitated and generated a diverse range of new knowledge, not only concerning specific commemorative artworks but also in the re-visioning of these works as indicators of wider sociological shifts in grief and mourning practices.

The active construction and reflection through writing about *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* proved to be an invaluable aid in understanding the methods deployed by practitioners concerning their materializations of loss. Drawing comparisons between my exposition and that of writers and theorists proved illuminating. It revealed that artists are embodying their lived experiences in materialized form by *mimicking the symptoms of loss, grief, mourning and trauma*. The exposition *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There* acted as a counterpoint in this discovery. Although it encapsulated the monotony that the grieving process may incur, it did not *actualize aspects of the grieving process itself*. This is because the work started and finished in exactly the same state.

Conversely, with the production of *D(e)ad*, which was composed of organic matter, the *actualization of the grieving process* was exposed. As a 'performative' processual work unfolding across a year, it changed states many times. During this period, through material decomposition, it literally altered in 'character'; as a metaphorical portrait of my father it symbolically 'played out' his death and dying. The production of *D(e)ad* led to a fascinating and synergistic discourse between differing yet interconnecting objects of study. These objects of study were *D(e)ad*; the historical *vanitas*; and works by Gonzalez-Torres and Leonard. By looking back to the *vanitas* it was possible to map out its remarkable re-emergence in the form of performative contemporary cenotaphs in art.

Grief Shadow extended upon my previous expositions by evidencing that *it is possible to embody the synergistic and dynamic processes of grief, mourning and melancholy through a static work which does not in and of itself portray pictorial, plastic or processual changes of state*. This is important because it offers a new insight into artistic materializations of bereavement and commemorative practice.

Another significant contribution to knowledge is the identification of these grief and mourning works as cenotaphs and what they inculcate. Traditionally, a cenotaph is a physical monument or tomb commemorating an individual or a group of people who are

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buried elsewhere. If built as a national memorial, it serves to honour those who have died at war or in a disaster, providing a tangible focus for remembrance and commemorative practice. Cenotaphs erected as public monuments are architecturally imposing but nevertheless impersonal. They do not capture the quintessential characteristics concerning each and every individual who has died in a particular event. Instead, inscribed into these monuments are the devastating rollcalls of the dead which evoke a collective message of compassion, suffering and sacrifice. Cenotaphs memorializing famous people such as Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)[109] in Washington, D. C., or Horatio Nelson (1758-1805)[110] in London venerate the individual by accentuating their heroic servitude for the greater benefits of humanity.

In comparison, contemporary art cenotaphs are very unassuming. They allude to the tender gestures made by those visiting a tomb or shrine such as leaving tokens of endearment. The artworks in my thesis comprise fruit, photographs, votive offerings, contact relics and flowers. This type of cenotaph is so unostentatious that it is in danger of being overlooked; nevertheless, as I have evidenced, this new phenomenon offers valuable conduits of information. These memorials pay tribute to ordinary people like the artist themselves, family members and close friends. As a subgenre, contemporary art cenotaphs encapsulate a range of similar characteristics including:

- unique personal grieving responses
- attempts to overcome psychosomatic wounding
- loss as incurred, inferred, sublimated or realized
- a metaphorical or an actual portrait of the deceased
- the combination of intimate/private domains with wider sociocultural arenas
- the expression of human mutability, ephemerality and the inevitability of death and dying
- the deceased being metaphorically resurrected to 'live' again through social

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[109] Abraham Lincoln the 16th President of the United States of America is honoured in the Lincoln Memorial (built 1914-1922). The colossal statue of President Lincoln sitting in a chair was designed by Daniel Chester French (1850-1931) and carved by the Piccirilli Brothers. The architect of the building in which the statue his housed is Henry Bacon (1866-1924) (National Park Service U.S Department of the Interior, n.d.).

[110] Admiral Horatio Nelson is memorialized in Nelson's Column (built 1840-1843) in Trafalgar Square. It was designed by William Railton (1800-1877). Admiral Nelson is depicted standing on top of a Corinthian column. The statue was carved out of Craigleith sandstone by Edward Hodges Baily (1788-1867). The four lions at the base of the column were sculpted by Edwin Henry Landseer (1802-1873) and added in 1867 (AboutBritain.com, n.d.; BBC News, 2006; The National Archives, 2013).

> encounters and active engagement

- continuing bonds, acts of love and the preciousness of life itself.

Cenotaphs in art are an embryonic field of study. This thesis reveals that contemporary artworks need to be looked at again as expressions of living with loss. The scope of this research also needs to be extended to encompass other forms of art practice. Areas that need to be investigated include contemporary artists' portrayal of death as sleep, funereal monuments/architecture, shrines and post-mortem portraiture.

In summary, I also think that it is important to acknowledge once again the links between contemporary art cenotaphs and Christian tradition especially because in secular societies, religion no longer dictates the manner in which death and dying is rationalized. Nevertheless, it still does resonate profoundly within the public consciousness and underpins the collective psyche (Jung, 1933/2001). Historically, the church commissioned and funded the production of art as a means to inspire faith and enlightenment. From this symbiotic relationship emerged an extraordinarily rich visual iconography conveying meaning concerning the individual and the divine. Themes and genres in religion which are apparent in these contemporary works have included the Christian cult of saints' relics, the *vanitas*, images of saints and martyrs and *ars moriendi*. Since art gestures back to that which has gone before, it is not surprising that artists are reconfiguring religious rituals, tropes and commemorative practices in their personalised cenotaphs.

Every artist's cenotaph encapsulates a homage or religious recognition which they reframe into a secular equivalent. Wilke and Spence forensically record the invasive and harrowing medical treatments that they underwent whilst living with cancer. The representation of their acquiescent and medically wounded bodies are temporal successors to that of Christian images of saints and martyrs. As expressions of suffering they offer a regulated encounter with the abject and the possibility of catharsis. Gonzalez-Torres' cenotaphs honouring his partner Ross Laycock and father are the secular equivalent of a sacred votive offering, shrine, sacrifice or the Roman Catholic Eucharist (Mooney, 2004; O'Neill, 2007). Similarly, Leonard's memorial to David Wojnorwicz evokes a votive offering or church graveyard (Philadelphia Museum of Art: Collections, 2018). Her meditational practice of stitching together fruit skins is synonymous with the sacred act of reciting traditional prayers such as the Rosary. My cenotaph to Robert Webb

generates a symbolic relic reminiscent of the Shroud of Turin or the veil of Veronica.

A prime example of the re-contextualization of traditional Christian scripture and iconography is by Wilke in the creation of her personal mythos. She collects precious contact relics of her wounded mutability and presents her iconic self-portraits as diptychs and triptychs. She reconfigures the suffering saints and as a dying mortal, she becomes the suffering Christ figure as a focus for contemplation. When *Intra-Venus*, (1991-1992) is exhibited within the sacrosanctity of a white cubed space, it formulates the secular version of an oratory. Whereas Christ is resurrected from the dead to become a divine figurehead, Wilke is resurrected in materialized form as a suffering flesh-and-blood mortal: her work is worthy of veneration. Through it, she performs an act of self-transcendence. Wilke's personalised cenotaphs (in digital form or as physical manifestations in a gallery) are indicative of all the works in this corpus. These works are remarkable because not only do these artists metaphorically or symbolically resurrect a dead loved one but they also - through the acknowledgement of their own grief and mourning - resurrect and heal themselves. The discovery that these artists are mediating Christian theological practices in the production of secular memorial works provides a contribution to this field of knowledge. Art is no longer in service to a religious metanarrative. Likewise, the vestiges of religion (relics, garments, paintings) are no longer reserved for an ecclesiastic community but are being redefined within contemporary art practice for the ordinary person confronting their own mortality. Rather than church or chapel providing spaces in which grief and mourning are ritualized, fine art is increasingly taking up the task of the sacred space in which artist and viewer find communion. Such artworks challenge what might be considered divine and where divine ritual might take place.

The production of these personalised cenotaphs for public viewing by artists is a generous act on their behalf. This is especially so today: in America and Europe after the public internment of the dead, people are expected to conduct their grieving in private (Rando; 1991: 5-6; Cann, 2014: 1-10). Artists have taken a deeply private activity/process and made it public. In a secular age when there are no longer any customary guidelines, rituals or observances, artists' cenotaphs offer different ways of understanding loss and bereavement. They reveal alternative forms of commemorative rituals and tributes as well as providing innovative, practical and poetic ways of assimilating profound loss back into our lives. Even more importantly, they provide a discursive forum and opportunity for social encounters about difficult lived experiences which for many people prove to be both isolating and frightening. They show that the deceased can still have an active,

vibrant and ongoing existence in one's life and in the wider community (Klass *et al*, 1996).

The synergistic mechanisms afforded by practice-led research (including exhibitions and expositions), methodological approaches and theoretical research generate exciting, challenging and unforeseen knowledge and discoveries.

Appendices

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An exhibition of practical work produced by Sheridan Horn shown in partial fulfillment of the final submission.

The exhibition was housed in the International Project Space, Birmingham School of Art, Margaret Street, between Friday 6th - Tuesday 10th April 2018 and contained the following expositional works:

- *Here-and-Now; Then-and-There*, (2012-2013) A photographic memorial (for close-up details of the separate photographic images in this triptych please see Figures 35, 36 and 37. These three images were displayed in the exact order as they appear in the figures but housed within a single picture frame

- *Grief Shadow*, (2014). A photographic memorial containing four photographs. For close-up details of each image please refer to Figures 86, 87, 88 and 89

- A flat screen monitor displayed a rolling programme of two colour films *Grief and Mourning* (2010) 5.51 minutes and *Grief and Mourning* (2010) 13.44 minutes by Sheridan Horn and Tony Jopia

- *Grief and Mourning* (2018).

For a visual overview of the exhibition please see Figures 96, 97 and 98 below.

Figure 96. Sheridan Horn. Expositional Works (2018). International Project Space, Birmingham School of Art. 6 - 10 April. Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.

Figure 97. Sheridan Horn. Expositional Works (2018). International Project Space, Birmingham School of Art. 6 - 10 April. Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.

Figure 98. Sheridan Horn. Expositional Works (2018) International Project Space, Birmingham School of Art. 6 - 10 April. Courtesy of Douglas Atfield.