

**EMBODIED NARRATIVES:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY WITH PUBLIC SPACES AND CREATIVE BODIES IN
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA USING ARTS BASED METHODS AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE METHODOLOGIES**

by

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ABSTRACT

This multidisciplinary arts-based research-creation study explored health and wellness realities, including my own, of people in northern British Columbia. In two public settings, autoethnographic creative writing was translated into installations and performances. The use of arts-based methods in this study was intended to evoke participants' intuitive ways of knowing, leading to (re)connection with self, body, and land/place: in short, to resilience. The broadest question of the research was: Can practices anchored in creative/performative autoethnography and body-attuned narrative help people in northern landscapes attend to mental health and healing? The findings emphasized achievable potentials for individual and community resilience, as well as renewed connection to place, through creative interventions that engage narrative in sensorial ways. Findings also emphasized the importance of self-determination and agency within the design of creative interventions, and the implications for healing through witnessing narrative.

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Placing myself: A creative reflection

I'm thinking about the way we create spaces for healing. About the way we hold space for one another. About the ways our actions become research become action forming an ever-expanding circle. To search and re-search and search again.

I'm thinking of a drive through Jasper and the Crowsnest pass, coming to the Old Man river and moving through my own bloodlines. I'm thinking of an island I had never heard of before becoming familiar and of moving like seaweed in the bay. I'm thinking of the shimmer of poplar, aspen and birch and their slow dance through the seasons. I'm thinking of my own heart turned inside out. Seeking reciprocity, a mirror, presence, even unconditional love. I'm thinking of the space beyond words. The space that arrives, was always there, makes itself known, heard, this space beyond words (yet that is found through words) that my search leads.

I find myself wrapping rosehips, birch bark, chaga, rocks in copper. Materials I've collected over this summer and fall. I wrap these medicines, these objects holding mass, and space. Taking their own time to grow, to decay.

Wrapping, writing, gathering, assembling, moving. What is revealed to me through these processes? It's like walking in the bush. It's both a mapping of new terrains and of terrains I've passed so many times I would know them in the dark.

When I was born I was wrapped, swaddled. Wrapping recalls a maternal nourishing. A containing. Some somatic practices draw on the image of wrapping oneself in sound and

*vibration as a way of invoking the spiral line in the body. Wrapping leads to unfolding.
Becoming enveloped in the thinnest veil of sound, which permeates its way in deeper, deeper,
into the core of the body until movement arises in a slow-moving unfurling recalling the
fern, the cocoon. The thin line of spider web winking light in this place known only by
mushroom pickers comes to know us as we lay our footsteps down.*

We vanish, sometimes to ourselves.

*Writing may be a way of picking up my own tracks,
rekindling the fire,
tracking myself to the beat and breath of highway lines.*

*Finding myself on a dock west of west,
in a snowy forest where the river is clean enough to drink from,
or waking next to a glacier mouthing its way clear over a mountain range
north of north.*

Pocket it.

Wrap it in copper.

Let it decay, until only the space remains.

1. INTRODUCTION:

An inquiry into fostering resilience through narrative and the body

This research developed wellness-focused, image-rich, and interdisciplinary narratives associated with lived embodied experience. Specifically, and using arts-based research (McNiff, 1998), and autoethnography (Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015), I developed two creative interventions: *Blue Rituals: Writing the Self* (referred to as *Blue Rituals* for short) and *Ecologies of Intimacy*. *Blue Rituals* focused on exploring mental health realities, including my own, for individuals living in northern geographies. In *Ecologies of Intimacy* the exploration of health extended to resilience including social and environmental justice. The overall research centered on principles of feminism, culturally sensitive practices, and environmental humanism through arts-based and social-justice oriented participatory research practices.

The broadest question of my research was: Can practices anchored in creative/performative autoethnography and body-attuned narrative help people in northern landscapes attend to mental health and healing? A number of subsidiary questions informed this broad research question. These subsidiary questions included: 1) Can the body, directly, be a source of knowledge to develop narratives of wellness? 2) How might relationships with land and place prompt evocative narratives by accessing body memory and imagination? 3) Can narrative writing and performance/installation be tools for diminishing stigma related to trauma for people who engage with creative interventions within public settings? Additionally, if the answers to the above questions are “yes,” does sharing this creative work in a public health setting increase patient likelihood of engaging meaningfully with

and/or returning to this healthcare setting? Does sharing this work in the public setting of a university campus alter the culture of this setting to be more inclusive and humanistic?

Two main projects comprised my larger research project: *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* (please see Figures 1 and 2 below). These two projects each had three phases of creation. The first phase of *Blue Rituals* developed an autoethnographic poetry collection entitled *Blue* and accompanying visual art. This autoethnographic piece of creative writing was in response to themes of femininity, body memory, trauma, and intimacy and served as source material for the second phase of the project. This second phase was to translate *Blue* into an installation with performance aspects at the Spiritual Sanctuary facility located in the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia (UHNBC). The installation was titled *Blue Rituals*. The third phase was to animate this installation by offering various means of viewer engagement and to invite conversation through a public Open Dialogue to discuss arts-based research as a means of addressing mental health.

The same model was followed in *Ecologies of Intimacy*, a more expansive project. The first phase of *Ecologies of Intimacy* was to create two additional autoethnographic texts alongside *Blue*. These were entitled *Swale*, a creative autoethnographic text, and *Transformation*, a dramatic autoethnographic text. These texts were used as source material to develop visual and performative work (as *Blue* was used to create *Blue Rituals*). The end result was *Ecologies of Intimacy*: *Ecologies of Intimacy* brought together *Blue*, *Swale* and *Transformation* in an installation at the Rotunda Gallery on campus at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). The third phase of the project was to likewise animate *Ecologies of Intimacy* through viewer engagement

methods as well as through an Open Dialogue on arts-based research as a means of addressing health in relation to social and environmental justice. *Ecologies of Intimacy* explored health in three layers: at the individual level (*Blue*), within community and allyship (*Swale*), and in relation to climate change and environmental health (*Transformation*).

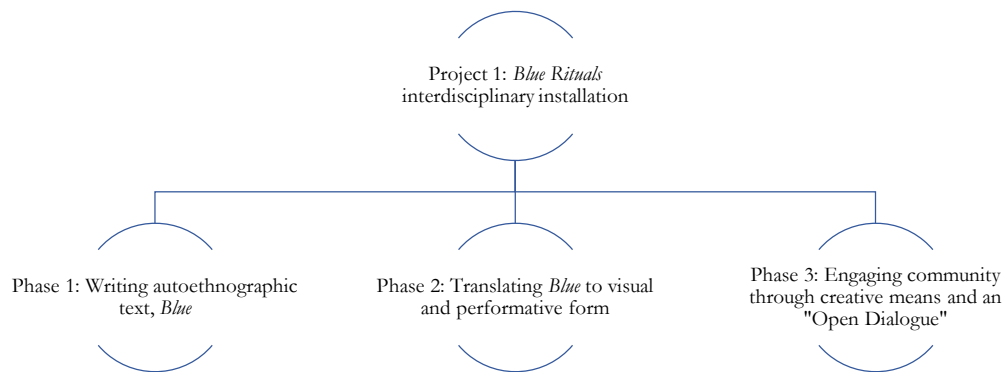


Figure 1. Three phases of Project 1: *Blue Rituals: Writing the Self*

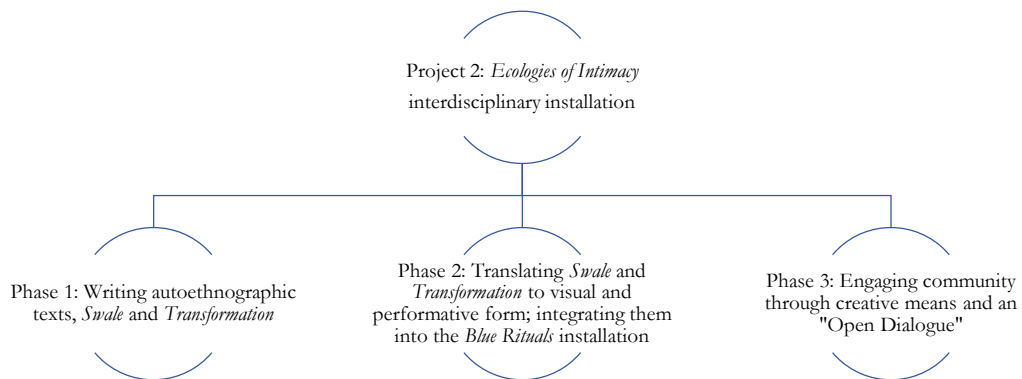


Figure 2. Three phases of Project 2: *Ecologies of Intimacy*

I began the installation *Blue Rituals* with the aim of providing a creative intervention in a public healthcare setting to open space for reflection and somatic engaging for women-identifying persons who also identify as having experienced trauma. I anticipated that women in their 20s-30s would be the most receptive to the project because the autoethnographic content draws on my experiences in my 20s and 30s. I was pleasantly surprised to find that individuals of all genders (men, women, non-binary) ranging from teens to people in their seventies and beyond were engaged in the project; it became a community-wide initiative. *Blue Rituals* took place in a local northern hospital and was open to anyone within the hospital community including healthcare providers, patients/clients and visitors. A core aim of *Blue Rituals* was to provide a space within the hospital that dissolved some of “roles” that can divide healthcare providers and patients. Likewise, I had imagined that women-identifying persons on campus would be more receptive to *Ecologies of Intimacy*. This project also ended up being broadly attended, this time by the UNBC community including people of all genders and ages, and staff and students alike.

My hope is that these two projects (and the six phases of which the two were comprised) led to a deeper knowing and experiencing of wellbeing for all participants. In opening a space to explore new ways of well-being at the individual level, as well as in relation to community and the environment, my research was intended as an act towards social justice. Framing this research are my own, autoethnographically-informed, creative reflections. The purpose of my

autoethnographic reflections are both to document the research journey and make sense of my own subjectivity and relationship with the research topic. To further address community-identified needs in relation to wellbeing I have also included a thematic analysis of the Open Dialogue sessions held during *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*.

2. BACKGROUND:

Exploring story as a means of connecting to self, other, and the broader world

This research adds to a growing body of work evidencing that mental illness experiences must not be addressed through deficit models but, instead, should be addressed through strengths based creative and population-informed narratives of success (Reynolds, 1951). Arts based research is defined broadly as “a form of qualitative research in the human studies that employs the premises, procedures, and principles of the arts. It is defined by the presence of aesthetic qualities (or design elements) within both the inquiry process and the research text” (Given, 2008, p. 29). Additionally, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (2019) defines research creation as:

An approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices, and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media (par.22).

Arts methods and methodologies are increasingly understood as effective tools for addressing health, wellbeing, and the humanistic side of patient care (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Autoethnography, for instance, provides processes for viewing ourselves and our stories within a larger social, cultural and geographic context so individuals, and others, may benefit from reflective examination, and the transformative potential, contained in lived experiences (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015). Likewise, narrative practices are evidenced as a means of prompting deeper embodied connections across illness and wellness spectrums (Charon, 2006). At the core of both autoethnography and narrative practices is story. The following background section thus reviews existing literatures and research about autoethnography, stories, and storytelling (including several forms, for example, devised theatre). I specially review ways that autoethnography, stories, and storytelling will be leveraged to address my research questions and how I will deploy autoethnography, stories, and storytelling in a research project focused on mental health and wellness in northern British Columbia. In the final third of this section, I consider environmental humanism as it relates to the body and wellness, thereby linking the various literatures and existing research that together drive my own inquiry.

2.1 Story and Health

Story may be one of humankind's most intrinsic methods of teaching and sharing experiences. Stories that extend across time, space, cultures and languages, for the humans, have always been a method of approaching knowledge and of knowing

ourselves (King, 2003). Theater is story in action, story embodied: one of the oldest (Western) articulations of story, as it relates to theatre, reaches back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. It provides a link between story and healing. That link exists in the concept of catharsis: "the purging of the emotions of 'pity' and 'fear' that occurs when we watch a tragedy [on stage]" (Halliwell, 1987, p.72). Understood in this way, narrative practice in medical humanities and autoethnography are conceivably a means of bringing story to realms of healing.

One approach to healing and story can be challenging dominant cultural narratives in the form of qualitative research, such as autoethnography. The implications of sharing story that is personally sourced and the potential of this act to evoke meaningful sociocultural change is examined in Adams, Jones & Ellis' (2015) text *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research*. In the second chapter, they pose the question, "Why do autoethnography?" (p. 23). They provide four responses that have become guiding principles for me. These are: 1) to critique, and/or make contributions to, existing research and theory; 2) to embrace vulnerability as a way to understand emotions and improve social life; 3) to disrupt taboos, break silences and reclaim lost and disregarded voices; 4) to make research accessible to multiple audiences (Adams et al., 2015, p. 23). In particular, Adams et al.'s second tenet, "to embrace vulnerability as a way to understand emotions and improve social life," is resonant for me in the context of this project (p. 23). This principle speaks to engaging with narrative *through a felt sense*. For my purposes, I am interpreting vulnerability as openness, humility, and a willingness to be affected by story. This active embracing of "vulnerability" contains potential to offer an added layer to dominant narratives of what constitutes strength and wellness. "Embracing" a felt

sense, such as humility, through autoethnography opens the doors, for my purposes, to engage with a multiplicity of mediums such as installation and performance in order to inquire into vulnerability in its corporeal fullness. In order to receive the nuances and complexities of another's story, embodied and present listening skills must be carefully cultivated. As "narrative practices" become more frequently employed, especially within medical and healthcare settings, research literatures about medical humanities continue to refine this method of receiving story with new language. Charon (2006), in her seminal work *Narrative Medicine: Honouring Stories of Illness*, defines the term "narrative competence" as "the capacity to recognize, absorb, metabolize, interpret, and be moved by stories of illness" (p.14). In part responding to Charon's work, her colleague DasGupta (2008) offers the idea of "narrative humility" which "suggests an engagement with stories that acknowledges that stories are not objects listeners can comprehend or ever become entirely one hundred percent competent with, particularly when those stories are oral interchanges with real live people on the other end" (p. 980). These terms, however, do gesture toward the responsive necessity of listening, of receiving another person's narrative with skill and embodied presence. My aim in developing autoethnographic works about mental health, and in developing creative spaces for others to use reflective-writing, was to place myself in the experience of receiving, of being a listener. This occurred both through using autoethnography as a means of listening to my own story through self-reflective writing, and through my offering of creative engagement in community during which I practiced narrative competence, narrative humility and active listening as an arts-based researcher.

Increasingly, skills such as “embodied listening,” “presence,” or the practice of “bearing witness” are being integrated into the training of healthcare providers as the impact of empathy and attunement to a patient’s story are recognized as having tremendous effect on patient wellbeing and recovery rates (Finlay, 2016). The skills of “presence,” and “active listening” are being increasingly applied to medical humanities through interdisciplinary explorations. For example, physician and researcher Martina Ann Kelly at the University of Calgary works with philosophy professor Tinu Ruparell on applications of phenomenology for physicians in training to foster comfort in “being with” the unknown. In physician-ship, the unknown is encountered in the many moments of uncertainty to navigate alongside patients as they face a transition in their health, loss, or the process of dying. As well, phenomenology and hermeneutics are being applied to the field of healthcare as frameworks with which to redefine the myth of physicians as objective providers of care and instead embrace the humanistic and subjective identities of healthcare providers as well as cultivate awareness of implicit biases (Evans, 2002). Borrowed from philosophical and theological schools of thought, the practice of simply “bearing witness” to another is being recognized for its therapeutic outcomes.

As a slight aside, but expanding on this idea of spaces that offer the reprieve of “being” for both patients and healthcare providers, leads me to speak about the quality of space that an installation can provide in a hospital setting. *Blue Rituals* was designed to be accessible for all members of the hospital community including healthcare providers, patients and visitors. Because the Spiritual Sanctuary is outside the clinical domain, the installation and space have the potential to provide reprieve for patients, visitors, and healthcare providers. The aim of having a space

open to all members of the hospital community and to design the project from a living systems perspective (Miller, 1990; Capra, 1997) was to create an inclusive space that does not differentiate according to “roles” within the hospital. With a focus on shifting the system itself to better support individuals towards having access to supported wellness for all individuals, I aimed to break up systematic expressions of who is “unwell” and who is “well”. I endeavoured to create a space that viewed health and the ability to provide care on a continuum that shifts throughout a person’s life. Similarly, I aimed to embrace “social-justice informed care” that places emphasis on the healthcare system, rather than the patient, to reduce stigma. These shifts away from dualistic perceptions of health and the embrace of language that seeks to humanize individuals (and recognize social determinants of health) represent important epistemological shifts in Western society’s perception of illness and wellness continuums. Another aim of this research, then, is an effort to provide meaningfully articulated feedback about how aspects of a healthcare system may be further prompted toward being a holistic site of care attuned for all members of the hospital community, and especially those seeking care for mental health.

2.2 Story and the Body

To return to care and story, to acknowledge the wholeness of another’s narrative with “competence” and “humility,” one must in part bear witness to the body’s telling of story (Charon, 2006). The nuance of body in story is approached by psychologists specialized in trauma as a means of observing the several “languages” that a person uses to communicate their story. Leading psychologists specialized in

trauma-recovery (such as Peter Levine, Pat Ogden) recognize that often the “true” story beneath the narrative lives in the way the individual’s body presents while speaking their narrative. As such, an aspect of the therapeutic process in recovery of trauma can involve drawing attention to the contradictions within a client’s “languages” – verbal, and physical – and within this to open space to narratives that have gone unspoken. The body is also a site of renewal. The ability of somatic and body-based therapeutic practices to track the body’s pathways to the roots of trauma at a cellular and neural level: this has been adopted in the work of Ogden, and Levine. By involving the body within my translation of *Blue* from an autoethnographic poetry collection to an installation with performance aspects I aimed to include the body in the practice of narrative. I also aimed to acknowledge the body a vital “speaker” in corporeal expressions of autoethnography.

The arts-based method of performance provides a powerful means of subverting dominant narratives that can downplay the motioned corporeality of experience and expression by recognizing and validating the body as *instrument* (Artaud, 1958). The employment of “multiple languages” of movement, gesture, voice, and speech performance can express the contradictory and nuanced layers within narrative (Grotowski, 1968). For instance, following World War II, there was an emergence of counter-art forms and genres such as Butoh dance in Japan and Theatre of the Absurd in America. These methods used performance to draw attention to the hypocrisy of language, to subvert dominant narratives of heroism, and, in the case of Butoh, to look to the body for authenticity (Fraleigh, 2010). Another form which arose following World War II that looked to the body as a means of expressing the psyche is Authentic Movement, pioneered by American contemporary dancer Mary

Starks Whitehouse. Authentic Movement is “a self-directed form in which individuals discover a movement pathway that offers a bridge between the conscious and unconscious,” and that “explores the relationship between a mover and witness, being seen and seeing” (Stromsted, 2017, par.1). Both Butoh and Authentic Movement will be further discussed in the methods section, however, for the moment I will continue to link them to the idea of working with the body to explore narrative in a fulsome way. Psychologists specialized in trauma therapy focus on the body’s narrative and survival expressions as ways into the “true” narrative. With the same attunement to nuance movement-based artists seek the story beneath/between the story and the body’s iterations of contradiction, and inconsistency. Artists who perform narrative seek to convey the complexity of the body as a container of its entire lived experience. The placing of a narrative that embraces vulnerability within a public healthcare setting using textual, visual and performance arts methods may be an opportunity to open expressive space for the body’s narrative as related to mental wellness. The act of opening these spaces, through this research project, is an effort at challenging dominant narratives about “strength.” Indeed, one of the aims of this research is to pay heed to the non-linear process of healing, in part by creatively, and with an eye to arts-based-movement, integrating trauma into lived experience.

Opening space within a public health setting may provide an opportunity for a viewer to engage in their own internal narratives within a setting somatically attuned to this purpose. Offering this somatically attuned space, including the presence of autoethnographic work about the body, may be a way of re-articulating self-care and of challenging bias, stigma, power inequalities, and even gendered

notions around mental health (hooks, 2000; Lorde, 2012). Doing such in-situ work may be a further means of bringing a practice of vulnerability into a public sphere to “improve social life”, to return to Adams, Jones & Ellis’ (2015) principles on “Why do autoethnography?” (p. 23), and to challenge the culturally dominant notion about experiences of illness or vulnerability remaining private. This is a notion that is increasingly being challenged as concepts such as “the power of vulnerability”; “shame resilience”; and “self-compassion” are adopted by mainstream culture through the work of TED talk popularized researchers such as Bréne Brown and psychologist, Kristin Neff (Brown, 2012; Neff, 2003). By engaging story and using embodied means through somatically attuned spaces, difficult narratives that defy language may be brought to community and made public.

2.3 Story and Relationality

This thesis inquired into how an embodied engagement with narrative in public settings might foster a sense of connection and therefore wellness. By installing *Blue Rituals* in the public healthcare setting of the Spiritual Sanctuary at UHNBC I aimed to cultivate a conversation about representations (or even repressions) of trauma, an experience often undergone in isolation. As well, thematically, I inquired into femininity, identity, intimacy, grief processes, sexuality, and the ways landscapes and geography inform our being-ness in the world. I continued to cycle back to the questions, “What does it mean to be a woman in northern regions?” and, “What do we do with the experiences that demand our deepest emotional resources?” Feminist author and psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estes speaks about the “moral obligation” of story; once we have experienced a “truth” (of sorts) there is

humanistic pull to bring this knowledge to others (Estes, 1992). In a society where loneliness and isolation are significant barriers to wellbeing (Compton, 2015) my research aims to be a point of connectivity.

Elements and details about experiencing trauma may always remain beyond access. Memories and their languages may hover beyond what is able to be captured or even understood, even through practices of sharing story, creating space for story, and receiving story. Feminist theorist and writer Cixous (1997) speaks about the paradoxical nature of exchange with another in her work *rootprints*: “[I]n this point where we would give anything to exchange ourselves and the exchange does not happen, the inexchangeable makes its strange and invisible presence felt” (p. 54). As in DasGupta’s work on “narrative humility” there is an aspect of story that remains mysterious between the speaker and the listener. Cixous articulates the “paradox” within that place of the “inexchangeable” (p. 54). She says, “Right where the exchange is impossible, an exchange happens, right where we are unable to share, we share this non-sharing, this desire, this impossibility” (p. 54). Through engaging this process of the inexchangeable a new connection emerges, or as Cixous writes, “We stand ‘separaunited’” (p.54). As I will discuss further in my methodology section, feminist theory provides one means of acknowledging and respecting the diversity of story, the incompleteness of story, and the differences of lived experience that cannot be fully understood by others, or perhaps even ourselves. However, while there may be a lack of understanding, there is still the possibility for presence and for bearing witness to one another that creates a different sort of connection. As Cixous articulates, bearing witness to one another’s reality may allow another sort of empathetic exchange to take place. This practice of bearing

witness to narrative informs both the creative design of the installation and performance. As well, it informs in part my data collection methods of autoethnographic reflection on viewer engagement, and thematic analysis of the Open Dialogue sessions of both *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*.

Drawing on phenomenology opens further opportunities to view the porousness of stories, to understand that in addition to being extensions of the body, stories are also at work with and in relationship to landscapes and ecologies *outside the body*. In *Braiding Sweetgrass* biologist and traditional medicine woman Kimmerer (2013) speaks about how story belongs not only to human forms, but to all of our relations: “Our stories say that of all the plants, *wiingaashk*, or sweetgrass, was the very first to grow on earth, its fragrance a sweet memory of Skywoman’s hand... Breathe in its scent and you start to remember things you didn’t know you had forgotten” (p. 5). In his text, *The Spell of the Sensuous* Abrams (2012) speaks to the “reciprocity” between landscape and self: “The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in return” (p. 50). As I will explore further in my methods and methodologies sections, sensorial experience, the external landscape, and the stories we generate from these reciprocities are interwoven. This relates particularly to the second creative intervention I carried out, *Ecologies of Intimacy*. *Ecologies of Intimacy* inquired into the link between personal human wellbeing and the environment. Through creative means, particularly in the texts *Swale* and *Transformation*, I provided an autoethnographic exploration of story in the form of an installation and performance to provide a space where the porousness of story and the reciprocity of story embraced the land we inhabit as a relational force.

Especially in *Swale*, relationship to land is also explored as it relates to social justice. I will now speak to the methodologies and theoretical framings I used to underpin and guide this work.

3. METHODOLOGIES

Interweaving feminism, cultural sensitivity, and environmental humanism in creative practice

My research was fundamentally qualitative and arts-based. I used arts-informed methods, by which I mean a set of tools anchored in creative and humanities practices, deployed to answer specific research questions. Creative, humanistic (as opposed to didactic or closed-ended) engagements and methods prompt and open new spaces of understanding in research (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015; Given, 2008). My research methods were informed by a series of theoretical and philosophical framings that allow me to make sense of the research. The most influential methodological underpinnings of my work were feminism, culturally sensitive practices and environmental humanism while developing autoethnographic work through in textual, visual and performative means. It is the methodological framings that I explore in this section.

3.1 A Feminist Approach

To approach my research questions using autoethnography and art production through embodied knowledges, and community engagement in an inclusive way, I drew from feminist theory and in particular feminist phenomenology. These

methodologies informed both the creation of the content of *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* and my reflective writing on the process of undertaking this work, a component of the dataset I have generated. Cixous' (1976) work on writing in relationship to the body (*l'écriture féminine*) informed my process of writing the three autoethnographic texts *Blue*, *Swale* and *Transformation* as well as the way I reflected on the process of writing these texts and sharing them publicly. Again, these texts served as the first phase of research and the source material for the installations that featured performative elements, *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*. The content of my writing delved into the sensorial realm of intimacy, sexuality, femininity and trauma and relationship to outer landscapes. A component of my data was critical reflection on the impact of writing that elicits and make use of body memory in relationship to healing. I will also refer back to Adams, Jones & Ellis' (2015) principles on autoethnography as a means of bringing vulnerability forth "to improve social life" and reflect on how my own practice of vulnerability through this project impacted my relationship to mental health and healing. Cixous' (1976, 1997) theories on women's writing has informed my way of developing language about my own relationship to the interplay of writing and the body.

My choice to translate *Blue*, *Swale* and *Transformation* into installations, rather than offer them in a purely textual form, was informed by my desire to offer an experience that was sensory in nature. I drew from phenomenology in the way that I designed the installations to encourage firsthand sensorial engagement from the viewer. In Abram's (2012) *The Spell of Sensuous*, referenced earlier in my Backgrounds section, he approaches ecology and autoethnographic writing through the lens of phenomenology in a way that resonates with how I wish to apply this

methodology to my own project. He describes phenomenology in the following way: "Phenomenology, as [Husserl] articulated in the early 1900s would turn towards 'the things themselves' toward the world as it is experienced in its felt immediacy... the world makes itself evident to awareness [in] the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience" (p. 37). Abrams speaks about the way deep attunement to one's environment through a sensorial lens has the potential to reveal subtle interconnections between the human and their environment. Within these installations I aimed to engage viewers in sensorial ways; through tactile means, using gesture and movement, through the visual quality of text, the arrangement of objects in space and so forth in an effort to "turn" the viewer towards their internal and "direct, sensorial experience," (Abrams, 2012, p.38). On a different note, though there are potent intersections between feminist schools of thought and phenomenology, writer and philosopher Grosz (1994) reminds us that phenomenology itself has been defined from a male gaze and that the feminist adoption of phenomenology may be contradictory in some ways. It may even require different terminology altogether to fully explore liminal and cyclical states housed especially in the female body. While I refer to feminist phenomenology as a means engaging feminist paradigms and first-order sensorial knowledges with relation to narrative, I endeavour here to also articulate sensorial experiences that respond to liminality in both the content of my autoethnographic texts and in my reflective writing on the overall research.

Cixous (1997) observes that the very act of writing is an embodied and cyclical one, a process of narrativizing from the "inside out": "The process of writing is to circulate, to caress, to paint all the phenomena before they are precipitated,

assembled and crystallized in a word" (p.18). Bound up in this idea is the notion that the stories we tell in a way do not belong solely to us: Cixous speaks about the creative process as a chance to become "more human" and "to be able to echo- a complex but magnificent labour – with what constitutes the universe" (p.32). The stories we tell are sourced from first-order, sensory perceptions of the world. To receive them, it is necessary to be present. Through attention to the sensory experience of what is received, the creative choice of what language or discipline to translate the experience into arises. Ability to be present and to make choices within presence is at the root of all creative endeavour and allows for there to be a natural passageway between the act and choice-making practices of both writing and performance (Aposhyn, 2004); the two forms can extend into one another to provide a multilingual expression of narrative.

Feminist theory (particularly in the realm of theatre) offers fertile terrain for working with the body as a site of renewal and metaphor. In Butler's (1988) essay *Performative acts and gender constitution*, she links phenomenology and feminist theory, stating; "the body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities" (p.18). Performance practices offer specific, live, instances as the body (and by extension identity) is in a state of constant motion and becoming. In the collection of essays, *Acting Out: Feminist Performance* Diamond (1993) revisits the roots of Western theatre in her essay *Mimesis, Mimicry and the "True-Real"*. She puts her finger on one of the origins of divergence between Western "Truth" and a feminist definition of "truth": "For feminists this "truth" – usually understood as Truth, a neutral, omnipotent, changeless essence – is inseparable from gender based and biased epistemologies"

(p. 363). She states, “feminist theory and practice, in all of its variety, suggest ways of rethinking theatre discourse: we might imagine a mimesis that is undermined (or overcharged) through repetition, or a stable referentiality troubled by the body’s true-real” (p. 365). Diamond cites both the body and the act of play (through language and performance) as possible origins for revealing the multiplicity of truth as subjective, contextual, ever-shifting, and at times contradictory. Feminist knowledges shed light on notions of “truth” as fluid and multiplicitous and the validity of knowledges, experiences, and narratives that favour cycles, imaginative progressions, somatic (felt) impressions of time with special relevance to trauma/healing. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of feminist phenomenology to this research is a valuing of the body as both a tool and site of renewal and something that is “available” to everyone, and therefore a deeply humanistic means into notions of wellness.

There is a long history of feminist approaches as a means of reclaiming autonomy of one’s own body in instances where Western approaches to medicine have historically sought to have authority over the female body/psyche. There are particular scars in the historical treatment of women’s experiences of mental illness where patriarchal cultural views have directly informed diagnosis, for example, the historical diagnosis of “hysteria” (Berheimer & Kahane, 1990). A feminist phenomenological methodology highlights the subjectivity of human knowledge and that diagnosis and understandings of illness are deeply informed by the conscious and unconscious cultural values and beliefs of the time (Irigaray, 1977, 1985). By attempting as much as possible to turn to the body and one’s own perceptions (hermanuetics) of sensation there can be a nuanced, and most

importantly, self-determined understanding of “illness” and of “wellness”. Additionally, a feminist phenomenological approach emphasizes a view beyond Cartesian paradigms where there is no need to integrate the “mind” and “body”; they were never separate.

To return to feminist theory as connected to community engagement practices I draw from the work of Reinharz (1992) and her text, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. Of special relevance is her perspective on feminist ethnography. She states that “feminist ethnography is consistent with three goals mentioned frequently by feminist researchers: 1) to document the lives and activities of women, 2) to understand the experience for women from their own point of view and 3) to conceptualize women’s behaviour as an expression of social contexts” (p.51). Reinharz goes on to discuss the “dilemmas” and tensions that commonly arise in this work. Among these, she discusses “trust”, appropriate “closeness/distance”, and the continuum of “complete observer” and “complete participant roles” (p.65-69). Contributing to these tensions she speaks to the many potential dividers between women including, “socioeconomic status, life-style, sexual identity, marital status” and explores the viewpoint of some feminist ethnographers that these “must be overcome to gain access to the views of a diverse range of women” (p. 65). I believe this last point is potentially contentious, and I question whether or not these “dividers” are able to be overcome or instead be respectfully acknowledged as differing lived experiences. This echoes feminist scholar Spender’s (1985) insight that “at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure

knowledge” (p. 5). I aimed to ground my project in this core principle and to transparently embrace my own positionality. The subjectivity of knowledge was at the centre of how I introduced *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* into the broader communities of UHNBC and UNBC.

In carrying out my research I approached the work with a willingness to be affected by it. In her book *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*, Boler (2004) speaks to the necessary role of emotion in feminist research processes with regard to researcher-reflexivity and positionality. More recently, the role of emotion in research has been discussed using the term “affect theory” or the “turn to affect” that (broadly-speaking) embraces emotion as fundamental to meaning-making and knowledge production (Gregg & Seigwort, 2010). Likewise, Reinharz (1992) discusses how traditional ethnography values “respectful distance” while feminist ethnography “values openness to intimacy and striving for empathy...it means openness to complete transformation” (p. 67-68). This “openness to complete transformation” (p.68) speaks strongly to the guiding principle of this project as “vulnerability for improving social life” (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015, p. 23). Reinharz notes, “This transformation - or consciousness-raising - lays the groundwork for friendship, shared struggle, and identity change” (p.68). This is further echoed by feminist scholar and writer hooks (1994) who coined the term “engaged pedagogy” in relation to teaching. Engaged pedagogy recognizes that learning can be a transformative act for both the student and the teacher, an act that values wellness, healing and even self-actualization (hooks, 1994). hooks describes herself as following in the lineage of Paulo Freire’s (1970) “pedagogy of the oppressed” in that

knowledge is a form of liberation; learning is an act that changes us and has the potential to loosen the hold that dominant structures have on us. These common threads of knowledge exchange as being mutual, valuing the whole being, and containing the potential to truly affect all participants is how I have aimed to shape (and leave space for others to shape) this project. A commitment to vulnerability as a researcher with special attention to the role of emotion, of relationship building within community, and taking cues from the viewers/participants created optimal conditions for “transformation” for all involved.

To further qualify my use of the term “transformative” with regard to a feminist approach in carrying out this research, I will turn to Cerwonka (2011). Cerwonka offers a critical caveat on the liberatory or transformative potential of research in her essay, *What to Make of Identity and Experience in Twenty First Century Feminist Research* and speaks to the discrepancy between feminist researchers using the experiences of others in a way that is “incompatible with the theories of identity and power that many of the same researchers find convincing” (p. 71). There is a common theme for feminist researchers who aim to “give voice” to “marginalized experiences” while lacking reflexivity. The lack can lead to “assumptions about agency, resistance and the liberatory potential of research” (p. 60). Cerwonka goes on to say that “qualitative research must also explain the terms on which identities and experiences rest, and it should explain how they incorporate, reflect and stand in tension with dominant ideologies or discourses” (p.61). In *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice* Archibald & Crnkovich (1995) begin the chapter on cross-cultural practice by stating, “White feminists working outside of their own culture face certain ethical and methodological challenges” (p. 107). Archibald &

Crnkovich speak about the importance of “respect for difference as opposed to a search for universality” (p. 107). Perhaps there is a way to allow both respect for difference and a search for common humanism to inform the process of carrying out community-oriented research. An acknowledgment of difference relates back to DasGupta’s (2008) work on “narrative humility” which operates on the principle that “we cannot ever claim to comprehend the totality of another's story, which is only ever an approximation for the totality of another's self” (p.980).

The broad aim of the community-driven aspects of this research was to provide a platform for a diverse range of voices and stories. This occurred while also acknowledging that there were many stories that I simply was not able to fully grasp in an embodied way because of my particular positionality. In terms of sharing my own story, a degree of “researcher self-disclosure” occurred by using autoethnographic texts as source material for the installations. Reinharz (1992) discusses both the pitfalls and the ability to build relationship between researcher and participant through “researcher self-disclosure” stressing the importance of taking cues from the participant on if this will further the relationship or cause discomfort (p. 69). Particularly during the Open Dialogues, these are principles that I had the opportunity to be cognizant of, carefully and from a critical feminist perspective. Overall, a feminist approach helped to facilitate an atmosphere of “inter-exchange” where the complexity and nuance of story was acknowledged and honoured.

3.2 Culturally Sensitive Practices and Allyship

Both projects (*Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*) entered into spaces of intersectionality, of gender and culture and where they overlap and inform each other, in terms of the viewers of the installations. The intention was to especially make the work accessible to women-identifying persons who have experienced trauma in the Prince George area. There was a high likelihood that some of the participants were thus Indigenous women who have endured trauma in the Prince George community due to the fact that Indigenous women in British Columbia experience higher rates of violence and death than Indigenous women in other provinces (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015). This is in part because of the high incidence of violence against women and girls on Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2015; The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019). As well, this work takes place in the broader Canadian context of our recent (historically speaking) Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). This moment in time calls for settlers to be deeply reflexive about our roles in society. In *Unsettling the Settler Within* Regan (2010) calls for those of us with colonizer roots to "link critical reflection, enlightened vision, and positive action to confront the settler problem head on" (p.16). My projects were thus shaped with culturally sensitive methodologies with an aim towards allyship. In their paper *Working Across Contexts* Hart, Straka & Rowe (2017) discuss practical steps for approaching decolonial research as a settler. They begin by acknowledging the incredibly tenuous nature of such work: "Settler researchers involved with Indigenous research represent a wide range of motives, ethical commitments, and

understandings of anti-colonialism” (p.333). They also speak to the nature of the anti-colonial work being, of course, very different for a settler than it is for an Indigenous person:

Settlers can work in anti-colonial ways by educating members of their own group, challenging overt and covert colonial oppression, and supporting Indigenous peoples in acts of self-determination. However, there is always the danger of replicating colonialism despite good intentions. To be anti-colonial, Settlers have to ensure that their actions do not reinforce colonial oppression, such as when they claim they are doing ‘what is right’ for the colonized” (p.333).

Instead, Hart et al. offer this core principle, “Their [Settler] actions must always support Indigenous peoples’ self-determination, and it is always Indigenous people who determine “what is right” as anti-colonial action” (p.334).

An awareness of my own positionality as a settler of European descent was critical to developing the overall project. I aimed to carry out this research as an aspiring ally, which required reflexivity about my own paradigm. In *Progressing Towards an Indigenous Research Paradigm in Canada and Australia*, Wilson (2003) states, “Paradigms shape our view of the world around us and how we walk through that world. All research reflects the paradigm used by the researcher whether that researcher is conscious of the usage or not” (p.5). In *Towards an Indigenous Paradigm* Kuokkanen (2000) speaks specifically to the dissonance between a Western research model and Indigenous epistemologies, “Western models of conducting research... are often characterized by a certain worldview, based on metaphysical dualism and

laden with perceptions that derive from the Enlightenment: the fragmentation of human knowledge and the distancing of oneself both physically and mentally from the research object,” (p. 413). She continues, “[I]n holistic observation one does not consider her/him/[their]self separate from or outside the observed but rather as a part of a larger process,” (p.413). Keeping at the forefront of the work that Indigeneity is always determined by Indigenous peoples, utilizing methods and methodologies in participatory research that aligns with Indigenization has the potential to be an act of allyship. Just as definitions of “Indigenity” and “Indigenous paradigms” are determined in the present and unquantifiable, so must a commitment to allyship be fluid and receptive: In her talk “Allyship in the Context of Indigenous Rights” lawyer and activist Chantelle Bryson defines allyship through its responsiveness, “Being an ally isn’t a role you can claim for yourself...it is a state achieved by an active, lifelong, and ever-changing commitment to relationship building with Indigenous individuals and communities.” (Bryson, 2018, par. 3). While there is no one Indigenous paradigm or one settler paradigm, a commitment to self-reflexivity helped me to create a “safe space” that acknowledged and respected intersectionality.

A notable area of overlap in both feminist and Indigenous paradigms is that of relationality and the dissolution of dualism. This relationality, often expressed in story, departs from binary states and instead seeks knowledge through interconnectedness. Kuokkanen (2000) speaks to this in the following way, “The holistic approach of an ‘Indigenous paradigm’ also rejects Cartesian and Judeo-Christian dualistic splits between mind and body according to which a person’s intellectual capacities have to be separated and consequently heightened above

more physical aspects of life” (p.417). Furthermore, many of the post-constructivist theories that dismantle dominant belief systems to make way for a deeper awareness of non-dualistic interconnection have their roots in Indigenous knowledges (Armstrong, 2006; Todd, 2016). Language is one such means of engaging relationality to offer different paradigms through story. Language as a signifier contains the potential for seeping through the cracks of dominant culture to break up the foundations of patriarchal or colonial thought as the resonance of words and evokes subjective somatic and tacit knowledges (Kuokkanen, 2000; Armstrong, 2006; Todd 2016). In the move away from dualistic thinking to reciprocity and relationality, a deeper potential to be affected by the external world and an openness to processes of “becoming” is present. In *Braiding Sweetgrass* Kimmerer (2013), speaks to nature of exchange inherent in writing in this way, “Writing is an act of reciprocity with the world; it is what I can give back in return for everything that has been given to me” (p. 152). The attunement of a space that is shaped by relationality in both the creative work and through a commitment to allyship may contain the potential to use narrative practices to create inclusive space.

In *Ecologies of Intimacy* I explored my own questions of relationality and reciprocity with land as a settler of Turtle Island especially through the autoethnographic text *Swale*. While each creative inquiry within *Ecologies of Intimacy* is concerned with relationship building and acts of reciprocity, the autoethnographic text *Swale* is particularly concerned with how I, as a settler of European descent, inquire into Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship building in social justice contexts. *Swale* considers how to write about my relationship to land responsibly, and

transparently, as a settler of European descent. This leads me to speak about environmental humanism as a practice that informs the content and the design of *Ecologies of Intimacy*.

3.3 Environmental Humanism

This work approaches wellness and mental health in relationship to the broader ecologies we inhabit. While post-constructivist concepts such as “enlivenment” and “more than human” sentience are increasingly being used in environmental humanities literature, these paradigms stem from the work of Indigenous thinkers, and scholars, and the deeply rooted ways of knowing that have long been present on Turtle Island and must be acknowledged (Todd, 2016). These knowledges are increasingly embraced for the potential found in our *felt* relationships with our environments as sources of resiliency, particularly as we enter fraught times due to climate change. Writing, art-making and somatically-attuned practices are means of building connection with the land we inhabit.

As humans enter this time of potentially irreparable environmental loss, many scholars, activists and artists are considering how our humanness is bound up in our connection to nature and why more links are not made between our destruction of the environment and our own mental wellbeing? Deep ecology informed writer and activist Macy (1998) considers this blind spot in her inquiry into why apathy may take such a strong hold when action is most needed: “Western psychology has virtually ignored our relationship to the natural world. Our connection to the source

of life does not figure in its definition of mental health, nor is our destruction of our life-support system included in its list of pathologies" (p. 49). She reiterates a critical question of Western psychology, "It has failed to ask Paul Shepard's rather obvious and haunting question, 'Why does society persist in destroying its habitat?'" (p. 49). In his text *Care of the Soul* Moore (1994) links spiritually-infused psychology with ecology stating that, "[T]he fields of psychology and ecology overlap, because care of the world is a tending to the soul that resides in nature as well as in human beings...a soulful ecology is rooted in the feeling that the world is our home and that our responsibility to it comes not from obligation or logic but from a true affection" (p.270). Additionally, Macy uses both psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski's term "positive disintegration" and Ervin Laszlo's term "exploratory self-organization" to describe the middle-space where the apathy is dislodged and humans (and societies) undergo *change* towards functional (healthy) relationship with the environment (p.45). Likewise, the view of change as an embodied process that requires movement (even if it is at a cellular or neural level) forms the foundation of several therapeutic somatic practices (including Authentic Movement). Linking an exploration of mental health to the broader health of the natural environment became a necessary expansion of my initial research question: Can practices anchored in creative / performative autoethnography and body-attuned narrative help people in northern landscapes attend to mental health and healing?

Forum theatre artist Diamond (2007) also adopts systems theory in his text *Theatre for Living* and speaks to live performance as a means to interrupt our cultural feedback loops and contribute to the health of our social and cultural ecology.

Creative intervention can be a means of encouraging self-reflexivity in relationship to the environments we inhabit, and thus a form of social justice practice. Both art-making and activism actively question how this work can be carried out sustainably for the practitioner. The embodied quality of creative interventions and activism may hold a key in answering this. In *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* adrienne maree brown (2018) poses the questions, “How do we make social justice the most pleasurable human experience? How can we awaken within ourselves desires that make it impossible to settle for anything less than a fulfilling life?” (p.5). This aligns with the roots of Deep Ecology that Macy (1998) describes as “Seek[ing] to motivate people to ask, as [founder] Naess puts it, ‘deeper questions’ about their real wants and needs, about their relation to life on Earth and their vision for the future” (p.47). By designing the installation to be a sort of “ecology” I aimed to bring the creative work into relationship with the broader environment of northern British Columbia. Additionally, working with the practice of gradually expanding the installation in phases and “growing it” in response to viewer engagement, I hoped to make the process one that felt inherently responsive and organic.

This quality of *enjoying* our environment is explored by interdisciplinary writers such as Kimmerer (2013) and Rose (2017) who inquire into the life-sustaining quality of wonder within nature for cultivating relationality and therefore survival. For example, Kimmerer speaks about the relationship between the flora asters and goldenrod in meadow settings and the way their colour contrast and pattern of growing beside each other is bound up in their survival through pollination and seed disbursement. She goes on to say, “The question of goldenrod and aster was of

course just emblematic of what I really wanted to know. It was an architecture of relationships, of connections that I yearned to understand. I wanted to see the shimmering threads that hold it all together. And I wanted to know why we love the world, why the most ordinary scrap of meadow can rock us back on your heels with awe.” (p.46). This awe and *felt* connection to environment can be an entry point for practices of land stewardship (Kimmerer, 2013). Likewise, in her essay *Shimmer* Rose (2017) invokes the northern Aboriginal Australian tribe Yolungu’s concept of *bir’yun* that translates to “shimmer” or “brilliance” through inquiring into the sensual relationship between flying foxes and flowers in *The Art of Living on a Damaged Planet* anthology. Rose extends her inquiry into this mutually beneficial relationship to speak about the ways we humans are implicated too in the connectedness that is inherent to nature’s design: “The waves of ancestral power that shimmer and grab are also exactly the relationships that bring forth and sustain us. The kiss of life is an ancestral blessing, alive, brilliant, and pulsating in the world around us, within us” (p.61). To apply this to the work of *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*, I aimed to create environments that acted as sanctuaries within public settings to foster mental health and wellbeing by invoking the natural landscape through these arts-based initiatives.

Specifically, I was curious about using devising methods and installation to inquire into emotional resiliency to be found in embodied connectedness with the broader environment/ecology of northern geographies in *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*. Engaging the natural environment creatively may have allowed for a greater degree of awareness to perceive the link between our mental health and the

health of our environment. For instance, my autoethnographic text *Transformation* (within *Ecologies of Intimacy*) inquired into loneliness within Western society and questions how we can approach “need” through a different paradigm, as a way to confront the uncomfortable reality of the human species destroying its habitat. Through *Transformation* (and the whole of *Ecologies of Intimacy*) I aimed to approach the distress within our current human experience of climate change through creative means. I aimed to use embodied engagement with our broader ecology through dramatic text in order to inquire into consumerism and to wonder, “What does the body need to feel satisfied, whole, connected, receptive, even generous?”

Expanding on this idea of felt connection with our broader environment, “love” as a politic is being (re)embraced as an inclusive and ethical activating tool by many contemporary writers, activists and artists. In her text, *all about love* hooks (2000) explores this concept of political love to challenge the destructive, even pathological effects of capitalism. For instance, the political notion of love as awareness of our interconnectedness is gaining traction across fields as a source for activating the paradigm shifts called for by social scientists in climate change adaptation literature. Abrams (2012) demonstrates this felt sense of interconnectedness with our environments using ecological phenomenology to describe intersubjectivity: “The gestures and expressions of other bodies, viewed from without, echo and resonate one’s own bodily movements and gestures, experienced from within. By an associative ‘empathy’, the embodied subject comes to recognize these other bodies as other centers of experience, other subjects” (p.37). In the recently published *Love, Politics, and Science Education on Damaged Planet* Bazzul & Tolbert (2019) explore

‘political imagination and love’ as tools for revolutionizing education systems: “Political imagination and Love become forces that recast, and make different possibilities visible...they embrace multispecies justice and various forms of political equality” (p.14). Abrams likewise affirms that *felt* connection to multispecies realities in our environments allows us to more deeply perceive our own consciousness as organisms. He writes, “Ultimately, to acknowledge the life of the body, and affirm our solidarity with this physical form, is to acknowledge our existence as one of earth’s animals, and so to remember and rejuvenate the organic basis of our thoughts and our intelligence” (Abrams, 2012, p.47). This emphasis on feeling connection to our broader world, or adopting a politic of love, contains the potential for imagining, or creating, an ethics-driven system change. It also pays heed to consciousness, an invisible layer that exists beyond our five senses, as a vital force that shapes our sense of interconnection and our actions. Love as a politic, or felt sense of interconnection, informed *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* as sites that aimed to foster emotional resilience not only at the individual level, but within community and in relation to the environment.

3.4 Interdisciplinarity in Creative Practice

The presence of initiatives that intersect or engage the methodologies discussed (feminist phenomenology, culturally sensitive practices, and environmental humanism) through creative methods has been shown to be a fruitful means for addressing complex questions. During the process of carrying out the two installations *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* I learned about other creative

endeavours that were likewise investigating the intersection of feminism, decolonization, and environmental humanism using arts-based means. In conversation with eco-performance artist Denise Kenney she referred to the turn in performance art towards “creating context over content” through incorporating these methodologies into the design of a creative project in order for the viewer to experience the art in an embodied way (D. Kenney, personal communication, May 28, ,2019). First, I will turn to a discussion on the interrelationship between narrative, the body, and land. Secondly, I will explore how different research-creation initiatives are being designed with this interrelationship at the center of the work, and share a few examples of contemporary work by artists from Turtle Island.

The interrelationship between narrative, the body, and land can be found in land stewardship and its relation to story. Language itself can enliven and be a means of cultivating relationship with environment. Writer and activist Armstrong (2006) speaks of the Okanagan language as being inherently interwoven with the territory it grew out of: “We think of our language as the language of the land...This means that the land has taught us our language” (p.32). Engaging this language is life-sustaining: “The way we survive is by speaking the language that the land offered us as its teaching. To know all the plants, animals, seasons and geography is to construct language for them” (p.32). Likewise, Abrams (2012) echoes this interconnection between the land itself and language, “Only by affirming this animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world” (p. 56). This interconnectedness between narrative (language), our somatic responsiveness, and land returns to

Todd's (2016) assertion, noted at the beginning of this section, that these interconnections have been present in Indigenous thought systems from time immemorial.

The role of story as a somatically attuned tool to melt the body's "freeze" response (sometimes disguised as apathy, as Macy (1998) speaks to) and mobilize us towards action was recently described by Canadian theatre artist Kendra Fanconi at the Vancouver conference, *Climate Narratives*. She used trauma-informed language and somatic experiencing theory to describe freezing in this way: "[I]nterestingly, anxiety and overwhelm are not emotions, they are a lack of emotion that comes from not being able to process. They are blockage. Frozenness" (Fanconi, 2019, par.9). She adds that giving time through the act of slowing down is needed for story to register on an emotional level:

You see, the heart moves seven times more slowly than the mind. Facts, news, studies scrolling our news feed, these are not rates of information digestion that allow people to mobilize. We have to Slow Down and let our turtle heart which has been trundling along behind like 'wait...what...was...that...you said/read?' to catch up (par. 17)

To recognize our bodies as somatic sites (capable of connection, reciprocity and resiliency) that are *moved* by story can be a means of accessing our agency. It can be easy to forget that hearing or reading a story is a sensorial, physical act. At an even subtler level, it contains movement at a neurological level. Allison (2019) builds on neurocognitive researcher Jacobs' (2017) description of reading as a "felt motionless movement through space" adding that, "[o]nce you've finished reading, that motionless movement leaves in your mind a numinous shape of the path you

traveled” (p.11). The willingness to engage narrative, may contain somatic potential for cultivating greater individual and cultural capacity to “move through” liminal spaces or undergoing transformative change.

Through the lens of ecological phenomenology Abrams (2012) likewise speaks to the enlivening quality that a “slowing down” of sensory perception can bring. This action has the potential to allow us to decentralize ourselves as humans in the story of life and bring us into animated contact with our environments:

So, the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded. As we return to our senses, we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies – supported, that is, not just by ourselves but by icy streams tumbling down granite slopes, by owl wings and lichens, and by the unseen imperturbable wind (p. 65).

Beyond speaking or writing these stories, the act of listening is, of course, a vital one. As Kimmerer (2013), Armstrong (2006) and Abrams (2012) note, active listening can occur beyond human-to-human relationships and take place with the land itself. An example of using active listening to make space for layered narratives in a research-creation context, is found in the work of Canadian eco-somatic performance artist Christine Bellerose (2016). Based in Montreal she works with the intersection between dance and story to “shift my relationship to sites of colonization” (p.102). Working outdoors and in direct relationship to the land she makes space for engaging Canada’s colonial legacy through her body and practices “learn[ing] to hear the environmental language” (p.102). For example, of a recent work performed

in winter she writes, “Rather than working against extreme cold, ice, snow, wind, wet, flood, insects, sharp rocks and slippery lichen, I work towards consciously moving in synchronicity with the influences present, and to be present to influences including those emanating from my past and my own presence” (p.102). She includes the reality of her settler lineage in this physical relationship to landscape: “I imagine dancing my bloodline, remembering my place as a settler-dancer trespassing on stolen land” (p.103). She describes how “Somatic movement [can be] a modality of experiencing life and framing research that activates narratives of complex histories” (p. 105). Beginning with the sensory, rather than linguistic story can make space for new possibilities to arise or to be imagined in a way that stems from listenership and *felt* relation to land.

An example of writing as a means of fostering a deeper intimacy with each other and our environments that specifically uses autoethnography can be found in Nelson’s (2015) work, *The Argonauts*. Nelson calls this book a work of “autotheory”. In it, she utilizes literary theory to bring us into the centre of narrative that is non-linear, personal and embodied, and simultaneously deeply clarifying in its utilization of post-constructivist theory to further the knowledge of what it means to be in relationship to one another. In *The Argonauts* Nelson speaks about the act of writing as something that one performs (in the true sense of the word) in reference to her early work, *The Performance of Intimacy*: “I didn’t mean *performance* in opposition to “the real”... I mean writing that dramatizes the ways in which we are *for another or by virtue of another*, not in a singular instance, but from the start and always,” (p.32). To return to a feminist phenomenology lens, this speaks to the

affective power contained in the narratives we hear or tell. By giving significance to our personal lives and the intimate details within them as inherently meaningful allows us to see our actions and relationships as being imbued with agency (O'Brien, 2016).

Iñupiaq interdisciplinary artist Allison Akootchook Warden works with the complexity of Indigenizing space and shifting culture through several mediums. An example of holding complexity, and embedding social justice and body-attuned principles into art practice, is found in her interactive installation *Unipkaagusiksuguvik* (the place of the future/ ancient) that took place over two months in the Anchorage Museum in 2016. Warden (2018) describes the project as “an installation of an Iñupiaq ceremonial house that exists between the hyper-future and the super-ancient” and was “physically present in the exhibit for almost 380 hours over the course of the two months” (Warden, 2018, par.1). She speaks about her role as an artist, in part, as being a “living part of the exhibit” (Warden, 2018). This exhibit challenged notions of Indigenous culture as being something of the past that is found in museums using both humour and inclusive, participatory invitations to the audience. The installation acted as a space for traditional healing and knowledge-sharing events such as a “Traditional Plants as Medicine” workshop. Among other methods of viewer engagement Warden offered a “rest area” within the installation: “Included in the installation were quilts and planet pillows, with the intent of allowing patrons to have a space to relax and unwind...A space to decolonize one's spirit, a space to take a nap, if so inclined” (Warden, 2018, par. 5). This interactive installation illustrates how creative means can be used to offer viewers a different “way of being” in a public setting.

How can feminist, decolonial and environmentally informed methodologies shape narrative-based research with the aim of increasing mental health and wellness? To answer this for myself, I have turned again to Kimmerer's (2013) words that "Writing is an act of reciprocity with the world" (p.162). Perhaps practicing reciprocity with the world through writing, and holding somatically-attuned space for community to explore narrative, is a means of disintegrating stagnant patterns and allowing new narrative possibilities to emerge. The entangling of narrative and somatic shifts as self-organizing processes (when unhampered) sheds light on the vital necessity of being in relationship to, of being *moved* by, our external environment in order to successfully participate in social change. The capacity to simultaneously weave our personal narratives into an embodied responsiveness with the external environment allows us to respond fully as living systems to the world around us. Using creative means to simply "make space" for narrative and embodiment practices in public settings can help bring dialogue and an opportunity for envisioning greater health and wellness to the cultural forefront. This brings me to the methods I used to carry out *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*.

4. METHODS

Transforming story through creative means in two public settings

Methods generally refer to the tools, means, and practices by which a research question is answered. The primary question driving my research was: Can practices anchored in creative / performative autoethnography and body-attuned narrative help people in northern landscapes attend to mental health and healing? As

mentioned, this research was qualitative and experiential, which necessitated creative processes augmented by autoethnographic reflection. Using these methods was intended to evoke participants' intuitive ways of knowing, leading to (re)connection with self, body and land / place: in short, to resilience.

As described in the introduction to this thesis, the research unfolded through two projects, *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* (please see Figure 3). These two projects, which contain some overlap, were each comprised of three phases (please see Figures 5 and 7). The projects and each of their phases are detailed below. The detailing focuses mostly on the mechanics of the projects, the where, how, why, and what of each endeavor. Following the detailing of *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* (and each of their three phases) I then turn, in the following chapters, to the outcomes and results of the projects. The outcomes and results are shared as: excerpts of the projects themselves, and a discussion of the findings.

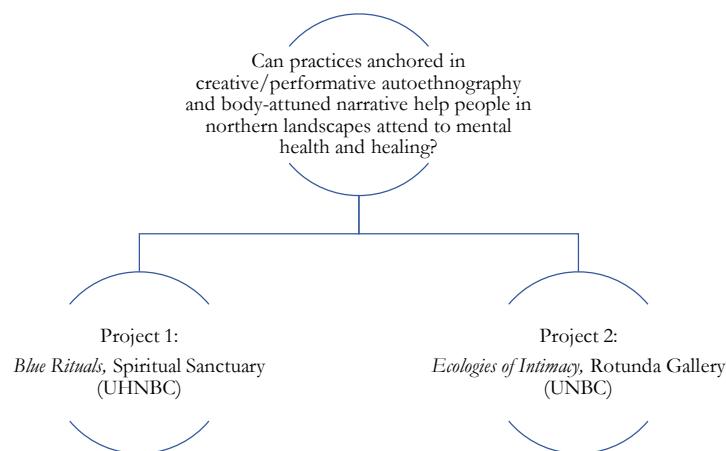


Figure 3. Two creative intervention projects

4.1 Project 1: *Blue Rituals*



Figure 4. Me with some of the visual and textual material from *Blue Rituals: Writing the Self*, Spiritual Sanctuary UHNBC (Photo credit: Katriona Auerbach)

Blue Rituals unfolded in three research creation phases. First came the writing of an autoethnographic poetry collection, second was the development of an installation with performance elements derived from the poetry collection in the Spiritual Sanctuary at UHNBC. Finally, there was the design of viewer-engagement for the UHNBC community. The first two phases of my research project (autoethnographic poetry collection and installation) generated autoethnographic and reflective ‘data’. The third activity, of offering viewer-engagement options, generated ‘data’ about people’s experiences and perceptions on mental health and healing from the hospital community. Together, these datasets (or narrative evidences) allowed me to produce a story, a researched and evidenced narrative, about perceptions and perspective and feelings of individuals living with experiences of disrupted mental

health in northern BC. I will speak in detail about the ways I carried out each phase of the first project, *Blue Rituals*.

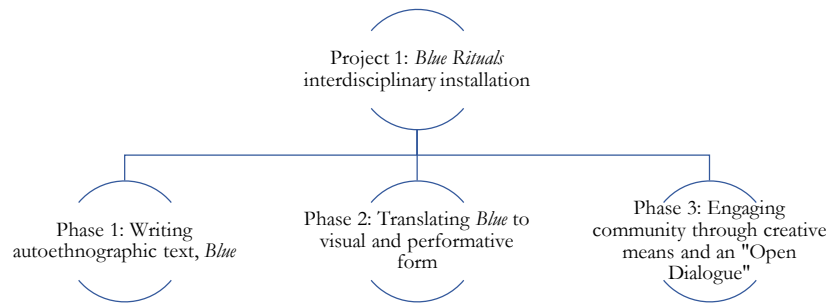


Figure 5. Three phases of Project 1: *Blue Rituals: Writing the Self* (reproduction of Figure 1)

4.1a Phase 1: Creating *Blue* as an Autoethnographic Text

The production of a poetry collection served as the initial phase of the first project in my research. I used creative autoethnographic writing (in the form of a poetry collection) as a tool for investigating my own relationships to health, identity and relationship to place. I developed this poetry collection largely over the course of a year through a graduate level Creative Writing course in fiction. The natural structure that emerged during the writing process was to arrange the collected text into thematic sections in order to allow the arc of the poetic narrative to unfold (which later informed the structure of the installation). In the final version of the poetry collection *Blue* I also included visual art in the form of mixed media paintings that I had created alongside the writing. I included select pieces of the mixed media work in the second phase of the first research project, *Blue Rituals*. Throughout all

phases of the research project, I used self-reflective journaling to record benchmarks in my creative and research process.

4.1b Phase 2: Translating *Blue* to an Interdisciplinary Installation Form

The poetry collection *Blue* served as the source material for creating an installation (with performance elements) in the Spiritual Sanctuary of UHNBC. This phase saw the translation of textual work into an installation. The act of creating the visual installation became interwoven with the structured movement improvisation so that they informed each other over the course of my week spent in the Spiritual Sanctuary. I will discuss this process in further detail later in this section. For now, I will speak mainly to the visual aspects of the project.

The primary visual method was to create a three-dimensional collage using pulpboard, birch materials, and found objects. I wanted to maintain the visual quality of the written word on paper and at the same time create an experience that felt immersive for the viewer. To do this I transcribed the text from *Blue* onto pulpboard with blue ink and arranged the pulpboard in the space of the Spiritual Sanctuary. Through experimenting with pulpboard and ink, I found that shaping the paper in the form of spirals or scrolls allowed me to create standing pillars of text. The thematic use of spirals visually relates back to principles found in somatic practices that the track “spiral lines” in the body and navigate the tension between weight and force in movement. I arranged the birch rounds and pulpboard spirals in circles and semi-circle formations. Visually I was curious about creating images of “permeability” through a design where the viewer could physically enter a shape

(semi-circle or circle) to engage with the visual material. To me, this related back to the body through the building block image of cells and cellular matter (also a thematic reference in the text of *Blue*). Because of the different dimensions of the pulpboard, I was able to create variety of levels with the scrolls. While creating the scrolls themselves I became curious about the performativity of writing itself as a physical act. I wanted to find a means of remaining somatically engaged as performer in the space through a relaxed, generative “pedestrian” task. The act of physically writing the poetry collection out over the course of the installation gave me my starting point for developing a performance structure as discussed later on. Simultaneous with this process I decided to work with birch as a second central image.

My relationship to birch as a visual material came while writing *Blue* in the cabin that I live in just outside of Prince George, BC. Much of the writing content focuses on themes of liminality and, on journeys: walking, hiking, or riding my bike, or longer journeys taking to train to Prince Rupert or driving long stretches of Highway 16. Through-lines that I began to follow were the presence of the boreal forest in several of the poems and tracking space by rivers, train tracks and highway. My cabin outside of Prince George is surrounded by birch. As I spent time walking through the forest, chopping wood, and making fires in my woodstove I came to think of birch as an image for conveying cycles. These cycles showed up in the tree rings themselves or papery layers of birch bark peeling off of the trunks, or birch logs turning to ash in the wood burning stove. Birch spoke of the circularity of the writing process, about internal landscapes as well as to my relationship with the land itself. Midway through my writing process a birch tree beside my house

cracked during a storm and had to be brought down. I ended up with two trees worth of birch rounds and began collecting large birch branches and fallen pieces of birch “paper”. Once in the Spiritual Sanctuary I arranged the birch rounds in a crescent or semi-circle and then added the branches to create a sort of architecture that I could begin to shape the space with. Through the course of the week the birch rounds served as viewer seating as well as “scaffolding” that I could place the pillars of text on or around.

Blue was developed in a collage style that gathered the poems together thematically to form an overall narrative and collection. The content lent itself to a visual structure that made use of fragments to create an overall picture. I was curious about creating a “forest of text” for the viewer to experience the collage as having enlivened, immersive quality. To create this immersive effect, I strung cotton clothesline across the room in five lines to add to the overall “scaffolding” of the space in addition to the birch rounds and branches. Over the course of the week I used the clothesline to display writing from *Blue* as well as to hang birch bark using fishing line. At this point I also integrated a select few of the original mixed media images I had created while writing *Blue*.

I began to think of the space as something that could be inhabited by story, image, and memory and brought in found objects to complete the collage. I gathered objects that had symbolic or literal significance to the poems and placed them in the Spiritual Sanctuary to further fill out the sense of the space being inhabited by narrative. As well, I was interested in working with found objects to inform my movement as a performer in the space, and to highlight key images from the text.

The key objects I incorporated were:

- A blue pottery bread bowl that had belonged to my great grandmother and had been used on their homestead property in southern Alberta
- A pottery water pitcher from the historic Medalta pottery factory (made with clay from the Medicine Hat area)
- A blue sheet made with the papery quality of a hospital sheet
- Wooden framed images of birds gifted from a friend
- Assemblages including: driftwood, seashells, sand, keys, sea glass, moss, bones, real nests, tiles, and copper wire

In addition to the pulpboard, birch materials and the scaffolding created with clothesline, these found objects served as the “bones” of the installation that informed both the movement and later, the viewer engagement.

To return to the discussion of how the visual installation and movement improvisation informed each other, the performance aspect of *Blue Rituals* was comprised largely of a task-oriented structured improvisation. The task, as mentioned earlier in the section, was to transcribe the poetry collection *Blue* onto pulpboard and arrange it in the Spiritual Sanctuary over the course of a week. In this way, the act of transcribing the text from *Blue* onto pulpboard and then arranging it in the space created both the skeletal visual and performance aspects of *Blue Rituals*. The literary structure of *Blue* determined the structure of the installation showing. I decided to work with two sections of *Blue* per evening to create the installation itself (one additional evening was set aside as a margin for catching up and for the Open Dialogue). This meant transcribing two sections of text from *Blue* onto pulpboard, shaping them, and arranging them among the birch materials and

found objects, or on the clothesline, each evening. Interspersed with this main task, I worked with intervals of “free improvisation” where I responded through movement to the text of *Blue* and the environment of the installation. These intervals were informed by the movement practices of Authentic Movement and Butoh.

Both Butoh and Authentic Movement are forms that I studied in my earlier training and practice as a devised theatre artist. While a study of Authentic Movement or Butoh and their lineages in relation to health humanities applications could be a thesis in itself, I will define them briefly as methods used to inform the performance aspect of the installation. Authentic Movement works specially from internal impulse. This is a self-directed improvisational form where the practitioner “moves in response to body-felt sensations, emotions, memories, movement impulses, and/or images” (Stromsted, 2009, p.2). This highly sensitized form was developed by dancer Mary Starks Whitehouse who trained with contemporary dance pioneers Martha Graham and Mary Wigman. Whitehouse’s interest in Jungian psychology and inquiry into an embodied form of working with unconscious impulse led to the development of Authentic Movement in the 1950s (Stromsted, 2001). As described in the background literature Butoh is a Japanese form of dance that originated in response to World War II. This form inquires into the fragility of the body and psyche, is driven by visceral expression and a purposeful slowing of movement to produce highly imagistic performance. Butoh unravels traditional notions of aesthetic spectacle in favour of movement that is sourced from a responsiveness to the internal landscape (Fraleigh, 2010). I chose these forms as both are driven by sourcing movement from internal impulse and the unconscious, and Butoh, especially, values images (especially of transformation from one state to another) as

a stimulus point for enlivening the body. As well, the deep attunement that both forms require allows for practitioner to bear witness to the continuous processes of change occurring in the body at all times. Stromsted (2001) describes the transformative potential of such attention in the following way: “Movement that emerges from a genuine source within the practitioner, when made conscious and integrated into lived experience, is by its very nature transformative” (p.39). These forms served both as springboards for generating creative material and as “grounding” practices for myself as a performer.

In the month prior to *Blue Rituals*, I prepared for the free improvisation intervals by working daily to respond to sections of *Blue* using Butoh and Authentic Movement. During this time, I also recorded sections of text from *Blue* to be used in a soundscape. Through this process of researching the text through movement I discovered several key actions or images that I referred back to in the improvisations. Some examples of these transforming images were, draping a blue sheet over myself to create an image of being underwater and then fashioning the same sheet into the image of a swaddled baby, or using a birdcage to simulate the bones of my ribcage and opening the birdcage door to reveal a bird/heart. The vocabulary I developed in this month prior was also “task-driven”. For example, some of the key movement themes were responding the shadows and negative space between birch branches, and using a traditional Butoh “walk” to cross the space creating a pathway (journey) through the birch rounds, or walking on birch bark to evoke a soundscape like walking on snow. These images were in response to the text of *Blue*. For instance, the image of walking on snow responds to a line in poem 9.1 of *Blue*, “I am making tracks one step at a time towards the calving, the

heaving, the frozen cut shard and thrust of ice slabs bordering split of free running Nechako-Fraser confluence". The intervals of free improvisation between the main task of transcribing text allowed me to animate the space and create cohesion among the different elements of the installation by integrating them into a movement response during this hour. As well, the movement structure was informed by the shape of the space itself. I moved through the space in "rounds" alternately responding the written text transcribed onto pulpboard, the objects and negative space within the installation and the soundscape of recorded text from *Blue*. These rounds were approximately seven minutes long and ran in intervals about four times/evening between 6:00-7:00. As the project unfolded the timing of these rounds became more organic. To further draw these elements out and create an immersive environment I worked with found lighting and a soundscape.

The technical elements (light and sound) used in the installation were minimal and helped to create a contemplative atmosphere. To draw out the light and shadows of the space I worked with several sources of found light including lamps, tealights and fairy lights to further create silhouettes especially of the birch branches. In terms of sound design, I planned to work with original atmospheric soundscapes created by an artist named Ingvild Langaard (used with permission) whose work I became familiar with during my time in Norway. However, I found the soundscapes dominated the space too much and that a natural soundscape arose organically from being in the hospital itself and from discoveries made during the performance element (for example, the crunching of snow created with birch bark). As mentioned, I recorded fragments of text from *Blue* to be played at different points. This brings me to speak about the final component of the *Blue Rituals* installation,

the viewer engagement.

4.1c Phase 3: Community Engagement with *Blue Rituals*

The third and final phase of this project was to engage the viewers and therefore the hospital community of UHNBC. This phase was carried out in a number of ways including the pre-opening tasks of generating awareness about the project through media and publicity, the actual physical viewer engagement during the installation showing, and the public Open Dialogue that helped to close the event. I will discuss these tasks in sequence here.

The pre-opening of this project was comprised of working with the Spiritual Health Manager, Lauren Aldred, to discuss the protocol for the project specific to the Research Ethics Board application; designing media including a press release for local media outlets; and designing and distributing posters in the Prince George city centre and on campus. I worked closely with Lauren Aldred to better understand the role of the Spiritual Sanctuary in the community and to ensure we had a working plan for my time in the space should her support be needed (please see Research Ethics Board approved application in appendix). Lauren Aldred also helped generate interest in the project through the Northern Health listserve and through word of mouth. To spread awareness of the project, I brought posters to organizations whose mandate focuses on health and wellbeing including the Central Interior Native Health Society, the New Hope Society, Chinook Yoga, the BC Cancer Centre for the North, and the Mental Health and Addictions Service Centre, the House of Ancestors, and the Friendship Centre. I also distributed posters on campus

as well as local bars and coffee shops (please see appendix for full publicity materials). As well, I had several informal conversations about the project with members from organizations where I had formed relationships over the course of my time in Prince George, especially at Chinook Yoga, and at the New Hope Society. I made a small event bulletin to be distributed to select classes at UNBC, as well as a social media “event page”, and developed hashtags and posted images and updates regularly on social media in the lead up to the project. These tasks took place from August 2018 to the opening in November 2018.

The *Blue Rituals* installation took place over the course of a week from November 20-25th, 2018. I was present as a facilitator and performer between 4:00-8:00pm (generally longer) each night and structured the time as follows:

November 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 2018

4:00-6:00 Transcribing text from *Blue* onto pulpboard and arranging it in the space while the space is simultaneously open to viewers to engage in self-directed free-writing, drawing or viewing the space.

6:00-7:00 Structured movement improvisation performance over the course of the hour in short intervals.

7:00-8:00 Free time for conversations, preparing for the next day etc.

November 22, 2018

4:00-6:00 Transcribing text from *Blue* onto pulpboard and arranging it in the space while the space is simultaneously open to viewers to engage in self-directed free-writing, drawing or viewing the space.

6:00-7:00 Open Dialogue on arts-based initiatives in healthcare settings.

7:00-8:00 Free time for conversations, preparing for the next day etc.

The central driver of my overall research and of *Blue Rituals* was to inquire into narrative as a generative means for increasing wellness. Therefore, the methods for engaging the viewers were designed to offer the viewer an opportunity for self-reflection on their own narrative about, or relationship to, healing. This was prompted through several modalities and opportunities for engagement. I aimed to make this phase of the project inclusive by design and to open space for viewers to self-determine how they wished to engage. The primary means of engaging offered was through a “freewriting station” that included writing prompts and an invitation for placing the freewriting within the installation. The physical act of viewer freewriting likewise contributed to the visual material of the installation and as an act of somatic engagement with *Blue Rituals*, mirroring my own process of transcribing text from *Blue* (engaging it visually and through performance). I will mention the suggested means of engaging with the project and then speak to each creative “offer” individually in more detail.

The offers for viewer engagement included: (1) reading the poems from *Blue* transcribed onto pulpboard; (2) contributing free-writing (or drawing) to installation (a “station” for this purpose was provided); (3) choosing a “poem for the road” that the viewer could take with them (this option was also offered virtually to anyone unable to access the space); (4) choosing a glass bead or shell to place in the “counting jar” provided to mark the viewer’s visit; (5) placing an object on the “found object shelf” symbolizing something that provides a sense of connection, or

alternately something to let go of; (6) simply being in the space; (7) at select times finding a spot in the space as audience for a live movement improvisation performance with a soundscape of recorded text from *Blue*; (8) adding a comment or reflection in the guest book; (9) participating in the Open Dialogue available to the public on the potentials and further needs of using arts-based research as a means of addressing mental health.

As mentioned, freewriting was offered as the primary means for viewers to engage with *Blue Rituals*. A “freewriting station” was incorporated into the Spiritual Sanctuary for this purpose. Some viewers chose to draw at this station instead of write. The freewriting table included paper, pens, pencil crayons, ink, calligraphy brushes, scissors, a jar of clothespins for hanging the writing either on the clothesline or pinning it somewhere else in the installation. An instruction card was provided to guide the viewer: “Choose a writing prompt or create your own; include your free-writing in the installation using the clothespins provided, or keep it for yourself.” As well, several freewriting prompts were included. These prompts were thematically linked to the poetry text from *Blue*, and to the subject of healing (please see Figure 6 below).

“tell me... about a dream you recently had”

“tell me... about a time you told someone something about yourself you had never shared before”

“kintsugi is a Japanese technique of repairing broken pottery with gold...tell me about a time when you felt broken and how you ‘filled in the cracks with gold’”

“tell me... about a time nature revealed a “truth” to you”

Figure 6. Examples of free-writing (or free-drawing) prompts given to viewers

I incorporated several small “rituals” into the design of the project and especially the viewer engagement. One of these was the use of a “counting jar”. Viewers were invited to “place a stone or shell in the jar to mark your presence at *Blue Rituals*. This was intended as a small act of bearing witness to the space. Another “ritual” was contained in “poems for the road” jar. At the end of each day I selected short portions of text at random from *Blue* and handwrote them on small scrolls of paper added to a jar at the entrance / exit of the installation. Viewers were encouraged to take a “poem for the road” with them. I also offered this option virtually through social media using photographs of the text for anyone who was not able to attend the project in person. The theme of using small acts to mark presence, or to reflect, was carried over into the idea of an object shelf. The idea of working with a “found object shelf” was that viewers could leave something small on the shelf, guided by an instruction card: “Leave an object here that symbolizes connection. Alternately, leave something that you’d like to let go of.” This encouraged viewers to return to the installation and to include their reflection (using an object) into the unfolding narrative of *Blue Rituals*, and to visually shape the space through their contribution.

Of course, another option was to simply inhabit the space or to use it as a gathering place for conversation and visiting. This naturally allowed for a small “audience” to form organically and for me to share the performative aspect of *Blue Rituals* through the movement “free improvisation” and using select recordings of text from *Blue*. A guestbook was provided in the installation for viewers to record written thoughts, comments and impressions. Lastly, an Open Dialogue was held near the end of the project as a facilitated opportunity for the UHNBC community to share their reflections of arts-based initiatives as a means for addressing mental health and

healing. The Open Dialogue included a short presentation of my thesis research, a mark-making exercise (discussed further in the findings section) and a facilitated discussion that I guided using appreciative inquiry. As will be discussed further in the findings, this community conversation allowed me to help identify primary needs that arts-based initiatives like *Blue Rituals* could potentially meet in the healthcare setting of UHNBC. The research model (and, in part, the ‘dataset’) of *Blue Rituals* also served as blueprint to subsequently carry out *Ecologies of Intimacy*, which was larger in scope.

4.2 Project 2: *Ecologies of Intimacy*



Figure 7. Performing movement from *Ecologies of Intimacy* Rotunda Gallery, UNBC

(Photo credit: Katriona Auerbach)

Using the same research model as *Blue Rituals*, I created the installation *Ecologies of*

Intimacy shown in the Rotunda Gallery at the University of Northern British Columbia between December 9, 2018-January 22, 2019. *Ecologies of Intimacy* was created using three autoethnographic texts. The first was *Blue* (and subsequently the visual and performative material from *Blue Rituals* was used). I then worked with two other autoethnographic texts, *Swale* and *Transformation* as source material to likewise create visual and performative work. Together, *Blue Rituals* and the textual, visual and performative material generated from *Swale* and *Transformation* comprise *Ecologies of Intimacy*.

Swale was created in response to my firsthand experience at the political protest Standing Rock in North Dakota and was developed during a self-directed course on autoethnography. *Transformation* was written during a course on Climate Change in Northern Regions while studying in northern Norway. Respectively, these two autoethnographic texts inquire into social justice practices and resiliency, and social / cultural transformation in response to climate change. The three pieces together form a dialogue on health and wellbeing as it relates the individual, to social justice within community and society, and to environmental health. *Ecologies of Intimacy* used all of the above methods of creation and viewer engagement referred to in Project 1 *Blue Rituals* with some changes to fit the setting of the Rotunda Gallery and UNBC campus. To avoid redundancy, I have only included the methods or process elements that differed in this project.

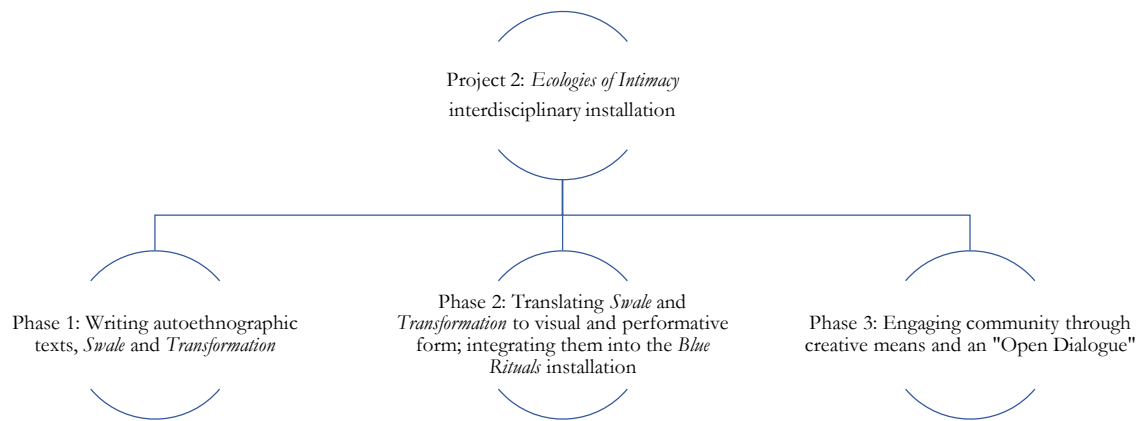


Figure 8. The three phases of Project 2: *Ecologies of Intimacy* (reproduction of Figure 2)

4.2a Phase 1: Creating *Swale* and *Transformation* as Autoethnographic Texts

As mentioned *Swale*, a work of reflective creative writing and visual art production, was created during a self-directed course in autoethnography that coincided with my participation in the political “water protector” movement of Standing Rock. This movement was in response to the endangerment of the Missouri River’s drinking water and excavation of ancestral burial sites to build the Dakota Access pipeline and is currently the largest gathering in history of Indigenous peoples bringing together members from over 300 tribes. The firsthand experience of witnessing this movement as an aspiring ally and the process of recovering from being arrested informed this piece of reflective writing on social justice practices and resilience in relation to health and wellbeing. It also further drove my inquiry into the feminist assertion that the personal is political.

While I initially began with the intention of working textually, I found that visual autoethnography proved a much more accessible way in at this particular point. The exhaustion of being occupied with legal correspondence in a year long process court process made writing, which has always been my primary creative medium, feel out of reach. In the end, this deepened my inquiry into the relationship between the body and writing process and I began first to work visually with the collage technique of assemblages. Working with gathering of objects into paper nests grounded me physically in a tactile, methodical practice and eventually led me through a visual process of mapping out an autoethnographic piece of text on the intimate aspects of social justice and how personal resilience practices can be extensions of larger political movements. Consecutively to *Swale* I had several opportunities to share a performance piece I developed, *mni wiconi/water is life*, in both artistic and academic settings. This piece partly informed the performance aspect of *Ecologies of Intimacy*, which I discuss later in this section.

The second component of Phase 1 of my second project, *Ecologies of Intimacy*, is *Transformation: A Personal Engagement* (referred to as *Transformation* for short). This text was developed while studying abroad in northern Norway in a class taught by social scientist Grete Hovelsrud, an anthropologist from the International Governmental Panel for Climate Change Research. During this course, we read interdisciplinary scholarship on the social dimension of climate change adaptation. These readings, and especially the work of human geographer Karen O'Brien, prompted me to inquire into the use of creative intervention to humanize the complex questions being put forward in this literature. Specifically, I wished to

inquire into how to activate individual and cultural paradigm-shifts given the momentous reality we find ourselves facing with regard to climate change using an arts-based method. I experimented with using autoethnography in dramatic form to create an extended monologue. The content of this monologue inquired into contemporary North American relationship to “need” in late stage capitalism, and placed the internal drivers of consumerism in tension with the speaker’s relationship to sentient landscapes. An aspect of the creative process in developing this piece of text was photographing the landscape in northern Norway and creating assemblages of natural and found objects in response to the text. Photographs of both the landscape and the assemblages were included in the installation.

4.2b Phase 2: Translating *Swale* and *Transformation* to an Interdisciplinary Installation Form

Blue, *Swale* and *Transformation* formed the source material for the installation *Ecologies of Intimacy* shown at the Rotunda Gallery on campus at the University of Northern British Columbia. A core structural aspect of this work became an inquiry into the intersections between individual health, health of the community in relation to social justice, and environmental health. I began to imagine the three texts (*Blue*, *Swale*, and *Transformation*) as three “bodies” responding to one another: the individual body, the communal body, the environmental body. *Blue* had already been translated into *Blue Rituals* and I included the entirety of these installation materials in the Rotunda Gallery showing. The text itself of *Swale* and *Transformation* was also included. I printed the text in small sections onto 11x17 poster paper and mounted it along the two “alleyway” walls in the gallery with images interspersed

between the short sections of text to create a visual story. As well, I printed booklets of the text for those who wanted to sit and read the work in full (please see appendix for full texts).

The *Ecologies of Intimacy* installation at UNBC's Rotunda Gallery was an interdisciplinary installation with collage, handmade nests, found objects, and a performance element with recorded and spoken text. The dimensions of the Rotunda Gallery are considerably larger than the Spiritual Sanctuary and it is designed, of course, to accommodate visual art. The gallery is circular in structure and there are several surfaces for mounting or suspending work using cables, and levels for placing work. I will speak to the individual components of the visual work created followed by the performative work.

Because of the increased space I was able to include several original mixed media images from *Blue* that I had created alongside the poems. These images were gathered together in collage form and were mounted on the back wall of the space using brass pins. Adjacent to this wall runs an alleyway space for mounting images. On this wall, I included a series of photographs of the mixed media "nests" that I had created to accompany the text, *Swale*. These photographs were displayed alongside the text of *Swale* printed in 16x20 poster format on art paper. The original mixed media "nest" assemblages were also included in the installation as small sculptural objects. On the "alleyway" that runs opposite from the one at the entrance I placed 11x17 posters of the text from *Transformation*, and photographs of assemblages of natural and found objects made as a response to the text, as well as photographs of the surrounding landscape of northern Norway. In addition to this I

shaped hundreds of empty paper nests in a pile in the centre of the Rotunda Gallery as the central image of the *Ecologies of Intimacy* installation. The image of a nest became one that linked together *Blue*, *Swale*, and *Transformation* as a symbol of mother / child relationships, of home, of “holding space”, and of preparing to leave comfortable territory. I expanded my invitation to viewers from placing personal objects on the “found object shelf” to integrating them into the assemblages in the installation. These empty nests provided a “habitat” for free-writing created by the viewers (several notes were tucked into the nests) as well as the objects they contributed (agate, wild hazelnuts, chesnuts, coins, etc). Found objects specific to *Swale* and *Transformation* were included throughout the installation in the UNBC’s Rotunda Gallery to further create the environment of *Ecologies of Intimacy*. These objects informed the movement improvisation aspect of *Ecologies of Intimacy* as I used them to carry out movement “tasks”. As well, during this installation the viewers were invited through directions provided on “pathway cards” to engage in tactile way with the found objects through re-arranging them in the space.

The performance aspect of *Ecologies of Intimacy* followed a similar process to *Blue Rituals*. The movement structure was in part determined by the circular space of the Rotunda Gallery. This lent itself particularly well to working in “rounds” or cycles through the space and shaped the structure and duration of the improvisation. I continued to work with movement tasks sourced from all three texts and to use techniques and vocabulary from Authentic Movement and Butoh.

To delve further into some of these techniques, I will speak first my application of Butoh and second to my application of Authentic Movement in creating the

performance material. A key movement “touchstone” for me was to cross the space in a traditional Butoh “walk” while allowing myself to be informed by the imagery and objects I was encountering. Butoh often works with images of “transformations” from one state to another, such as the journey of a flower budding, blooming and decaying. This sensitivity to transformative processes allowed me to locate transformative images in the text or visual environment I had created and draw from them in my movement improvisations. Authentic Movement hinges on the experience of allowing freeform, internally driven movement to be witnessed. Though this is a divergence from the “pure” form Authentic Movement, I imbued the installation itself with the role of “witness” and began my movement response in attunement with the visual materials and text surrounding me. There was, of course, also the presence of audience members as witnesses and this informed the sensorial experience of being “seen”. Because of the infinite possibilities Authentic Movement allows for (the main principle is that you are present with your internal impulse and witnessed) this practice can at first seem simplistic. However, attunement to full presence as a performer while making movement (and durational) choices can allow for deep exploration of unpatterned movement and prompt the practitioner to release any assumptions of what they think they know about how (or why) the body moves. The added challenge is that because the practitioner is being witnessed, there is a degree of awareness on the external that acts as an anchor. Much like yoga, and several somatic movement practices, Authentic Movement fosters the skill of cultivating simultaneous internal and external awareness. These forms, Butoh and Authentic Movement, allowed me to work with improvisation that prioritized attunement to internal and external space and the sentient presences around me, with a sensitivity to the constant

transformations taking place at a sensorial level, both in my body and in the environment I was inhabiting, and even in the “living” quality of the text I was responding to.

The skeletal structure of the overall movement improvisation was to move through the Rotunda Gallery in a clockwise direction alternately responding to the written text transcribed onto pulpboard, the objects, especially the paper nests, and negative space within the installation, and the soundscape of recorded text (comprised of sections of all three pieces). I also incorporated some material from my performance piece *mni wiconi/water is life* and used video footage to layer over top of movement at one point in the structured improvisation. In the later phases of this project I began to work with speaking the text from all three pieces as well. The Rotunda Gallery features a “circle” in its center that allows for acoustic play, such as creating echoes. The end result was an interdisciplinary combination of devised methods to craft performance including movement improvisation in relation with recorded text, spoken text, and the visual elements of found lighting, found objects, video footage and visual art.

4.2c Phase 2: Community Engagement with *Ecologies of Intimacy*

Community engagement was a key aspect of both *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* that comprised this research. Like *Blue Rituals*, the community engagement included a pre-opening phase, various offers for viewer engagement during the installation, and an Open Dialogue to close the project. The pre-opening began with designing media including a press release for local media outlets; and designing and

distributing posters in the Prince George city center and on campus. I worked in partnership with the UNBC Wellness Centre to ensure that students and staff wishing for support would have an opportunity to receive this through drop-in counselling hours or by appointment (please see Research Ethics Board approved application in appendix). In addition to organizations whose mandate focuses on health and wellbeing, I also brought posters to locations with an active interest in social and environmental justice and/or fostering relationship to land. The organizations I brought posters to included: Central Interior Native Health Society, New Hope Society, Chinook Yoga, the BC Cancer Centre for the North, and the Mental Health and Addictions Service Centre, the House of Ancestors, and the Friendship Centre and the Farmer's Market. I also distributed posters on campus as well as local bars and coffee shops (please see appendix for full publicity materials). I continued to have several informal conversations about the project with members from organizations where I had formed relationships over the course of my time in Prince George, especially at Chinook Yoga, and at the New Hope Society. I made a small event bulletin to be distributed to select classes at UNBC, as well as a social media "event page", and developed hashtags and posted images and updates regularly on social media in the lead up to the project. These tasks took place from October 2018 to the opening in December 2018.

Ecologies of Intimacy ran over six weeks between December 9, 2018 – January 22, 2019. Like *Blue Rituals*, I worked in layers to shape the installation and respond to viewer engagement and contributions to inform the overall structure of the installation showing. While I continued to work in an interdisciplinary way using textual, visual and performative methods, the performance component was more

contained. Rather than work with nightly improvisational performances I developed the structured improvisation using movement and recorded text as a culminating feature of the installation and shared it with two undergraduate classes (English and Critical Geographies), as well as during the Open Dialogue, and subsequently shared an excerpt of it at the *Creating Spaces* medical humanities conference in Hamilton, ON.

Later in the project I integrated the idea of “pathway cards” that choreographed a set of actions for the viewers to experience the space differently. Each card featured a combination of four (4) ‘activities’ to form a pathway through the installation for the viewer. These were comprised of visual, movement-based, or textual offers and also contributed to the soundscape of the space. For example, one pathway included the following directions:

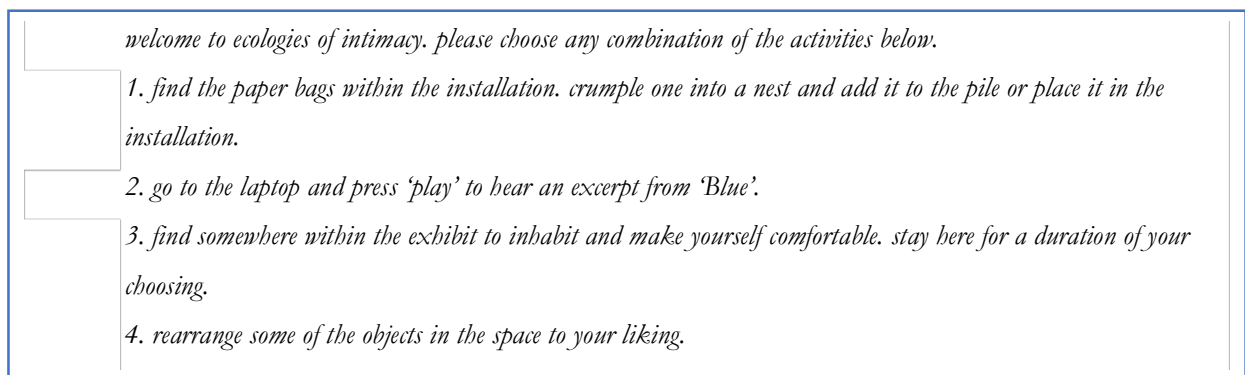


Figure 9. Example of the pathway card provided to viewers at *Ecologies of Intimacy*

These pathways were intended to provide guidance for viewers to engage the space somatically through a variety of modalities and possibilities.

Lastly, I followed the same structure for the Rotunda Gallery Open Dialogue as part of the *Ecologies of Intimacy* installation, but broadened the question of how arts-based research initiatives and practices could inform healing to include healing in social justice and environmental contexts. I also posed the question of how the experience of our northern geography informs the experience of this arts-initiative for the viewer. The Open Dialogue included a short presentation of my thesis research, a mark-making exercise (discussed further in the findings section) and a facilitated discussion using appreciative inquiry. I will now turn to the findings chapter to share excerpts of the material from *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*. Following this, I will share the outcomes of *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* participants through a discussion of observations from the two Open Dialogue sessions, and using my own autoethnographic reflections on the process of carrying out the work.

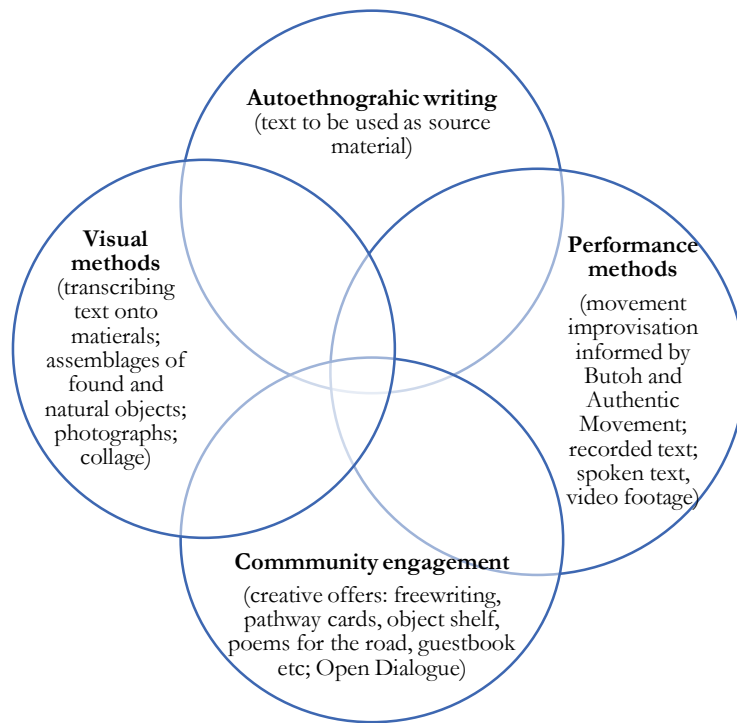


Figure 10. Devising methods used to create *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*

5. FINDINGS:

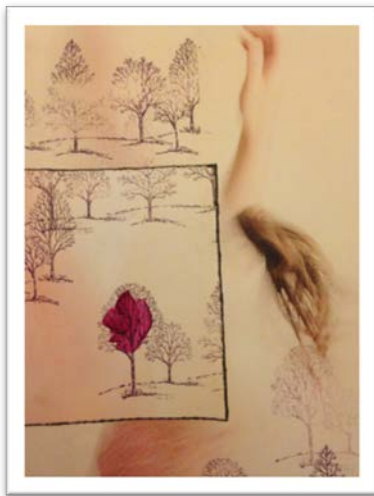
Excerpts from *Blue Rituals and Ecologies of Intimacy*

One of the findings of this research is the creative work itself that was developed. In this section I will share excerpts of the autoethnographic creative writing and visual work from *Blue*, *Swale* and *Transformation*. These texts formed the source material for the installations *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*. I will follow this section with a discussion of the findings of both projects using participant observations from the Open Dialogue sessions and my own autoethnographic observations about carrying out the projects. Please see appendix for the full texts of *Blue*, *Swale* and *Transformation*.

5.1 BLUE RITUALS

5.1a *Blue*

1.1 the body is in all places at once. the body holds all at once, distinguishing not in geography or time but in the sensory. each place, held in the confines of your skin, each memory encircling another.



1.3 i was driving through the mountains and i could remember everything that was ever spoken by family, lovers, and friends that i had crossed this stretch with in times past. i remembered the things i said to myself as i moved beneath these grandfather rocks - that's what my mom always called them - this night under the full moon i could feel

their rock hands folding around me as if cupping me in prayer, stars peeking out above, the darkness all around this barely formed road, the deep green of the pines, blackness of the spruce blanketing the land and of it all hush, hush, hushing.

we peeled each other back, this night and i.

3.3 with you, water is all around.
with you, i am shaping a new language.
i know what makes the tide turn
heave its self over the edge, curl
its own height sweetly, willingly,
and rush the shore with all its might.
in this newfound space we call each to
other just to hear the sound echoing
back at us, like bats sensing the shape of
fruit in the night. my name in your
mouth is a sweetness breaking open.

5.2 and now i am here.
tiptoeing around this chasm.
i am trying to create a holding space for
my own delivery. phantom pregnancy.
"a miscarriage is still a birth" says one
of my pamphlets. i think that an
abortion is also technically a birth,

something leaving my womb. my
would-be due date.

blue, blue night sets in.

i wonder what time of day you would
have been born. the moment you would
have chosen to enter the world, trading
water for air, taking in color, sounds,
your mind quickening, absorbing,
collecting and making sense of it all.

here the day is calm, horizon of blue
hills, soft cloudy sky, but there are
tremors in the water, something is
traveling, pressure systems shifting, air
pressing down on water, heat gathering.



when it comes I feel the thunder like it's
rolling through my own body, sending
electricity to my fingertips.



i split open an apple to reveal the falling
star caught inside, a trick my mom used
to play. all apples have shooting stars in
the middle if you slice them the right
way.

inside my own body is the white noise
of blood crashing through vessels. i
heard it when the technician turned on
the sound while examining my womb
for remaining tissue.

"it's just physical, just matter," i
repeated to myself and kind of believed
it.

gentle waves rock up onto lakeshore.
your experience, with eyelids as thin as
the skin of an onion, i imagine, is / was
not unlike my own in this moment as i
stand on the deck listening to water in

the dark looking up at the stars,
pinpricks of light in the night sky.

we are sliding in and out of our bodies
all the time.

6.4 i begin at my feet, bones hollow like
a bird, a flute, slide through this tunnel.
i want to start here in this openness, feel
my way through every and each space.
a layer melts clean off me, like wet snow
on a hot roof in spring. in the night, i
wake to the stars dipping low. they are
visible between slender birch trees,
leafless now, stars so bright they are
watery: Pleiades, the seven sisters, and
nearby the little dipper. they cool my
mind as they draw me up to meet them,
pour clear water from the dipper into
my mouth, send me back into the night.

9.1 geo-chasm split intricate and
glittering bowls of crystalline ice licked
smooth by breath permeating to loosen
poplar sapling scent and heady
cottonwood musk
it's too early to be spring but everything
is muddled these days and we don't
expect the seasons the way we used to.

i am making tracks one step at a time
towards the calving, the heaving, the
frozen cut shard and thrust of ice slabs

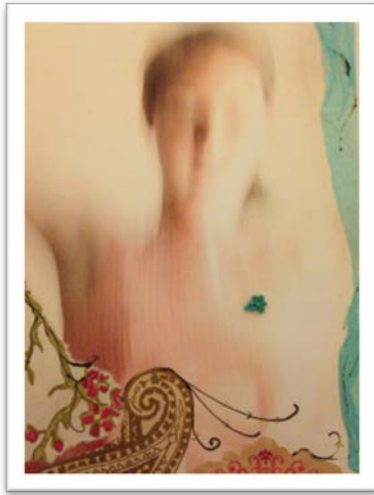
bordering split of free running
Nechako-Fraser confluence.

i am making tracks one at a time never
sure how deep the footfall will sink boot
print stamping above the rushing
beneath, the desire to cradle soft rime
aching in my palm, buoyed by the
uncertainty of the surface below but that
is the nature of ice.



9.2 how can i reconcile
and force my brain
porous muscle
to focus on the running of water
as the ice melts slippery with
sunlight beyond the window
the jagged crop of tree
the second
to second
in order
to trace
a line

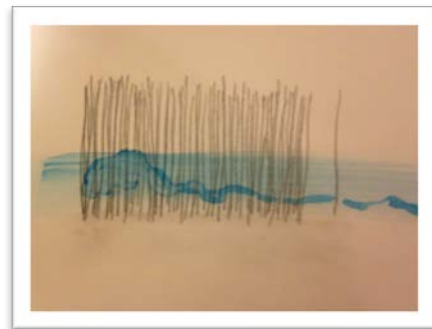
however thin
back to
myself?



10.1 night, teach me to spill truth
from my mouth, to scrape clean the
edges of my own heart. rinse my bones
with seawater and allow underside of
sternum to become a chamber eroded
by wind's fingers rushing over this
hollow space. coax voice where there is
none channel me words that will speak
love, again.

10.9 you are/i am the water drops
bending the grass, rain sounding in the
dark, a dream breaking its shell in the

deep of night, steam rising from a fire
put out with a pail of water, a promise
to come back in another form. you are/i
am the ear that hears my oldest secrets
and my strangest stories, a cold front
descending before storm blowing
through me, the July heat coaxing
perfume from pink clover and water
beading clover's leaves in the morning.
these water beads, they come from
somewhere, came from many places,
before resting on the open palm of
clover leaf, to wink light at you, at me.



10.10 these memories weave in and out
of each other, mouths tasting mouths,
words being passed from lover to lover
in the dark, stars as witness, wind
shaping sound, love spilling into itself
only to spill over again.

5.2 ECOLOGIES OF INTIMACY

5.2a Swale

“Trying to tie up all the loose ends and finally get it together is death because it involves rejecting a lot of your basic experience.

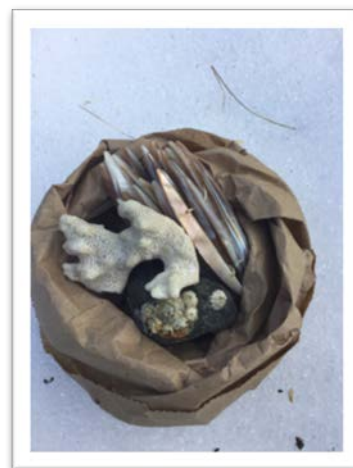
There is something aggressive about that approach to life, trying to flatten out all the rough spots and imperfections into a nice, smooth ride. To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest.” – Pema

Chödrön, Buddhist nun

Inquiry

Swale is a visual and auto-ethnographic inquiry through creative writing and found object art. This

piece was written following my firsthand experience at Standing Rock as a way to piece together disrupted notions of self, identity and worldview following my arrest while participating as a water protector in the political movement of Standing Rock in North Dakota. The image of a nest, a natural object that evokes both fragility and a sense of foundation, became central to this exploration of developing intimacy with my own process of healing. Through contemplation, the collection and arrangement of personal objects and memories, Swale inquires into the process of embracing fragmentation as a way to find connection, renewal and integration and to develop a personally sustainable approach to the practice of frontline social justice.



I've been thinking a lot
about nests lately.

About what it means to
have a safe space to
enter. About what is
means to hold space.

About empty space.

About space that is
waiting to be filled,

about space that is
suffocating, about space
where you can't get
away from yourself and
can't get close at the

same time. About space
that is breathing in relief
of its own emptiness.

About space that is an
offering just by existing.

Nests.

If I were to build a nest
to house this last year I
would fill it with the
crocuses that pushed

out of the ground in spring and tobacco seedlings I gave
water to with teaspoon, day after day and came home
to, when I came home, alone again. I would fill it with
bundled scarves from my Grandmothers worlds apart,
my biological European Grandmother and my
newfound adoptive Anishnaabe Grandmother. I would
fill it with Easter eggs Fedex-ed to me in a shoebox from
my Dad with green crinkly paper grass.



I would leave some empty. I would set some on fire. I
would gather the ashes and try to make meaning out of
them. I would see that grief is a messy process and
healing is an even messier one and sometimes healing
isn't the point, it is its own attachment. I would come
back to the understanding that all we need to learn is
willingness. All we need to love is willingness.

Willingness isn't an easy teaching.

I learned about willingness during a direct-action training in grassy field to the side of Oceti Sakowin, Standing Rock's main camp, where we unstacked foldout chairs into a circle and watched as the facilitators set up signs against the back of the truck. Those signs kept getting whipped around by the prairie wind and even after they duct taped them to the back of the truck those signs were pulled away at the edges.

We were encouraged to ask questions. I said something like, "I'm from Canada and I don't

know if being arrested will mean that I can't travel to the States..." It was a small and absurd this thing to say. "Being arrestable is not about trying to prove something," said the slight girl with hair parted down the middle who had already been to jail three times. "It's about willingness."



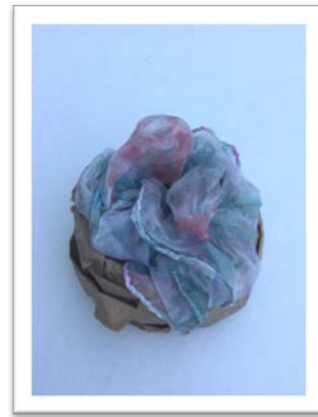
Willingness. Willingness to place yourself in the centre of the unknown. Willingness to have your body handled. Willingness to be strip searched. Willingness, knowing that this bigger than you, bigger than your life and your lifetime.

I step into a space that feels like being swaddled even if the hands that wrap it are gloved and carrying batons. We are all in it together, enacting this moment. We just happen to be in these bodies, on Highways 1806 four hours after sunrise. I'm thinking of an organism, a

porous membrane, we
are shifting, reading
each other's movements
and voices, dancing this
dance. Meanwhile, the
sage keeps growing, the
buffalo keep roaming,
birds fly overhead and
the tree to the right
keeps holding its yellow
leaves though it's almost
November. For a few
moments upon being
encircled by the
National Guard it is
calm and none of us
know how this day will
end.

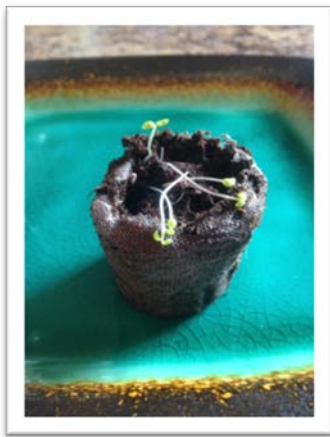


In my nest there would be many things that can't seem
to contain themselves: ashes, dirt, fire, water, memory,
time, love. I would pile my nests on top of each other,
try to make neat stacks or rows. At a certain point it
might become necessary to take them apart, sift through
the insides, try to extract meaning. Lay each piece out,
categorize it. Map timelines of where each bit came
from and how it arrived there and why I kept it and
what it means. But that would not be enough either. It
would not get me the answer I am after. Of how to heal
something. Of what it all means. Of how to grow.



Tobacco seedlings are both sturdier and more fragile
than you might think. They sprout cotyledon leaves
first, which are not leaves, but the seed broken apart,
embryonic, germinating. They spin light, dirt and air
together to form translucent stems, reaching, reaching,
these baby seedlings sometimes toppled by their own
weight. I tuck the dirt around them. I spoon them water.

Put the plastic covering in to keep in the humidity. Take it off. I watch many return back to the dirt that grew them.



A part of babies learning to crawl is that they need to become sufficiently mesmerized by something enough to want to get closer to it. To learn it. I would make a nest to show, to remember what it's like to do something because of joy alone. When I was

in grade three I did a report on sandhill cranes. I wanted to learn everything there is to know about them. My Mom took me to the downtown library because it was the only place in Edmonton to have a colour photocopier in 1993. We spent the afternoon making copies like magic and gluing them onto Bristol boards. Sandhill cranes mate for life. They nest in swales. "A swale is the hollow place, especially a marshy depression between ridges," says google. They sing a song when they fly overhead on their great migration.



There is danger in telling a story. A story can become a neat package when there is none. There is no end to story but the telling makes it alive. There only honest end is mystery. A willingness to know mystery. A migration and a swale, cotyledon leaves pushing against the perimeter of seed. A nest is a warmth of feathers and a gentle push into the empty free fall air at the same time.

5.2b Transformation:

A Personal Engagement

"To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe -- to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it -- is a wonder beyond words." — Joanna Macy

Inquiry

In "Climate Change and Social Transformations: is it time for a quantum leap?" Karen O'Brien references Andreas Weber's "Enlivenment paradigm, or a cultural worldview that emphasizes the importance of 'lived experience, embodied meaning, material exchange, and subjectivity

as key to addressing complex social problems like climate change" (O'Brien, 2016). She goes on to say, "Quantum social theory challenges us to recognize that life matters, subjective meaning matters, and we matter" (O'Brien, 2016). I am curious about embracing arts-based research and specifically feminist narrative as a way to approach Western relationships to consumerism through an inquiry into an inner landscape of "need" and a "process of becoming" that eventually link the speaker of this piece to an awareness of the sentient landscape surrounding her. This monologue/narrative draws on traditions of buffon theatre and is a purge of sorts that aims to meet consumer culture in its grotesque nature and roots of vulnerability/insecurity. Ideally, I wish to reconnect the audience back to humanism, and potentiality. This piece is meant to be performed so as to bring the audience closer to an experience of "liveness" and embodied (somatic/emotional) knowledge.

Additionally, I aim to raise the question what if we viewed climate change through the lens of creative process? What would emerge from this willingness to meet the unknown/unknowable as a collective, as an audience?

What is a radical
paradigmatic shift? I
want one. I want to feel
it. I want to remember a
way of living that I've
never experienced
before. I want to get
really strong, like, start
running in the dark
beneath northern lights
whose siren voices call
my name through
ghosts of snow.

I want to swim out in
the Norwegian sea. I
have touched it while
standing on the furthest
most point of this city.
It numbed my wind
burned hands within
seconds while I watched
the languid seaweed lap
against and shell
encrusted rocks, this

place looking like another place, another time, where I
sat feeling this same way by the sea.

That's not important.



What's important is that I've decided to construct my
life in a way that will make me desirable (again), a
better person. Like I said, I want a radical paradigmatic
shift. I want to feel it in my bones and my bones' bones.

I begin with meditating deep into the night. I am
practicing lucid dreaming. I do yoga with a David
Swenson video from the 90s, he stands in a field of
puffy flowers that youtube conveys to me through the
time space continuum. We commune. I contemplate
veganism, and make the switch from cow's milk to oat
milk anticipating the designs in lattes to come.

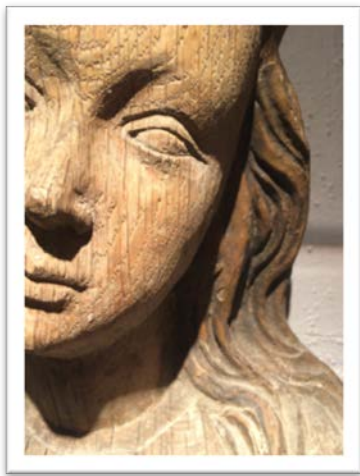
I dreams about the fish I have consumed, the artery
between their gills slit revealing jewel red blood

draining back to the sea
and feel something that
breaks the numbness.

I start a blog.

I try to absorb myself
like a protein into
humanity – engulf,
engulf, me.

I sweat in the sauna and
see other women's
bodies and the way they
feel comfortable in their
skin.



I descend into a tunnel
in the largest cave of
northern Europe with a
long name I can't

remember or pronounce. I descend in the pitch dark and
feel my way through, my belly against the earth. I talk
to my Mom on facebook, a blurry pixelated Mom but
her voice is the same one that calmed me after I was
squished by fellow kindergarteners in the back of the
playground tractor tire half buried in sand.



I go home and soothe myself with Radiohead, carrying
my laptop like a child balanced against my hip and
drifting from kitchen to bedroom. I listen to a yoga
nidra recording on headphones and the shapes of trees
speak to me through my laptop. The "I" has to... What?
Dissolve? Act? Shred? Engulf? Cooperate? Relax?
Unhinge? I try to re-parent myself and visualize feeding
my infant-self tiny teaspoons of milk between screams
of bewilderment at the world. I hope that all of this will
translate into some kind of robustness.

I read my mind and make more coffee. But instead of
perking up I fall asleep.

I open my eyes and see
the construction of my
life and from down here
on my back. In every
way in every movement
moment we are shaping
our cells, our lives, our
world. Especially in the
times we think we are
invisible, the times we
think don't count, the
moments we perceive as
meaningless. Like Joan
Didion says in *Goodbye
to All That*, "it had
counted after all, every
evasion and ever
procrastination, every
word, all of it." This
time I fall asleep for real
holding a plastic hairclip
in my palm.



In the inky night I drift from bed to bed to bed
just me and the thick dark amid the endless wind and
the passing train. I am everywhere I have ever been,
every restless night I have ever known, beside each
warm body I have rested my open palm against, and
maybe inhabiting places and nights and people I have
yet to visit too. Who knows?



When I wake I find
myself next to a glacier,
a mesmerization, this
shade of blue a frozen
undulation, the colour
of pulling you in. Whale
backed rocks fold,
mineral striped and
burnished purple,
beneath the tongue of
ice. In Bali they speak of
“rubber time” in
ceremony, this glacier is
time crystalized,
guiding me to stillness
and the small measure
of my life, the
thundering of calving
ice reminds me, that I
am muscle and neurons
firing, animal instinct

responding to the sheer kinetic motion, this glacier takes
me hard by the shoulders and places me back in my
body.



In the early morning rain patters on thin tent
walls, birdsong courses through me like spring
water spilling over from the soft warm bodies of
warblers and rose finches, my own blood and beating
heart nothing more or less than one more rhythm
among the rest.

6. FINDINGS:

Discussion of Community Open Dialogues and Autoethnographic Reflections

6.1 Discussion of Community Open Dialogues

At the core of this project was a search to produce and engage story through embodied means to improve mental health and wellbeing especially in northern geographies. Engaging with my own and other individuals' perceptions of mental health served as a starting point with which to later engage health in relation to social and environmental justice. Story can be a means to digest, or to "metabolize" the experience of disruptions in mental health, including grief and loss on individual, social and environmental levels. The act of bringing individual stories into a public setting can serve as a means of re-storying our personal narratives as valuable experiences that contain humanistic potential for compassion, empathy, resilience and change in our communities. The elements within the two projects *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* that served to foster the experience of humanistic connection and healing were discussed by participants who took part in the Open Dialogue sessions. These sessions form the basis for my thematic discussion and findings. Additionally, the process of Open Dialogue sessions allowed me to further cultivate the skill of active listening both in my creative process in the process of collecting data. While analyzing the reflections shared with me during the Open Dialogue, I have tried to listen how observations were articulated; to hear laughter, pauses, tonalities and silences as meaningful information in these conversations.

The aim of the Open Dialogue in both *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* was to provide a means to address my initial research questions through community reflection. The central research question I asked is: Can practices anchored in creative/performative autoethnography and body-attuned narrative help people in northern landscapes attend to mental health and healing? Using a feminist, decolonial, and environmental humanism-informed methodology and creative means, I inquired, can the body, directly, be a source of knowledge to develop narratives of wellness? These initial questions quickly led to a further inquiry about relationship to place, and question, how might relationships with land and place prompt evocative narratives by accessing body memory? Lastly, with regard to social justice, I asked, can narrative writing and performance/installation be a tool for diminishing stigma related to trauma for viewers who engage with an art-intervention within public settings? Additionally, if the answers to the above questions are “yes”, does sharing this creative work in a public health setting increase patient likelihood of engaging meaningfully with and/or returning to this healthcare setting? Following the opportunity to ask these questions through the showing of *Blue Rituals* in the healthcare setting of UHNBC, I was able to expand the question to inquire more broadly into perceptions of mental health in public settings by sharing *Ecologies of Intimacy* on campus at UNBC’s Rotunda Gallery. I asked, does sharing this work in public settings alter the culture of these settings to be more inclusive and humanistic? As well, through the process of asking these questions, my own conception of individual mental health was altered to become more deeply interwoven with somatic wellbeing, social justice and environmental health.

As mentioned in the methods section, I began both Open Dialogues by leading participants through a mark making exercise that served as a means to begin the conversation from an embodied perspective (please see Figure 11). I asked participants to respond intuitively through pastel marking on art paper to prompts about 1) their general experience in the setting (at the hospital or on campus), and 2) their experience of the installation and how it altered their relationship to the environment (in the hospital or on campus). In the Spiritual Sanctuary setting, I prompted reflections through mark making by asking participants to source from a time when they felt moved by a piece of art (from any discipline) and how this might further inform the dialogue about how art can contribute to cultivating a relationship with a given public setting. I also asked them to reflect specifically about how art initiatives in hospital settings may serve to the needs of women who have experienced trauma and prompted them to consider their own experience or to engage in compassionate imagining. In the Rotunda Gallery, I prompted reflections on how art inspired by place may foster a deeper sense of connection to a geography, and in turn how this sense of connection to place may impact local acts of social justice and environmental stewardship.



Figure 11. Two examples of participant mark-making in response to prompted questions

Three broad “reflective refrains” (what might be called themes) emerged from the materials collected as part of the Open Dialogue sessions. These reflective refrains were: 1) reflections on engaging with an autoethnographic process; 2) reflections on creative methods to foster self-determination, and 3) reflections on embodiment as a tool for wellbeing. I have titled the following sections according to these three themes. I have included an additional section on sense of place and reflections on northern identity. I include two figures of “word collages” created from viewer comments in the guestbooks of both installation (Please see Figures 12 and 13). Lastly, I conclude the thematic analysis of the Open Dialogues with ideas generated during the discussion on further applications of this research.

6.1a Storied Engagement

I used autoethnography both to create the two projects, *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*, to reflect on my own experience of carrying out the research, and to reflect on the ways that participants engaged with the two projects. A key observation offered in the Open Dialogue sessions was that the autoethnography used to generate my own work was further reflected by the participants' engagement with autoethnography. The stories they wrote, or the drawings they shared, fostered a thoughtful engagement with vulnerability in a safe space through reflective writing or visual art. One participant put it like this:

You have the freewriting station...and so it's almost like you're providing an opportunity for people walking by to come in and to be vulnerable. Because that's what autoethnography is all about; writing into those vulnerable places and that's often where healing takes place...it's provided a place for them to touch those places in their own bodies that autoethnography calls for a writer to do... as a means to share and let go of some of the pain. Because some of these writings are incredibly vulnerable, yet very strong, the fact that someone would write some of the traumas that they've been through in a space like this really shows that there is a need for it.

Several of the stories shared through free-writing or through conversation were about experiences with times of transition, liminality or the unknown. Viewers shared sensitive stories with me about their experiences with death and dying, with addiction, with grief. Some viewers spoke about experiences with supernatural or ghostly encounters or experiences that seemed to be just beyond the "ordinary". Several viewers shared about their "paths" to healing through meditation, through community support or spending time with nature. The willingness to engage in an

authentic way with research that invites personal storying about mental health and healing is a core finding of this project. The receptivity of the UHNBC community to approach this vulnerable subject matter and reflect openly on it shows, as the participant quotation above mentions, that there is a “need for it”.

As mentioned earlier, a key guiding principle that has informed this project is that of Cixous’ (1996) notion of being “separaunited” through “interexchange”. As people, we may not always be able to articulate or exchange the exactness of our experiences, but we can bear witness to one another and this allows for another kind of exchange to take place. Where understanding is not always possible, empathy may be. This relates back to Charon (2006) and Das Gupta’s (2008) work on “narrative competence” and “narrative humility”. Our stories are unending processes and there will always be aspects that remain mysterious, even to ourselves. Seeing participants stories shared alongside each other in the space (on the clothesline, in birch branches) illustrates a kind of “separaunited” state in the content itself being generated – there is an oblique exchange of personal experiences mirrored in the physical presence of stories being placed beside one another in the space.

6.1b Engagement through Self-determination

The initial research phases of both writing the autoethnographic texts and translating them using visual means served as ‘data’ for my own research creation process and created a model for participants to engage as they saw fit: “[Y]our modeling of your vulnerability also invites people to then feel like ‘look at what has

been done' ...and then they're able when they feel ready, if they do, to reflect themselves." While I hadn't intended this initial phase as an example to follow per se, the act of making an offer through narrative engaged individuals in a different dialogue about health than is generally available in clinical settings. To return to the notion of 'interexchange', by beginning the project with an offering of personal narrative it opened space for community members to do the same and to humanize the experience of mental illness, grief or loss.

Speaking to agency and self-determination within the design, the notion of choice came up frequently as a crucial element of reflective space. To begin, choice about simply whether or not to engage the space is one that is unique within the hospital environment. As one participant put it, "This space is one of the few non-clinical spaces where there is choice about whether you come in or not... the very fact of refusing to want to come in gives volition in a way that you do not have in healthcare where your choices are a narrow bandwidth of medical procedures or not." The design of *Blue Rituals*, and the language used to communicate with viewers through prompts, was open-ended and emphasized choice in terms of willingness to engage in an emotionally-reflective way. This emphasis on choice extended to timing: "There aren't a lot of spaces that we have where we can move at our own pace, or we don't always have that modeled for us. So, I think that's a powerful piece of it." Further speaking to the open-ended quality of engaging viewers one participant added that it, "Allow[ed] there to be time for things to come up more naturally...or creat[ed] opportunities where things do not have to be so linear." Agency in the form of encouraging choice, especially in the pacing, duration, or level of emotional engagement with an activity, helped to establish a

space where individuals self-determined if, and how, narrative practices might serve their wellbeing.

As mentioned, a unique feature of this project was that the installation at the Spiritual Sanctuary was available for viewing 24 hours a day. Participation through free-writing happened largely during the nighttime hours or in the early morning. This communicated a need within the hospital setting for creative or reflective space and services that is available outside of “regular hours”. The special quality of being able to access a reflective space, especially in the evening, was commented on during the Open Dialogue: “It’s really important because the nighttime is a really lonely or contemplative or good reconnection time, it’s a lot of different things.” As well, the 24 hour feature of the installation furthered the accessibility of the project for viewers that wished to participate in the project in a private way, without facilitation from me, or the presence of others.

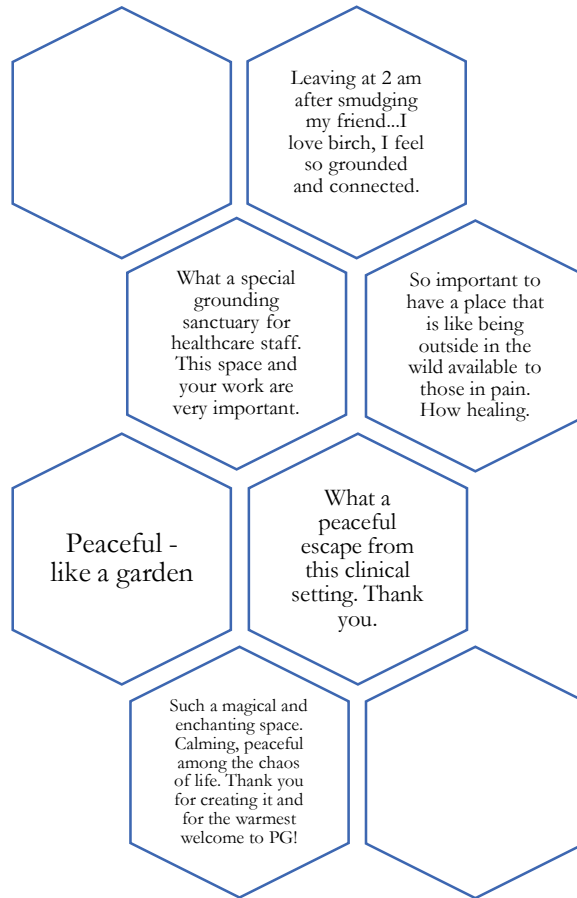


Figure 12. Viewer comments and impressions from the *Blue Rituals: Writing the Body* guestbook

6.1c Embodied Engagement

Much of the viewer engagement was stimulated by the aesthetic and sensory qualities of the installations. These qualities invited viewers to occupy the space of the hospital or on campus gallery differently from how they generally do. In some cases, aesthetic and sensory features prompted story from the viewers. The presence of birch served as an “point of entry” for viewers to engage in writing and reflection. Birch itself is, of course, a familiar image to many people who have spent time in northern British Columbia. This familiarity was enough to shift one of the

participant's experience of being in a hospital setting: "Having the birch tree...immediately my discomfort being in the hospital started to lift." Other participants (from both Open Dialogue sessions) echoed this reflection saying, "Seeing the birch branches themselves...invites that connection to land"; and, "So many of us identify with nature. There's something about dealing with natural items...when you're surrounded by unnatural things." The presence of birch evoked memory, and at the same time helped to create a sense of connection to nature in the space.

The installation also prompted viewers to orient themselves differently in the space. Of the Rotunda Gallery one participant said: "I don't know that I've ever sat here and looked up. It's very cathedral-like and enclosing and welcoming." As mentioned, I worked with several "found objects" such as pottery bowls and blankets as movement props. The presence of day-to-day objects used in a creative way activated the visual sense of the viewers: "So much of this is looking at the beauty of the ordinary" one participant commented. This emphasis on the sensory and aesthetic qualities helped prompt much of the free-writing as people shared their associations with these found and natural objects. As well, this emphasis on the sensory lent itself to the therapeutic possibilities for the space. In the Spiritual Sanctuary, the soft lighting allowed a participant to be physically more comfortable in the space: "When I've been in the hospital myself or as an ally with people that have dealt with trauma I've always felt like, 'can we just turn down the lights?' ... so, this kind of lighting is so much more calming and also doesn't feel like you're being exposed as, like, the glaring fluorescents when you're already feeling vulnerable and not there by choice." Though simply constructed, the aesthetic qualities of the space

provided a means for viewers to have an embodied experience by activating (or nurturing) the sensory. In other words, the installation encouraged presence and therefore *feeling* the body in settings (the hospital and on campus) that might normally be engaged in functional or pedestrian ways.

Furthermore, this invitation to engage the sensory, especially through natural objects, opened a discussion on how this work aligns with traditional Indigenous paradigms of health: “Of course, we are on Indigenous land here...health and wellbeing cannot be disconnected from the land and nature, from plants and animals, it is entirely connected. So, when you come into a hospital space that is void of all of that it’s actually literally disconnecting from an Indigenous sense of wellness.” As UHNBC and UNBC are on Lheidli T’enneh traditional territory this acknowledgement and alignment with traditional Indigenous paradigms related to wellbeing was a key consideration as discussed in the background literature and methodologies sections.

6.1d Sense of Place and Northern Identity

The presence of textual images and of natural objects specific to northern British Columbia, especially in *Ecologies of Intimacy*, also fostered a connection to place. Several participants spoke about northern British Columbia as a site with a rich history of land stewardship and how this further related to participants’ sense of northern identity: “Being here versus being in Vancouver where you’re constantly bombarded with sensation...there is time to listen to what the land is teaching you and what stewards of the land have been teaching for generations.” The production

of artistic work in special relationship to northern British Columbia helped to actively cultivate northern identity and relationship to this particular location: “The thing that almost made me tear up here in the middle of the piece, which was a lovely little surprise, was when you invoked the confluence of the Fraser and Nechako and I don’t think I have heard that phrase spoken in an artistic piece before and I got this amazing feeling of ‘she’s speaking my language’ or that ‘somebody’s talking to me.’” Acknowledgement of this particular land through textual and visual means helped to create a feeling of “groundedness” as phrased by one participant while engaging with the creative material.

A large part of relationship to place in northern British Columbia is related to activism. This location has a history of deep injustice, as well as deep resiliency in the face of injustice, with regard to land rights and stewardship. The evocation of this particular land through textual and visual means brought more complex emotions of “outrage” and “grief” for this land to the surface:

I can’t really be in northern BC without feeling its grief...[art] has been a way of buffering some of those harder, more challenging pieces particularly outrage. Processing outrage where there is no end point... and what that means in this body...The intermingling that you’ve done here... invoke[s] outrage and beauty at the same time.

The fostering of northern identity and connection to landscape through place-based art has implications for further cultivating a relationship between the individual and the land they inhabit thus increasing resilience, particularly in times of environmental injustice. As well, connecting with this specific location in northern

British Columbia allowed viewers to link their personal narratives from other geographies to this place as shared by one participant:

The experience of being here tonight was an addition to our story (referencing partner) of the tattoo art that we together wear to symbolize life in the Philippines to here. I think your sharing of your experience of social justice... really resonates and adds to our, and my, experience and journey here as Filipino diaspora here on Turtle Island ...your performance was an embracing movement for our story.

Through working with embodied and sensory means of engaging viewers in place-based art, connections to this particular landscape were further cultivated. This speaks to the interconnectedness of individual health and wellbeing with community and the land.

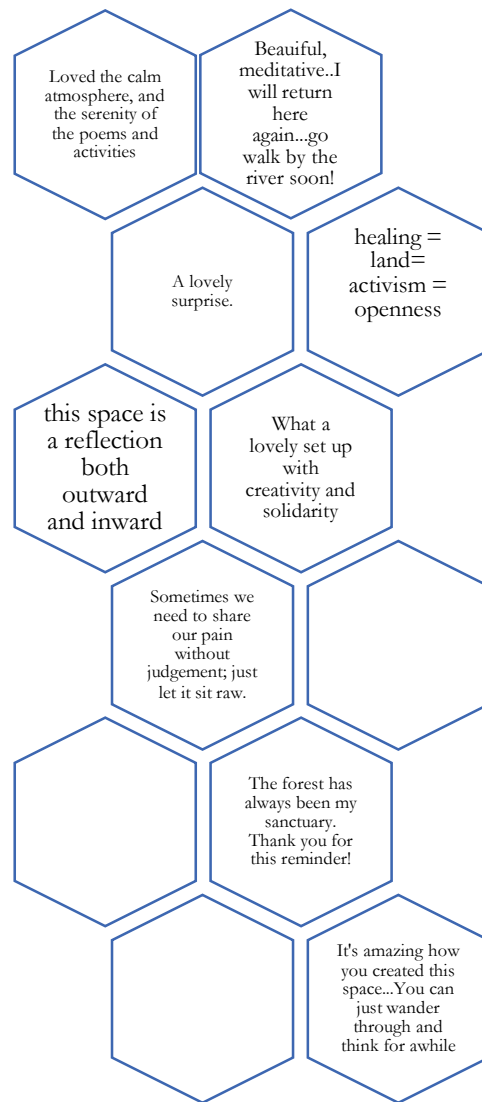


Figure 13. Viewer comments and impressions from the *Ecologies of Intimacy* guestbook

6.1e Conclusion: Community Open Dialogue Sessions

One discussion that arose during the Open Dialogue at the Spiritual Sanctuary with regard to future applications of the work is the question of where this research might have the most impact in the healthcare system. A participant spoke to the prevalence of arts-based programming for both seniors and children, but not for

adults: “I think creative arts are more accepted in children’s units and they have studies and the funds to do that. But people don’t get it yet with adults.” In terms of carrying this out beyond the scope of a thesis, the economic constraints and the need to reach the most recipients at the lowest cost was brought up. One participant spoke about how this project may actually have the largest reach in an area designated specifically for staff: “If a person has to choose where resources go...doing something for the staff has a bigger impact than anything we can do for the patients...so if we had to choose one thing to do I would say, put it in the staff rooms and in the cafeteria because people would come in and they would have that temporary oasis.” Speaking further to the need to show evidence that healthcare dollars are saved through arts-based initiatives, the participant added: “It’s what we prioritize in terms of healthcare dollars. I know staff retention is a huge thing around here. If we could talk the numbers talk and speak in the language of medicine in terms of things that would lead to staff retention... because replacing staff is expensive, having someone on disability leave is expensive...if we could show the resilience through evidence.” A parallel example of cost vs. necessity with regard to the development of palliative care units in the 1970s-80s was referenced in our discussion as a hopeful example: The need for palliative care units was strongly debated until the implementation of these units was evidenced as saving healthcare dollars in the long term. This question of demonstrating difficult-to-measure outcomes such as increased resilience or empathy as having economic benefit is an ongoing area of navigation in medical humanities and in mental health services.

The theme of developing language and evidence for the “usefulness” of this work has surfaced for me in different iterations of sharing this work. In one showing of

this work it was phrased as, “It’s beautiful, but what do you want people to do with it?” It is a good question that been a rich source of reflection for me. If *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* were fully intended a fine arts projects, this question may open up a discussion about the intrinsic value of art vs. the instrumental value of art. However, by setting these projects in a northern geography where the relationship to art may differ from that of an urban centre, and especially in the institutional settings of a hospital and a campus, this question is an important thread of my research’s narrative. On the continuum of “intrinsic value” and “instrumental value” art there is an intermediary term, art that has “relational value” (Maggs, 2014). The middle ground of art that is relationally driven helps me to locate *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* somewhere between art that is purely therapeutic or purely activist-driven, and art that is driven by the aesthetic or form-based inquiries. From a pluralistic stand point this research approach is one possible means of accessing humanistic resources, such as presence or empathy, in public settings like hospitals and campuses.

Following the Open Dialogue sessions, I found myself asking what this project contributed to the field of medical humanities and to research creation. Finding more connection to ourselves, our communities and environments through story, and about how the qualities such as empathy, compassion, presence and self-awareness benefit our health are not new findings. However, the methods for creating these projects and the implications for this northern community of having a space where these qualities can thrive make this a worthy endeavour. One participant’s reflection, in particular, sums up for me how pluralistic approaches to narrative through artistic means can impact health and wellbeing:

People are leaving very vulnerable pieces. And they're able to write them down, put them up, and, even anonymously, share them with other people. And then other people can come in and read them who may have had similar experiences... there's some pretty intense stuff up here... and to be able to leave that, to put your voice out there for other people to be able to connect with that... in a sense it's connecting everyone who is coming through here who is leaving bits and pieces of their own story for other people to be able to come and pick up and know that they're not alone, or to maybe understand a different perspective better. So, I think even that part of being able to come in and read all these different stories that are like little stars, little pieces of people, I think there's healing in that connection.

6.2 Autoethnographic Reflections on Creative Process, Embodiment, Agency, and Activism

As discussed, the textual, visual and performative material generated to devise *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* is both a method and a finding. In this section I will use autoethnographic observations to speak to the findings that came from devising and implementing *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* as a researcher and as an artist. I have also included further examples of the visual work that was created during *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy* to accompany these reflections.



Figure 14. Image from *Ecologies of Intimacy* (assemblage of natural objects)

6.2a Reflections on Creative Process

Image-creation was central to these projects in textual, visual and gestural form. In the influential text *Metaphors We Live By* Lakoff and Johnson (1980) inquire into our use of imagistic language to shape our reality asserting that, “New metaphors have the power to create new realities” (p. 145). I aimed to access image in a way that invited creative impulse from the viewers. For instance, nests were a central image in the Rotunda Gallery showing of *Ecologies of Intimacy*. An interesting development was that viewers began tucking their freewriting into the paper nests of the installation. This reverberated with my writing about nests as holding spaces for memory in the text *Swale*: “In my nest there would be many things that can’t seem to contain themselves, ashes, dirt, fire, water, memory, time, love.” Another creative image that arose from *Ecologies of Intimacy* was choice of several viewers to fold their notes and include them on the clothesline or pinned to the birch branches. The presence of a folded note – words that are kept private but nevertheless are present

and a part of the whole of the installation - felt apt for many of the ways unspoken stories are present in our culture, and in our bodies. This creative choice by viewers is a powerful metaphor for the inclusion of unspoken stories/ words in community. It also presented other viewers with an interesting physical choice: to observe the folded note as it was or to open it.

I used collage techniques in both of these projects visually and textually. A thematic image of both installations was of fragmented parts making up a complex whole. Writer Louise Erdrich (2017) says, “the whole is always located in the details” (p.294). The viewer contribution to this collage through fragments in the form of folded notes, scraps of drawing, or assemblages of objects served to create a collective collage sourced from individual memories in both locations. Viewing fragmentation from an embodied perspective, dancer Dana Caspersen (2011) writes “Experiencing fragmentation is another way of experiencing connection” (pg.99). I am interested in the idea she puts forward that fragmentation and wholeness are not diametrically opposed ideas. For me, the gathering of written, visual and movement-oriented material through assemblage, collage and in the overall installation, though fragmentary, also speaks to connections made between unlikely objects, events, or experiences. This showed up especially in the gathering of objects into nests and assemblages, and the overall theme of collections, and the dialogues that are created when collected objects (natural objects, found objects) are placed beside one another. When I added the viewer engagement component, I came to see the project as a three-dimensional collage happening in real time.

The natural sounds in the space, and the recorded text, also became vital sources for exploring embodiment. Dancer Deborah Kapchan (2015) speaks to the earliest of our languages, our somatic felt sense and our orientation to sound inside the body: “Sound and sensation precede the visual in human interaction; they are the first passages, and the philosophical standing of the body finds no ground without this acknowledgment” (p.21). The act of listening, is a somatic one that attunes us to an environment. There were many sounds that originated out of the installation itself: the scratch of pencils at the freewriting table, the crumpling of nests, pouring of water (introduced later in the project), and the “threshold sounds” of bits of conversation, equipment being wheeled by, the elevator opening just outside the door, or passing footsteps that were interesting and atmospheric in the way they fed into the space. Another sound and tactile contributor was a tray of glass beads, rocks and shells that I had set up by the door with the instruction to place one inside the vase placed nearby to “mark your presence at *Blue Rituals*”. The sound of people dropping rocks into the vase became a ritual within the choreography of the space.

This research is process-oriented and the tactile, methodical practice of preparing the installation materials informed creative offers I gave to the viewers. For instance, the repetitive act of crumpling hundreds of paper bags to form paper nests was one of the “activities” I invited viewers to engage in when I incorporated the pathway cards into the installation. These methodical tasks used to prepare the installation materials also fed into the movement “tasks” I performed during the structured improvisation sections. Several of the “activities” or “tasks” that I carried out as a performer or that I offered to the viewer required a “slowing down” in order to carry them out. The work of artist Lyndal Osborne informed this aspect of the *Blue*

Rituals and Ecologies of Intimacy. In an artist-led walk through of her work in the Art Gallery of Alberta Osborne spoke about gathering copious amounts of natural materials and arranging them as a way of processing the grief of her late husband. The act of re-writing text onto pulpboard scrolls using blue archival ink, and folding hundreds of nests, for example, allowed the installation to process-oriented. Offering creative engagements that were tactile and process-oriented allowed the installation itself to, potentially, provide a space for emotional processing. Assemblages, gathering, and collecting until form is realized, is significant to this work and embedded in the process and the final product.

The locations of the Spiritual Sanctuary and Rotunda Gallery informed the audience engagement as well. The Spiritual Sanctuary is located at the entrance/exit of the hospital while the Rotunda Gallery is in the centre of campus. Both spaces have a lot of foot traffic and are part of many people's daily routines: leaving or entering the building, going on a coffee break or lunch break. Potentially because of the Spiritual Sanctuary and Rotunda Gallery's locations I had several contributors who developed an ongoing dialogue with the projects. This began with the set-up that took place while people were passing through the gallery during their daily routines. Viewers would stop by out of curiosity to see how it was developing, ask questions (and to find out what all the birch was being used for!). Embodied acts surrounding the constructing of the installation itself became extensions of the project. In an example from *Ecologies of Intimacy* one visitor added stones and seeds weekly to the object shelf or the nests in the Rotunda Gallery. Some visitors wrote conversational notes for others to answer over the course of the installation

showing, or came by several times to talk and see the progression of the art (this happened with both *Blue Rituals* and *Ecologies of Intimacy*). These self-created rituals or exchanges created an opportunity for the installations to be engaged with over a longer duration and to form patterns that shaped the work.

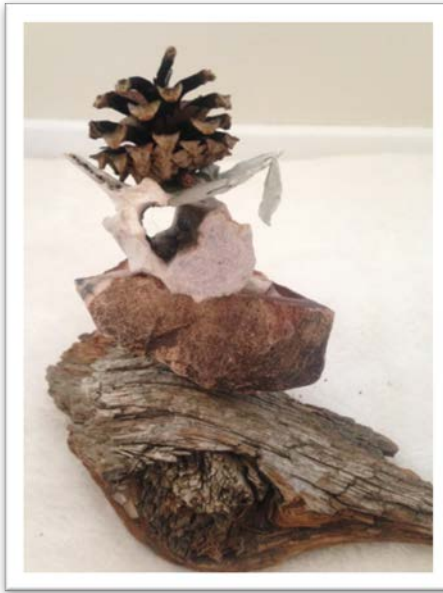


Figure 15. Image from *Ecologies of Intimacy* (assemblage of natural objects)

6.2b Reflections on Embodiment Practices

While creating this project I consulted with other interdisciplinary artists and was compelled by an idea put forward by dancer Camille Renarhd of “listening to a space” as a devising method in evoking improvised forms of movement (C. Renarhd, Personal communication, November 4, 2018). While difficult to quantify, I found the simple practice of spending time in both spaces, the Spiritual Sanctuary and the Rotunda Gallery, simply observing and “listening” to the spaces deeply informed the placement of objects in the space, the pathways of movement that

emerged and even the content of what I selected for inclusion out of the work I had generated. In the Open Dialogue this theme was further touched on as individuals shared their memories of both spaces. To me, this practice of listening and of contemplating the empty version of the space prior to installing the work allowed me to feel a sense of connection and respect for the exchanges and rhythms that these spaces already held. While receiving mentorship from interdisciplinary artist, Amber Borotsik during a “creative incubator” (where I worked to further define the “form” of *Ecologies of Intimacy*) she referenced a similar practice of “listening” for the text or “knowing the ‘missing piece’ of work by its absence” (A. Borotsik, Personal communication, May 2, 2019). This allowed me to imagine that the piece itself was assisting in its own delivery into form, and encouraged me to work from a place of receptivity. There were natural cycles at play in the room that shaped structural elements of both projects. As a performer, I was informed by the movement of light or shadows across the spaces, the quieter feel the installation in the evening (especially in the hospital), the soundscapes of objects created as they were handled, the “threshold” sounds just outside the spaces like the ding of the elevator, snippets of conversation or a passing trolley.

Utilizing forms that embraced liminality, and processes of becoming was increasingly important to me as the project unfolded – forms that reflected the content of the writing (grief, love, loss, sexuality, creativity, healing, intimacy; human states of liminality and transition). In a sense, improvisation became the central form of the project as it shaped my own participation as creator and performer in the project, as well as the experience of the viewers. Dancer and

movement improviser Gerry Morita (2018) speaks about improvisation as a radical expression of humanism because it makes space for the body:

I feel that in an era of mass digitalization and repeatability through media, that failure, roughness, the messiness of a live body and a focus on identity of that body are also radical states.... Improvisation is also immediate and communicative. Because we so often work in participatory contexts, improvisation is powerful in that it can be shared with any body in any location – not just in a theatre or with other dancers (par. 2-3).

As a form, improvisation spoke to both the content of the work and the contexts these installations were presented in: Improvisation is present in complex, dynamic processes like providing healthcare, or participating in frontline activism.

Improvisation requires a receptivity with your environment, a listenership, responsiveness and choice-making. Building a sense of improvisation into the project for the viewer through free-writing or the pathway cards, for example, allowed the project to take shape through community engagement and viewer responsiveness. This also prioritized “first-order” sensorial experiences of the viewers and allowed these embodied responses to affect the projects.

Additionally, being accountable to working with the body and from the body to develop the content and carry out the creative interventions made it so that I had to return to “somatic attunement” to ensure I was able to engage with the projects and viewers from a place of presence. If I became too caught up in the “doing” or “perfecting” of the project the work would not achieving what I wanted it to achieve – a somatically attuned environment within a public setting. For example, during the Open Dialogue in the Rotunda Gallery one of the viewers accidentally caught

her jacket on a glass jar filled with birch branches that shattered on the tile just as I was about to begin presenting. Calling organic elements into the space (birch branches that catch on jackets, human bodies) invites action (and responsiveness). Part of the installation and performance was to embrace what naturally happened. The installation itself became open-ended and made use of unintended or unexpected occurrences. In my commitment to improvisation as a method, I aimed for the bodies in the space to become extensions of the installation itself as they responded to the visual, textual and tactile offers and occurrences.



Figure 16. Image from *Ecologies of Intimacy* (assemblage of natural objects)

6.2c Reflections on Agency within Design

A key piece of advice for the project came from one of my colleagues about “cripping the space” This choreographic element focuses on the artist undertaking the work of mapping different alternatives for engagements to make the project as

inclusive as possible. Artist Jenna Reid (2016) defines “cripping the arts” as “to notice, embrace, and lead with the difference and disruption that disability creates within artistic production” (p.7). To me, this relates not only to new movement possibilities, but to work from “self-determination” as a core design principle for offering viewer engagement. This included choice about duration, modality, quality of emotional engagement, and a design that simply values presence as contributing to the installation with the option to add material to the project, or not.

A powerful example of “cripping” in the context of writing is offered by UK scholar Sara Wasson (2017) in her project *Translating Chronic Pain* (where I later had the opportunity to contribute writing from *Blue*). Wasson utilizes “flash writing” as a means of “cripping” and speaks about the genre as having the potential to interrupt chronic experiences of pain and/or being more accessible in times where maintaining health preoccupies large amounts of energy. She also embraces flash writing for its quality of witnessing a moment and states that, “pain experience may not lend itself to established forms of either illness narration or survivorship story” and that, “it may resist plot, instead being a thing of fragments, glimpses, and moments” (Wasson, 2017, par. 7). Working with collage techniques textually and visually created space for both viewers and myself to work in short form.

One of the guiding principles of this project was Ellis’ articulation that autoethnography can serve as means “to embrace vulnerability and improve social life,” and “to disrupt notions of taboo” (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2006, p.23). The intentional sharing of personal experiences also necessitated a consideration of ways to build in “rest” periods for myself within the work, and to consider how to do this

for viewers as well who may require access to rest, resources or a means of debriefing. Though I knew intellectually going into the project that emotions were likely to arise, the ways in which they did surprised me. I was reminded of the power of body memory and because of this process I felt further inclined to “make space” within the project for myself. This prompted the decision to build the installation in layers and to create the project in a gradual way so that I would have time and energy to respond to viewer contributions, and to successfully be able to maintain my presence and ability to attune myself to the viewers as both a facilitator and a performer.

Adding to this idea of creative accessibility, a compelling finding to me as a researcher-creator was that the installation seemed to “work” the best at night. Some viewers wished to experience the installation without facilitation or in solitude. The space was open 24 hours a day and, of course, the hospital is a space where people are often unable to sleep. At night, the installation seemed to take on a life of its own. This resonates with performance artist Denise Kenney’s notion that audiences may be deeply affected when the artist creates “context over content” for the audience to inhabit (D. Kenney, personal communication, May 28, 2019). The concept of a nocturnal installation is one that I am eager to develop further and to integrate into performance (ie. performances that happen at “odd” times: 2am, 6am, 11pm). When I would arrive in the afternoon there would be several new pieces of writing that had been left from people detailing a sleepless night, staying up with a loved one, witnessing a birth that happened at 2am followed by a smudging or getting off shift and needing to process.



Figure 17. Image from *Ecologies of Intimacy* (assemblage of natural objects)

6.2d Reflections on Creative Intervention as Activism

Each of these projects is embedded in an inquiry into embodied expressions of wellbeing, social justice and environmental health, as well as a desire to carry out research in a way that includes the body. Both brown (2019) in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* and Nelson (2015) in the *Argonauts* speak about the subversive, feminist quality of allowing rigorous work to be enjoyable. While exploring health and wellbeing sometimes in relation to trauma it became critical for me to find a way to do this work that was generative.

The question of how narrative can serve as activism was on my mind through *Blue Rituals* in particular. The contexts around the content changed over the course of the two years I planned and worked on this project. While much of the text is reflective and based on memory, 2018 and 2019 saw cultural shifts come to the forefront in the form of an outpouring through social media of #metoo stories and #youknowme

stories as women used social media platforms and narrative to counter the overwhelming rates of violence against women, as well as women's fundamental right to autonomy of their reproductive choices. Both areas are breached through narrative in my writing of *Blue*, particularly a narrative about abortion, and it was coincidentally shared at a time where these struggles were being recognized by mainstream media. While activism was explored in relation to allyship practices and land rights in *Swale (Ecologies of Intimacy)* the activism in *Blue Rituals* was much more personalized. Because the grounds of UHNBC have an ongoing anti-choice protestor presence it was important to me to include this narrative in a desire to humanize a stigmatized experience in a public setting and to offer a point of connection for anyone at UHNBC who may have experienced a pregnancy loss. To return to the idea of love as a politic, by truly embracing participants' stories and communicating through the fabric of this project that these stories matter, it may have allowed this work to register on an emotional level with participants. This feeling of "mattering" may have in turn fostered capacity or agency. Beyond meaning making, the simple act of humanizing that which we experience turns it in to rich soil; as Nelson (2015) quotes "ecofeminist" Annie Sprinkle in *The Argonauts*, "There is nothing you can throw at me that I cannot metabolize, no thing impervious to my alchemy" (Nelson, 2015, p.32). The image of "metabolizing" story has become an emblematic one for me in this project. hooks (2000) captures this idea in her text *all about love*, which explores love as a galvanizing force in community, educational settings and social justice: "Our sufferings do not magically end; instead we are able to wisely alchemically recycle them. They become the abundant waste that we use to make new growth possible" (p.54). Metabolizing story means to me

that even the difficult aspects of narrative can become like nutrition that can energize us to engage our communities.

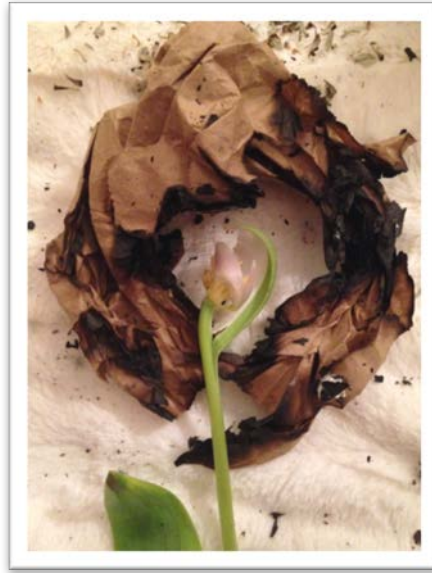


Figure 18. Image from *Ecologies of Intimacy* (assemblage of natural objects)

7. CONCLUSION:

Interconnection, porousness and embodiment in autoethnography

Autoethnography is an open-ended and porous means of carrying out research. It has also become a highly embodied practice to me. Rather than finding conclusive endpoints to the research questions I put forward it has helped me to deepen my relationship to the questions themselves. Autoethnography has allowed me to make connections between experiences where I did not previously see relationship. Especially, it has nudged me to be curious about the interconnection between writing, the body and land as being fundamentally interwoven and reciprocal. It has led me from a medical-humanities based inquiry to an embodied engagement with

social justice to the opportunity to bear witness to changing climate conditions in northern regions and to wonder, “How does real change actually occur?” It has allowed me to appreciate the nuanced, entangled movements of this dance.

One of the questions that came up during the Open Dialogue and during the installations with reference to *Blue Rituals* was, “Why blue?”. As Nelson (2009) says in response to the same question regarding her text, *Bluets*, “People ask me this question often. I never know how to respond. We just don’t get to choose what or whom we love, I want to say” (p.21). She later reflects, “Besides, it must be admitted that if blue is anything on this earth, it is *abundant*” (p.22). Throughout the project people shared their associations of blue with me: Blue is sky, it is rain, it is the Pacific, the North Saskatchewan, the Fraser and the Nechako, it is the mantle of the Virgin Mary, it a conversation through time with art pieces of the same title, it is blood before it meets oxygen. Other more storied associations were shared too: It is a man who used to bring his blue hospital sheet down to the courtyard, spread it out and lay in the sun; it the wrapping and unwrapping of bodies in hospital sheets; it is a friend’s mother who discovered her love of painting, especially with blue, when she developed Alzheimers. When I left the hospital one night there was a woman standing under the parking lot flood lights with a plush blue blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The happenings of the hospital on a given day or even the weather fed and shaped my impression of the installations and their greater contexts. Images surrounding the installations (memories, associations, happenings) seem to become invisible threads that fed into the stories the installations contained. To return to my original mention of nests as a central image, in some ways the installations felt like holding spaces or “nests” themselves.

Cixous (1994) says “the origin of the metaphor is the unconscious,” (p. 27). This relates to Nelson’s (2009) sentiment that we simply don’t get to (consciously) choose our subjects or images. This care for the unknown within my work and the language I chose became a part of the process of forming narrative. Blue is also an image that can describe grief in a way that allows there to be nuance or texture within the experience. At the beginning of *Bluets* Nelson describes her relationship to blue as something she “fought to stay under and get out from under, in turns” (p. 2). The internal conflict within overwhelming emotional states is a propelling force in all three of my autoethnographic texts. In *Blue*, an inquiry into what depression actually is, is one of tensions of the project. Like Nelson’s *Bluets*, I endeavoured to explore depression from a more left-of-centre angle in order to catch light or depth or specificity in it, rather than the nebulous vortex it can feel like. I hoped, as well, to cast a line of recognition (interexchange) to others who read *Blue* and identified with it. Writing each text has been like forming a collection of words, although they add up to something that was not the original purpose. Each time I began writing it was with the intent to “make sense” of something that had happened. However, rather than coming closer to understanding certain events the clarity I’ve gained has been in simply coming to know myself better. It hadn’t occurred to me that narrative humility or narrative competence can also be brought to our own stories, our own questions, our own mysteries.

Within the endeavour of beginning a story, a narrative, or autoethnographic account, there is also the endeavour of finding the end. However, in writing, and in healing processes I think there is also a necessary letting go of seeking the end of

story: the final lesson or meaning. Returning to the idea of narrative humility, there is a necessary element of mystery to story. When I am tempted to tie up the loose ends in my stories I am reminded that this runs the risk of betraying the actual experience. Likewise, Nelson in "bluet" #121 quotes Joseph Joubert, "Clearness is so eminently one of the characteristics of truth, that often it passes for truth itself" (p.31). She goes on to write, "I know all about this passing for truth. At times, I think it quite possible that it lies, as if sleight of hand, at the heart of my writing" (p. 31). Endings, like "truths" are slippery, unwilling to be pinned down, fluid and ever-changing. In this way, I find myself returning to the body for its knowledge of endings and truths: they are constant fluctuations, porous and organic, living entities full of phenomena.

(Re)placing myself: A creative reflection

The shimmer of birch leaves is outside my window, a little dance of catching the light, turning it this way and that. The slender trunks bend easy in the wind, a chorus of movement above ground, root systems intertwining deep below.

Witnessing a cycle of growth with these trees feels like receiving a teaching. It marks my mind in a clear image of this time, this place.

The yellow leaves dropping without hesitation against the blue sky, the scatter of ridged seeds caught on the fur of passing animals, the opalescent sheen of bark reflecting off snow and moonlight in the winter, the tart smell in spring and of sticky unfolding of greenery – all of this patience and process marked in a yearly ring.

*Writing is a way of picking up tracks
of bringing yourself back by virtue of sinuous line
tracing the body, marking paper, giving voice to what could not be spoken,
or perhaps, to what is meant to be spoken in a different way,
an intimate way, of one person offering the nourishment of words to another
through the root system of story.*

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APPENDIX

BLUE: A poem in eleven parts

0. cave diver

0.1 the train sounds in the night.

she comes to a place in between sleep and awake,
between the separateness of her body and of the rest of the world.
she hovers there.

0.2 i was given a piece of language on my tongue

felt my body move from within

respond to the rhythm of the words i was saying.

i said them long enough that they were imprinted in my fibres

and occasionally in the night seismic shifts would arise to break their foundations

this space, this open space, calling, layers unfolding

the earth parts and the word is pulled out.

as if in the jaws of some great animal

i shook myself clean

was shaken to the core

but though i imagined bear or wolf

i resided in my own mouth.

i was the bear, the wolf, benevolently

bringing me closer to what I know:

the universe is inside me.

there are stars, galaxies,

the wormhole, that great tunnel

they are all there

"bring me to my centre," i ask,

"no more, no less."

and so, i picked myself up with a warm and heavy tongue

and carried myself for a distance
until it was safe and then brought me back into my own throat
swallowed me whole.

i was a cave diver
delivered to the place inside
where i combed the tendrils of my fibres
and searched every catacomb and lumen, lacunae,
space, open space
i call, "take me to the centre,"
"no more, no less"
i am strong enough to hold myself
to allow the tunnel inside to crack open
i search forwards and back,
move forwards and back
forwards and back at the same time
proceeding with the smallest light inside me
the great cavern of my body
swimming in this depth
i envision a whale, a fish, a mermaid
myself inside this shell of flesh combing, combing.
this sleep, this breath, this rain, it is as if
i were laying myself out
before the stars swinging softly
in this slick hammock
at the beginning of time
i feel each second of the night

1. birth language

1.1 the body is in all places at once. the body holds all at once, distinguishing not in geography or time but through the sensory. each place, held in the confines of your skin, each memory encircling another.

1.2 i remember the silence. it was the sort of silence
that blanketed the ground after the first snowfall,
making the tracks of deer, bear, cougar visible.

it was a silence in which i could eventually locate myself,
at least for a slippery moment.

i want to bring you into the wilderness. i want to take you to a mountain stream
running beneath a hand-built bridge where yellow poplar leaves float by.
i want you to become a fellow traveler, searcher, collecting stories
and turning these words over with me
like pebbles in our palms only to give them a gentle toss
and have the future revealed to us.

1.3 let's say it starts here.

i was driving through the mountains and i could remember everything that was
ever spoken by family, lovers, and friends i had crossed this stretch with in times
past. i remembered even the things i said to myself as i moved beneath these
grandfather rocks - that's what my mom always called them - this night under the
full moon i could feel their rock hands folding around me as if cupping me in
prayer, stars peeking out above, the darkness all around this barely formed road, the
deep green of the pines, blackness of the spruce blanketing the land and of it all
hush, hush, hushing.

earlier i stopped by moose river shimmering in the afternoon sun, and lay my palms
flat on its body. the cold came into me, the fresh, the constant movement thrumming
through my veins, yes, on this path i heard the conversations of everyone who had
passed this way before.

and then, the night and i
we peeled each other back.

2. moth tracks to oblivion

2.1 there was a moth flickering on the inside of my windshield
and a train like a stallion galloping beside me
the sky and the earth were separated by two different shades of charcoal
and the forest was beyond the tracks.

come with me.

2.2 following the tracks
is maddening after awhile
the same sight for so long in both directions
it makes it impossible to tell if you are getting any closer
it appears that i could have been standing in this same spot the entire time

and then in the distance
he is there.
a body moving towards me
this maddening view
closer, closer
is he closer?
i'm running now
breath heavy
body light
a single track
the impossibility of not meeting
he sees me that is for sure
but his stride remains steady
closer now, dark hair fallen across his forehead
cupped palms swinging with softly by his sides
eyes clear and bright.

we meet.

i reach for his hand
quick as a bird it is at my cheek.
his palm on my face.
i am sinking, sinking then
leaving the tracks
and moving to the black spruce beyond
the forest thick and deep
his hand in mine
warm and slow this tender oblivion
i have been waiting for.

3. new skin

3.1 i toy with this new restlessness inside me
submerged, now, surfacing
then slipping below the ice again
the underwater chorus
of fluid rushing over rocks beneath the ice.

above, the wings of a thousand butterflies
each crystalline pattern
catching the eye of sun
and winking back at me.

steam rises up from centre of lake not yet frozen
heat escaping like a wound,
like the place you want to touch.

3.2 we are in your bedroom for the first time.

you have prepared for this moment. your vintage typewriter is positioned on the corner of your navy blue dresser. an unlit candle in a wine bottle stand on the opposite side, and in between are your favourite books: Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, W.P Kinsella's *The Alligator Report*, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Dostoevsky everything – books your sister has told you to read. against the wall to the right sits another navy blue dresser with a record player and an eclectic collection of Billie Holiday, Tom Waits, Johnny Cash, Nirvana records. beside it, your closet where the shirts that i've seen you wear on various days of the week hang innocent and light without the electric tinge of your skin, your chest, beneath the thin fabric (the smell of Old Spice deodorant and prickle of sweat). your twin bed is made neatly, the duvet is thin with a gray and yellow triangular pattern from the 90s. you've hung a picture of Mohammed Ali on your wall.

we stand, awkward. you move towards me, taking tentative butterfly steps, the weight slightly forward on the balls of your feet, outstretch your hands to rest them on my waist, perhaps as much to touch me as to steady yourself. the look in your dark brown eyes is part panic, like a deer about to dart but overlaid with a confidence i see through. i am wearing my favourite tank top. it is summer.

we lean in, and this is kissing. real kissing. it happens in a second, all the anticipating and wondering falls away (you will later show me the lip prints on your mirror in practice) and your mouth is on my mouth and that's all it is. your lips are warm and soft, soon this will be familiar but for now it is a strange dance or new food a hearing Billie Holiday on vinyl for the first time. we pull each other down made clumsy with giddiness, sit with our backs against your bed, hold hands and laugh.

3.3 with you, water is all around.

with you, i am shaping a new language.

i know what makes the tide turn

heave its self over the edge, curl

its own height sweetly, willingly,

and rush the shore with all its might.

in this newfound space
we call each to other just to hear the sound
echoing back at us, like bats sensing the shape of fruit in the night
my name in your mouth is a sweetness breaking open.

3.4 long drive rounding
night mountains
and sheer rock walls
rising up like a blue whale
in the still starry sky
i come undone
to the tune of Cowboy Junkies
unsure of how to
reel it all back in.

3.5 a cow has given birth on the side of the road. a triangular sheet of mucousy red
afterbirth hangs between her legs. at first, i don't know what i am seeing, just bright
red suspended catching light. i u-turn, drive back, and see the new born calf, slick,
resting in the grass.

on that same drive a boy wearing a full body skeleton costume is walking in ditch
next to the highway, navigating the slew of water at his feet. he looks up as I whip
by.

3.6 i find love in watery regions
where bones become coral become silt
flesh and blood the rocking of the sea
where rhythm parts and separates
the butterfly bones of my pelvis
a landmass welcoming erosion
willing the crash
of water railing against
the broadness of rock

birthing it anew.

beneath the depths there is a black
as deep as the forest at night
so dark, there are whispers of light
that you can't be you're really seeing,
a trick of the eyes, the mind,
ghosts opening their mouths
to show you a glimpse of teeth
and then of nothingness.

4. collections of sensory moments

4.1 i stand alone, vulnerable after all to lightning, and to you.

4.2 we sleep at your new place. i leave at 7am and feel a dragging as i drive away
and stil foggy with sleep think the car is about to run out of gas, i pull into the Petro
around the corner in the dark. icy wind rushes into me as I step out and see the that
the driver left side tire is completely flat, black rubber sagging into concrete, and
that I've ruined the tire by driving on it.

i get a coffee at the gas station/repair shop/grocery store.

"hi there, I have a flat tire."

"the mechanic gets in at 8."

while i wait i read movie reviews and an article on St. Petersburg and how to avoid
holiday debt. after this repair i am going to be flat broke.

i think about last night, lying just beneath veil of sleep in this new place with you.
why can't i collect my thoughts? why can't I talk to you? despite the fact we're
sleeping together i feel distant. like it's hard to make eye contact, like i stop myself
from speaking or from touching.

the sky is slowly brightening, the day beginning as i sit drinking a litre of gas station coffee reading about money and faraway places, think about all kinds of exchanges.

the snow has begun to pack itself up in a hard mound along the edge of the parking lot, a grey hill of ice. a Safeway bag drifts up and over it dabbing along the surface. i think about reaching out in the dark and feeling the contours of your back, finding words to unlock whatever we are seeking from one another in the dark.

4.3 the sky darkens by five o'clock and these are the shortest days of the year. the first stars pinprick the fading colors of sunset and i wait for green arrow to flash at the traffic light.

these days my head is swimming in liquid. feverish. the hours pass thickly and i'm moving through mud.

you haven't emailed. i type out a message that i don't send. i keep waiting.

things start to cycle back on themselves. wet snow glimmers with sunlight on the back window of my car. songs start and songs finish. i press repeat, burrowing into more of the same. i want a cocoon, just for now.

4.4 in the shower, i lean forward and focus on the warmth running down my back and the inside of my thighs. your hands are on my hips pulling down hard. i want to feel the space inside myself.

i wake at 2 am and lie still in the softness of this night.

there's a pressure inside my head that makes my ears ring. i feel stubble of your cheek against the back of my neck as we sleep lightly.

we move until our bodies are totally awake and then stop, rest, feel every sensation is amplified. pinpricks go through me. we move until we're numb.

you grip a handful of my hair and pull me closer.
we fall back asleep in the middle of the day.
when i look at the clock and it is night again.

4.5 i sit in my bed peel an orange, eat it, and think of slicing open my skin. flicker.
wasting time and walking home in the early light. i miss the days when Leonardo
DiCaprio still looked young and desperate in *Romeo and Juliet* and i imagined what
all that would be like.

5. lumen/lacunae

5.1 sitting in the car on the side of the road i watch you fill in letters with a blue felt
pen making small, thorough strokes that spell "jasper" getting ready to hitch out of
here. the low drawl of the *Be Good Tanyas* on the cd player, the heat, the small blue
strokes and soft tones roll over me, soak me in a warm nostalgia even though you
haven't left.

could it be that each goodbye is funneling down in a torrent to this one moment, this
one person, this stretch of road on Junction 24? the rock face of some part of me
begins to slip into the sea.

5.2 and now I am here.

tiptoeing around this chasm.

i am trying to create a holding space for my own delivery. phantom pregnancy. "a
miscarriage is still a birth," says one of my pamphlets. i think that an abortion is also
technically a birth, something leaving my womb. my would be due date.

blue, blue night sets in.

i wonder about what time of day you would have been born. the moment you
would have chosen to enter the world, trading water for air, taking in color, sounds,

your mind quickening, absorbing, collecting, making sense of it all.

here the day appears calm, horizon of blue hills, soft cloudy sky of pale, pale blue.
but there are tremors in the water and the rumble of thunder rolling in. something is
traveling, pressure systems shifting, air pressing down on water, heat gathering.

it's funny to think of the day that i knew you were here, also blue, but crisp, cold
filled with sharp air and early morning light.

now it's muggy, sensuous august. raindrops tap along the roof, i gaze at the patterns
of split wood that make up the ceiling.

when it comes i feel the thunder as if its rolling through my own body, sending
electricity to my fingertips.

i split open an apple to reveal the falling star caught inside, a trick my Mom used to
play with us. all apples have shooting stars in the middle if you slice them the right
way.

5.3 in my womb the sound of blood crashing through vessels. i heard it when the
technician turned on the sound while examining my womb for remaining tissue.

"it's just physical, just matter," i repeat to myself and almost believe it.

this sound, the gentle waves, constant. your experience, i imagine, is not unlike my
own in this moment as i stand on the deck listening to water in the dark, looking up
at the stars, pinpricks of light in the night sky.

did light filter through my body to eyelids newly formed, thin as the skin of an
onion? did the sound of my blood moving pulsing lull you to rest?

5.4 imagine your own body. image your bones, your muscles, your joints. imagine
marrow and porousness like coral, imagine interstitial fluid between cells, the dark
matter between neurons in your own squishy mass of brain. imagine being filled

with light until each tendon and fibre, each freshwater estuary of fluid dissolves and then evaporates. imagine only the shell of your body remains. and then feel that turn into light too.

5.5 i was an egg in my mother's ovaries all along, and so were you. even in your mother's own gestation at five months, while she was resting against that thin pink-red lining of her mother, a part of me was there. the body giving, giving, springing new life, fertile, abundant and fragile.

O

O

o this open

holy globe

of

no

thing

and yet

it is

my home

this little space

of o

containing

all

containing

open space

becoming resonant

filling filing

about to burst

no end or beginning

in the centre

of o.

let breath enter you like sunlight, the rays of the sun. we have hearts made of honeycomb with little open spaces held for the people we want to keep.

5.7 i imagine myself deep within the belly of a blue whale, find myself braced against corset of ribs. i listen to echoes deep, reverberations, touch my palm to wall of flesh and feel/hear the ocean, understand the language of bodily braille. i imagine the pangs and pricks i feel within my own belly to be fish, or small woman, fish-woman. she is wandering the hallways of my flesh even as i listen deep within blue whale. she, fish woman, is turning over tarot cards, spinning the wheel of fortune, waiting for the die to align, waiting to locate the moment when "life" switches to "death" within me.

6. speak love or just lie here

6.1 i seat myself across from the cutbanks
and think about finding a way to engrave steep sharp drop away
somewhere in my own consciousness
i can turn a pebble over in my palm
or lose myself beyond reach
in thick growth of bramble,
balsam scent and pine, upturned soil
and the decay of poplar leaves,
tartness of rosehip, thin skin burst easily
giving way to seed.

6.2 chasing down the moon
i want to put it in my body.
i want this slant
half cut sliced orange wedge
angled and tipped
in me

i want a piece of me
to be left in the ground

a half moon
cut with scalpel
from right shoulder
i felt my knees
give out and opened
my eyes to see boots.
“something has left your body”, he says,
“a wound is an opening
a wound gives a way out.
you cling to the things that make you sick
let them go.”

we crawled on sweetgrass ground
damp earth against my cheek.

6.3 we are sliding in and out of our bodies
all the time.

6.4 night,
teach me to spill truth from my lips
to scrape clean the edges of my own heart
rinse my bones with seawater
and allow underside of sternum
to become a chamber eroded
by wind's fingers rushing
over this hollow space,
coax song where there is none
channel me a voice
that will speak love, again.

7. sweet rusty nails

7.1 this time last year i was in a cabin in the woods by a lake. same muggy August heat.

this year I'm house sitting on the west end of Edmonton, pond in the back yard, a balcony, the works.

"how much of why you got back together with me is because i'm leaving right away?," you ask.

"all of it. that's the whole reason," i think, but just shrug.

but from the outside we look like a reasonably settled Alberta couple, walking the dog. lying in bed i say that i can barely remember parents when they were together, can't imagine them in the same room, let alone what it would have been like when they first met. you say, "they probably went out for some food, liked having sex, he probably made her laugh."

yes, we are like my parents, this dog, penny, is like my old dog. i am getting closer to 30 and today would have been my daughter's first birthday. is her first birthday? no, would be her first birthday. i look for meaning in dates, in the august heat, the silk of a soon-to-be spiderweb catching the light. penny licks a moth up off the sidewalk, snaps her jaws.

"i feel like we're waking your body up," you say.

-

newspapers are laid out on top of the dirt, yellow and brown with rain, soft with sun. i wade out into the raspberry bushes and search for ripe fruit.

-

"i would kill to have a family, but then, i would never have met you and that would be a tragedy, you say for the second time. tragedy is getting more drawn out each time you say it, traaagedy, beginning to slur with sweet rusty nails.

-

i gather all the bruised fruit from the bowl into my hands and walk on warm grass to the compost.

-

"i could feel it ripple through your body," you say, "that tipping point."

-

every time I look at the clock I wonder about the time of your entry. 11:00? 1:08?
2:01?

-

across the room for me there is a print titled "The Space between two Namings"
with
ink like black crows or seaweed spreading out.

-

only silence will do today.

-

i've been working on my headstand, finding it one second at a time.

-

there's a little group of cherry tomatoes in the garden, warm with sun and slide
them into my mouth.

-

tiger lilies unpeel in the heat, the feathery ink of their stamens stain my forearms.

-

carry the lilies inside. it is one of those days where only nature can keep me
company, offer wisdom and sweetness its bloom, decay, bloom, decay cycle.

-

i tried to do a headstand in yoga tonight but lost my balance, felt two cracks in my
neck and then seized up. i went and bought groceries and power steering fluid and
when I could barely turn my neck to shoulder check decided it was time to go home
and lie down. be still. i feel stone asleep on the couch, woke up in the dark.

-

ten minutes left of today.

-

penny and i walk. we look at the moon. she picks up a tennis ball, carries it in her
mouth until she wants to smell some grass, debates, puts it down, seems to forget it
ever existed. we walk over a bridge. i pick a dandelion with its perfect globe of
seeds.

i'm looking at its orb when a voice comes out of the dark. seriously. there's guy
sitting on his front steps smoking a cigarette, long black hair in a ponytail, "you
found one that's intact, hey?"

yep.

intact. we are all intact.

at home, watering the garden in the night. the sprinkler rises up, sets back down,
temporary rain.

i walk barefoot on the wet grass, make my way to the pond. not sure what I'm
looking for i pick up two rocks. one is narrow and striped, the other is smaller and
pinkish. i place them on a large smooth stone and tuck the dandelion stalk between
them so it's held upright. together they make an awkward heart shape with
something ephemeral-like between them.

8. crooked path of angel

8.1 somnambulant sea of trees

current of snow

i follow the wave

out into full embrace of icy landscape

time is thickening, slowing

beneath the ice

kiss me

here and here

i'm not easy to love

but i will be honest and

show you the cutbank slice of earth

the crack in the centre

of frozen lake,

or the prairie wrought
shaped into crests and dunes of snow.

8.2 sometimes the sliver of moon is enough
to keep me full
oftentimes this slicing of the night
by curve of blade, ethereal, milky
is all that i need cast my line to
small tether -thin as fishing line-
a crescent anchor

sometimes the evening star
lays cradled in tree branches
and i can step lightly
without breaking crust of snow

but tonight
wood is hissing inside the stove
licking every corner
outside the icy wind cries
scrapes its mouth
across the hardened edges of sparkling banks
the half moon is rising high
soon it will touch down on horizon
but for now it is a cup of milk
tipped, frozen in air
the warmth blooms in my body
as i step inside from the deck that overlooks the lake
frozen now, so like the one from that August afternoon
you put your arm around me
and we waited out
non-birth, expectant somehow,
i cannot touch

that limitless place.

8.3 it happened like this:

we were slipping under and around ourselves
i had come back early from Tucson to see your play,
home early from New Mexico dreaming
to hear your words echo out.

near Mexico my sister and i rested in sweet green of garden
nestled in arid landscape
drank coffee from a pot wrapped in crisp white teatowel
ate tamales, and anchored ourselves
in rooms thick with blue paint
floors warmed by sunlight.

then you and i were moving into each other
clearing space tracking down light
in layers of blankets winding tighter and tighter circles
the walls a pale blue, with slanted ceiling
sunlight coming in wings
all through that afternoon
seeking, seeking
tongue against tongue, an empty language
the answer perhaps in New Mexico
where I never stepped foot,
(it all looms mysterious to me now
that land of enchantment)
nevertheless
i am railing against you
breaking hard tidal
to locate space inside me

and that was how she arrived
like a sparrow at the window
or a seed of dandelion fluff touching down
silent, the smallest movement, barely possible to feel
she slipped through the edges to answer that silent question

9. flesh offering

9.1 geochasm split intricate and glittering bowls and shelves of crystalline ice
almost licked smooth by warming breath permeating
to loosen birch sapling scent and heady cottonwood musk
it's too early to be spring but everything
is muddled these days
we don't expect the seasons
the way we used to
i am making tracks
one step at a time
towards the calving, the heaving the frozen
cut shard and thrust of slabs
bordering split of free running
Nechako-Fraser confluence
i am making tracks
never sure how deep the footfall will sink
boot print stamping above the rushing
beneath the desire to cradle soft rime
aching in my palm
buoyed by uncertainty
of the surface below
but that is the nature of ice.

9.2 i am hoping to slip through the beats and exit unseen.
how can i reconcile
and force my brain

porous muscle
to focus on the running of water
as the ice melts, slippery sunlight
beyond the window
the jagged crop of tree
lining up the second
to second
in order
to trace
a line
however thin
back to
myself?

9.3 the heart is a lonely hunter
someone said once
there is a story, too, about the hunter's moon
as a time of transit
two girls crossing into to the world of fairies
by sleeping too close to a cairn on a grassy hill
only one comes back.
i always thought i would be the one who stayed in the netherworld
who could turn away from morphism?
now i'm not so sure.

9.4 the sun is on my body
the sun is falling across the sky
the sun is on my body
the sun is falling across the sky
the sun is on my body
the sun is falling across
the sun
the falling

i am
the sun is
i feel
i am
across
and now
sky

9.5 i fall back and there's a tinkling in my ears like a thousand tiny crystals
breaking. tibetan bowls ringing. and I know it's just the blood rushing to my head
but I go on listening, disappearing into the cold, the vast, the snowy north with
icebergs creaking and glaciers stretching out, and everything is white and clean,
desolate and alone and...

9.6 we are whispering in the dark. we are letting flesh deliver flesh.

a train is shaking along the tracks, sending vibrations all the way to our skin. it is
snaking through mountains, carving along mouth of river, twisting.

the land is getting more barren as we drive away from black walnut trees and mossy
damp towards snow tipped charcoal mountains. deer are grazing beneath the thin
veil of white grazing, grazing, grazing, filling themselves.

"sometimes we use painful times to give teachings because those are times you
remember."

water is gushing down between rocks.
sagebrush is lifting in mounds
off the dusty mountain.

it takes so much for a moment of alignment,
for all the pieces to fall together
and when you feel

them
knocking
one
against
the other
it is your responsibility
to let them
knock down the door
or softly turn the handle.

9.7 we are leaning over a blue flame you cradle in your spoon holding lighter to tequila and something about the blue lapping over itself amidst the breath of the tequila while mixing with air and then then absorbed into my own body slices a layer clean off me, knocks me back into the blue morning space between sleep and awake when my body is heavy with sleep, drinking in early light i feel as if my mother is near and i listen to a love song someone else had sent me in the early hours of yesterday and was reminded of the way love had poured over me in that bed, but it was not from you or you or you or me, it arrived from somewhere else, I could feel my breath warming the paint on the whitewashed wall as i felt this love from another space blanket us and then i am on the hard bench, you say, "you see la cucaracha is strong" and i'm not sure if you mean the tequila shot or are making a political reference about our need to overthrow that which has come before or simply addressing the sex-death drive, but in any case all of them feel true. the blue flame remains though, bending to the long blue evening and the sea spreading like silk as the passing boat makes its way to shore, kindling a second innocence.

9.8 a remembrance of a remembrance
of a moment that was only ever imagined
hovers just above my skin

9.9 there are two places i've been with midnight sun
these twin northern skies relieved of darkness,
and then consumed by it.

we make plans to go see the whales in the bay
it's a small chance, but we might be lucky.
when we collapse instead beneath midnight sunset
that we do not see because we never left your room
i begin to understand that the oblivion i have sought is hunting me back.
each face is becoming another face, another time
a sinuous line, a deep pulse, an undercurrent
causing me to break a sweat, tremble
walk myself down long corridors of an empty pause
where words do not surface but instead
you press your fingers into my mouth and wet me.
closer or further away? both at the same time.
the whales are in the bay, i am sure of it.
i can feel their flesh rounding out the water
and soundless songs beneath the waves.

9.10 train tracks

for a split second
a small thought crosses my mind

9.11 the remembrance comes down hard and soft in exactly the way i want it. we
walk and whisper and find each other in the dark, axis of fingertips, water
overflowing from a great bowl, you say, "i want to tell you i love you but i don't
know..." and let the "don't know" fall into the hollow space of a kiss reverberating
in my cells until i do know something.

i play solitaire by candlelight in the courtyard watch the blue wax drip down in like
a dance, it's fall and gather swift like the crack of glacier, but silent. there is this: the
simplicity of things moving according to the nature of their particles.

9.12 i said that i wish to locate the self, to take you to the place of silence where it
ends, but neither of us really knows when that will be, or what will happen next.

10. cracked earth below

10.1 i begin at my feet, bones hollow like a bird, a flute, slide through this tunnel. i want to start here in this openness, feel my way through every and each space. a layer melts clean off me, like wet snow on a hot roof in spring. in the night, i wake to the stars dipping low. they are visible between slender birch trees, leafless now, stars so bright they are watery: Pleiades, the seven sisters, and nearby the little dipper. they cool my mind and draw me up to meet them, pour clear water from the dipper into my mouth, send me back into the night.

10.2 i watch the embers of the fire go out one by one. the sky has been cloudy all day, mist gathering in the nooks between mountain peaks, tucking against the rock as if it were the firm line of jaw or the angle of throat, clavicle.

wring me out.

pour me open.

you are your own wilderness.

you will return to the stone walls crumbling over eons,

to the upright pines

the mist the waterfall going over edge without question

and the spray rising into the air.

you will disintegrate with the silt

twist with the roots

crawl through the moss

soon and so...

10.3 i move into prairie.

i loosen myself upon it.

cracked earth beneath me and prairie grass bowed low,

air sweet with clover and the hum of grasshoppers,

the prairie pulls me down to rest its lightness.

i let a grasshopper crawl with one sticky foot at a time
from hip to belly to shoulder and jaw.

10.4 a horse stands in the pasture, its breath fogging the morning air.

10.5 i ride my bike through streets so familiar i could close my eyes and still know
my way. trees are beginning to show tender green buds, dainty as the hooves of
baby white tailed deer.

the clouds are sugar spun, peach-coloured ahead, behind me, rinse of blue and soft
hush of hills beneath wedge of moon.

10.6 the rosehips turn to blush, the clover browns, the fireweed gathers tufts of seeds
to be scooped up by the wind. a cocoon has dropped from the overhang above the
doorway. its silky skeins are knit together in zip zagging lines, the blackened
remnants of an old body are folded into the layers of this soft shell.

in a day of two the shell will dissipate with the rain and darkened vestiges will be
washed away. in the end, the hardest thing is to just let it happen.

10.7 the thing with choice is that you never make it just once. you chose it, live it,
choose it again and again, until it makes you.

10.8 my heart is cleaving. you say / Love says, love is a separation, an expansion. an
egg separates to become a child, a child separates from its mother, the ones we love
all must leave someday, somehow. love expands to fill the space. love the best you
can.

10.9 you are / i am the water drops bending the grass, rain sounding in the dark, a
dream breaking its shell in the deep of night, steam rising from a fire put out with a
pail of water, a promise to come back in another form. you are / i am the ear that
hears my oldest secrets and my strangest stories, a cold front descending before
storm blowing through me, the July heat coaxing perfume from red clover and

water beading its leaves in the morning. these water beads, they come from somewhere, came from many places, before resting on the open palm of clover leaf, to wink light (at me, at you, at us).

10.10 these memories weave in and out of each other, mouths tasting mouths, words being passed from lover to lover in the dark, stars as witness, wind shaping sound, love (eternity) spilling into itself only to spill over again.

SWALE: An inquiry into resiliency and social justice practice

“Trying to tie up all the loose ends and finally get it together is death because it involved rejecting a lot of your basic experience. There is something aggressive about that approach to life, trying to flatten out all the rough spots and imperfections into a nice, smooth ride. To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest.” – Pema Chödrön, Buddhist nun

Inquiry

Swale is a visual and auto-ethnographic inquiry through creative writing and found object art. This piece was written following my firsthand experience at Standing Rock as a way to piece together disrupted notions of self, identity and worldview following my arrest while participating as a water protector in the political movement of Standing Rock in North Dakota. The image of a nest, a natural object that evokes both fragility and a sense of foundation, became central to this exploration of developing intimacy with my own process of healing. Through contemplation, the collection and arrangement of personal objects and memories, Swale inquires into the process of embracing fragmentation as a way to find connection, renewal and integration and to develop a personally sustainable approach to the practice of frontline social justice.

I've been thinking a lot about nests lately. About what it means to have a safe space to enter. About what it means to hold space. About empty space. About space that is waiting to be filled, about space that is suffocating, about space where you can't get away from yourself and can't get close at the same time. About space that is breathing in relief of its own emptiness. About space that is an offering just by existing.

Nests.

If I were to build a nest to house this last year I would fill it with my Grandmother's jewelry. I would fill it with shells I've collected on beaches in Malaga, Spain where Picasso lived. With horoscopes I read out aloud to a lover over eggs and coffee at Cocos in Jasper, Jasper that place I crossed and lingered, crossed and lingered every year of my life, the place I was in fact conceived. With the crocuses that pushed out of the ground in spring and tobacco seedlings I gave water to with teaspoon, day after day and came home to, when I was alone again. I would fill it with bundled scarves from my Grandmother's worlds apart, my biological European Grandmother and my newfound adoptive Anishnaabe Grandmother. I would fill it with Easter eggs Fedex-ed to me in a shoebox from my Dad with green crinkly paper grass.

I would leave some empty. I would set some on fire. I would gather the ashes and try to make meaning out of them. I would see that grief is a messy process and healing is an even messier one and sometimes healing isn't the point, it is its own

attachment. I would come back to the understanding that all we need to learn is willingness. All we need to love is willingness. Willingness isn't an easy teaching.

I learned about willingness during a direct-action training in grassy field to the side of Oceti Sakowin, Standing Rock's main camp, where we unstacked foldout chairs into a circle and watched as the facilitators set up signs against the back of the truck. Those signs kept getting whipped around by the prairie wind and even after they duct taped them to the back of the truck those signs were pulled away at the edges. Wind doesn't give up. We had gotten to the end of the training, discussed direct tactics like blockades, marches, locking arms in circles even, how to lock yourself to machinery with an L-shaped cast of metal, which some of the protectors would do in two days time. They would cross to the DAPL site in the deep of night under, knowing they would certainly be arrested. They went out in the cold, on the upturned burial grounds of their ancestors singing and calling to each other, keeping each other buoyant with nothing but their voices. They would continue singing when the Morton County police came they put bags over their heads and posted the photo of the captured water protectors on their web page.

In the training when we were encouraged to bring up questions I said something like, "I've just gone back to school to do my masters and I don't know if getting arrested will mean that I can't travel to the States..." It was small and absurd this thing to say. "Being arrestable is not about trying to prove something," said the slight girl with hair parted down the middle who had already been to jail three times. "It's about willingness."

Willingness. Willingness to place yourself in the centre of the unknown. Willingness to have your body handled. Willingness to be strip searched. Willingness, knowing that It's bigger than you, bigger than your life and your lifetime.

I step into a space that feels like being swaddled even if the hands that wrap it are gloved and carrying batons. We are all in it together, enacting this moment. We just happen to be in these bodies, on Highways 1806 four hours after sunrise. I'm thinking of an organism, a porous membrane, we are shifting, reading each other's movements and voices, dancing this dance. Meanwhile, the sage keeps growing, the buffalo keep roaming, birds fly overhead and the tree to the right keeps holding its yellow leaves though it's almost November. For a few moments upon being encircled by the National Guard it is calm and none of us know how this day will end.

In my nest there would be many things that can't seem to contain themselves: ashes, dirt, fire, water, memory, time, love. I would pile my nests on top of each other, try to make neat stacks or rows. At a certain point it might become necessary to take them apart, sift through the insides, try to extract meaning. Lay each piece out, categorize it. Map timelines of where each bit came from and how it arrived there and why I kept it and what it means. But that would not be enough either.

It would not get me the answer I am after. Of how to heal something. Of what it all means. Of how to grow.

Tobacco seedlings are both sturdier and more fragile than you might think. They sprout cotyledon leaves first, which are not leaves, but the seed broken apart, embryonic, germinating. They spin light, dirt and air together to form translucent stems, reaching, reaching, these baby seedlings sometimes toppled by their own weight. I tuck the dirt around them. I spoon them water. Put the plastic covering in to keep in the humidity. Take it off. I watch many return back to the dirt that grew them.

I would burn the edges of my nest, try to make a new shape, an in-between shape of creation, destruction. Tangled, irreparable, broken pile of nests. I would knock them over. I would try to put it all outside my body. I would start again. I would ask how to make a nest for a prayer. For trust. For housing the unknown. For letting go. I would come back to blue. That colour that traces my dreams in every shade. I would gather the glass beads used at the bottom of fish bowls that I used to buy at the pet store for 10 cents each as a kid.

A part of babies learning to crawl is that they need to become sufficiently mesmerized by something enough to want to get closer to it. To learn it.

I would make a nest to show, to remember what it's like to do something because of joy alone. When I was in grade three I did a report on sandhill cranes. I wanted to learn everything there is to know about them. My Mom took me to the downtown library because it was the only place in Edmonton to have a colour photocopier in 1993. We spent the afternoon making copies like magic and gluing them onto Bristol boards. sandhill cranes mate for life. They nest in swales. "A swale is the hollow

place, especially a marshy depression between ridges," says google. They sing a song when they fly overhead on their great migration.

There is danger in telling a story. A story can become a neat package when there is none. There is no end to story but the telling makes it alive. There only honest end is mystery. A willingness to know mystery. A migration and a swale, cotyledon leaves pushing against the perimeter of seed. A nest is a warmth of feathers and a gentle push into the empty free fall air at the same time.

TRANSFORMATION: A Personal Engagement or A Capitalist Romance and Other Engrossments of 'I'

Inquiry:

In Climate Change and Social Transformations: is it time for a quantum leap? Karen O'Brien references Andreas Weber's "Enlivenment paradigm, or a cultural worldview that emphasizes the importance of 'lived experience, embodied meaning, material exchange, and subjectivity' as key to addressing complex social problems like climate change" (O'Brien, 2016, p.622). She goes onto say, "Quantum social theory challenges us to recognize that life matters, subjective meaning matters, and we matter" (O'Brien, 2016, p.625).

I am curious about embracing arts-based research and specifically a feminist narrative as a way to approach Western relationships to consumerism through an inquiry into an inner landscape of "need" and a "process of becoming" that links the speaker to an awareness of the sentient landscape surrounding her.

This monologue/narrative draws on traditions of Buffon theatre and is a purge of sorts that aims to meet consumer culture in its grotesque nature and roots of vulnerability/insecurity. Ideally, I wish to reconnect the audience back to humanism, and potentiality. This piece is meant to be performed so as to bring the audience closer to an experience of "liveness" and embodied (somatic/emotional) knowledge.

Additionally, I aim to raise the question what if we viewed climate change through the lens of creative process? What would emerge from this willingness to meet the unknown/unknowable as a collective, as an audience?

What is a radical paradigmatic shift?

I want one. I want to feel it.

I want to remember a way of living that I've never experienced before.

I want to get really strong. Like, ski slopes and climb cliffs with my bare hands and start running in the dark beneath northern lights whose siren voices call my name among ghosts of snow. Your strength is only as strong as your flexibility, or so Lulu Lemon tells me.

I want to nurture land and I don't know, maybe grow potatoes. I did that while I was house sitting last summer, maybe before or after I met you, I can't remember. My Mom had told me that all you have to do is quarter them, bury them deep, and they pretty much do the rest, so I did in hot summer heat by the rose bush. They were late bloomers those potatoes and came up in September. You or I could live on potatoes forever, I mean until we died, which we will.

--

I want to forget you and that night in the movie theatre – the same theatre I went to for my 5th birthday to watch Cinderella passing out whips of red liquorice to my friends soaking in future notions of love and goodness. I want to forget the beers we cracked in the back row and the way you smelled and tasted like salt, the strong shape of your hands and leaning into the space between your jaw, your neck and your warm curls whispering because the movie made me tearful but also being here with you in this place that was so familiar made me tearful, and also like I could finally relax my face.

I want to forget the you before that and the you before that
and the you before that
and the you before that
and so on, if you know what I mean.

--

I want to swim out in the Norwegian sea. I have touched it while standing on the furthest most point of this city. It numbed my wind burned hands within seconds while I watched the languid seaweed lap against and shell encrusted rocks, this place looking like another place, another time, where I sat feeling this same way by the sea.

That's not important.

What's important is that I've decided to construct my life in a way that will make me desirable (again), a better person. Like I said, I want a radical paradigmatic shift. I want to feel it in my bones and my bones' bones.

--

I begin with meditating deep into the night. I am practicing lucid dreaming. I do yoga to a David Swenson video from the 90s, he stands in a field of puffy flowers that youtube conveys to me through the time space continuum. We commune.

I contemplate veganism, and make the switch from cow's milk to oat milk anticipating the designs in lattes to come – it's the little things, you know. I dream about the fish I have consumed the artery between their gills slit revealing jewel red blood draining back to the sea and feel something that breaks the numbness.

I start a blog.

I try to absorb myself like a protein into humanity – engulf, engulf, me. I sweat in the sauna and see other women's bodies and the way they feel comfortable in their skin.

--

I descend into a tunnel in the largest cave of northern Europe with a long name I can't remember or pronounce. I descend in the pitch dark and feel my way through, my belly against the earth. I talk to my Mom on facebook, a blurry pixelated Mom but her voice is the same one that calmed me after I was squished by fellow kindergarteners against the back of a playground tractor tire half buried in sand.

--

I run through the Brussels airport comforted by Flemish oil portraits gazing at me through video screens. Inevitably at the gates I draw the attention of the security guard increasingly frustrated with my inability to understand the directions he is giving me as I approach full panic, losing words, drenched in sweat now, shallow breathing now. I am soothed when the female guard who speaks to me in French and touches my chest, smoothing my dress. A security check, but also, touch.

I think about how everyone I've tagged in my blog post on food security on the energy gleaned from potatoes is someone I've slept with. I try to think about new ways of socializing. I go out to a bar that a school counsellor recommended to me. I don't sleep with anyone but I hear an acoustic cover of a Madonna song and for a moment and I walk home with new hope buoyant in my chest.

I work in a café on my new blog next to stranger eating a croissant, I know how it tastes and feels in his mouth because I ordered the same, we are sitting close, elbows almost touching and does he feel it? I feel unbearable sadness when the stranger he rolls his suitcase away, the airport tag still wrapped around the handle and his plate empty except for croissant crumbs to the left on my elbow. I mean, like, WHERE ARE YOU GOING? WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM?

--

I go home and soothe myself with Radiohead, carrying my laptop like a child balanced against my hip and drifting from kitchen to bedroom.

While listening to a yoga nidra recording the shapes of trees speak to me through my laptop.

The "I" has to...what?

Dissolve?

Act?

Shred?

Engulf?

Cooperate?

Relax?

Unhinge?

I try to re-parent myself and visualize feeding my infant-self tiny teaspoons of milk between screams of bewilderment at the world. I hope that all of this will translate into some kind of robustness.

I read my own mind and make more coffee. But instead of perking up I fall asleep.

--

I open my eyes and see the construction of my life and from down here on my back. In every way in every movement moment we are shaping our cells, our lives, our world.

Especially in the times we think we are invisible, the times we think don't count, the moments we perceive as meaningless. Like Joan Didion says in *Goodbye to All That*, "it had counted after all, every evasion and ever procrastination, every word, all of it." This time I fall asleep for real holding a plastic hairclip in my palm in lieu of human company.

--

In the inky night I drift from bed to bed to bed
just me and the thick dark

amid the endless wind and the passing train
I am everywhere I have ever been in
every restless night I have ever known
beside each warm body I have rested my open palm against
and maybe inhabiting places and nights and people I have yet to visit too.
Who knows?

--

How can I trust life when it has slit me open like a fish? But also, what else is there to trust?

If I have been slit open it is my own doing and so I must know how to grow silver scales too.

--

No, this is the dream: I dream about my Dad and I when we were both younger. I remember the feel of his t-shirt with the marathon logo on it how he smelled like sleep and coffee and peanut butter toast in the mornings. The sunlight is coming through my bedroom window in the early summer morning.

No, this is the dream:

I am walking in the blue evening beneath a tumble of liquid and light rain in the glow of the streetlight the night shiny with rain and a feeling so familiar it devours my heart and becomes it.

The dream shifts.

There's an ominous shade of purple in the sky. It's melding with the orange glow on the horizon. Android workers in glow tape jumpsuits are laying out pylons and there's a directionless lit up arrow turning with the wind. They direct cars off of the road. We've left it too late. The only time to prepare for the inevitable is now - we all hunker down in the cool grass bleached with sun and damp with the smell of earth.

The air is cold and still in that way which warns of impending storm. It's not pathetic fallacy, it's the convergence of particles. The tiny seashell of my hairclip whispers in a soothing way, staving off the darkness as I drift up down, up, down in the water of sleep/wake.

--

Four things drift into me in the night:

1. our presence shapes each other, it shapes the cells in our body
"it is just something that happened", you say
yes, i agree, it's just something that happened
that's all it is
but these things that happen
they reveal our insides
our cells reimagine their spaces
we know ourselves differently after, during
we learn ourselves
we become
and whatever it is that passes between
this membrane you call you and i call me
we are with the passing
we are the passing
all that is said/not said
done/not done

i want to remember it all

2. i return to the crescent moon and its expectant smile
the memory of summer evenings as a kid
when i would lay in bed
and dream of an angelic flamingo visitations
myself carried on a long migration to the tropics

the promise of adventures awaiting me
the world and i imagining each other

3. the dream is akin to the nights where as a teenager and felt the city for the first
time in its empty hours electric and dreamy-eyed at world opening in the form of an
empty soccer field, sliding calloused palm over the rusty goal post wet with dew
and the pink morning lifting itself to the day, i kneel in the rock garden next to the
bus stop on the corner to see the way the tissue of pink poppy unfolds itself before
passing through the screen window into sheets cool from night air and being
unslept in, blood thrumming blue

4. i find myself next to a glacier instead
a mesmerization, this shade of blue
underside frozen undulation
the colour of pulling you in

whale backed rocks folding
mineral striped and burnished purple
beneath the tongue of ice

in Bali they speak of "rubber time" in ceremony
the nearness of this glacier is time crystalized,
guiding me to stillness and the small measure of my life
the thundering of calving reminds me
that I am muscle and neurons firing,
animal instinct responding to sheer kinetic motion
this glacier takes me hard by the shoulders and places me back in my body

in the early morning rain patters on thin tent walls
birdsong courses through me like spring water
spilling over from the soft warm bodies of warblers and rose finches
my own blood and beating heart nothing more or less than
one more rhythm among the rest

PUBLICITY MATERIALS

Blue Rituals: Writing the Self

An Installation and Performance in the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia



photograph by Avia Moore, collage by Nicole Schafenacker

Created and Performed by Nicole Schafenacker—MA Interdisciplinary Thesis project

November 20-25th, 2018 + Spiritual Sanctuary + Performances 4-7pm daily -- FREE
Open Dialogue on Arts-Based Research as a Means of Addressing Mental Health Nov. 22 6:00pm

*Please be aware that this project contains sensitive material about mental health as well as references to sexuality that may be upsetting to some viewers. Please contact nicole.schafenacker@gmail.com for more details.



Ecologies of Intimacy: Three Creative Interventions

An Installation in the Rotunda Gallery, UNBC, Lheidli T'enneh territory



Photo by Nicole Schafenacker

Created by Nicole Schafenacker—MA Interdisciplinary Thesis project

December 11, 2018 - January 22, 2019 -- FREE

Open Dialogue on Arts-Based Research as a Means of Addressing Health and Social Justice & performance excerpt from *mni wiconi/water is life* Jan 17 6:00pm – Reception to follow

* Please be aware that this project contains sensitive material about mental health as well as references to sexuality and may be upsetting to some viewers. Please contact nicole.schafenacker@gmail.com for more details.



Press Release

Blue Rituals: Writing the Self

An Installation and Performance in the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia

About the Project

Blue Rituals: Writing the Self is new performance and installation by researcher and artist, Nicole Marie Schafenacker. This project is part of Schafenacker's thesis project at the University of Northern British Columbia in the Interdisciplinary Studies program. The first performance art piece to take place in the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia, Schafenacker welcomes patients, hospital staff and visitors to take part in a contemplative arts-based experience as a way to open a broader conversation on health, wellbeing and healing. The performance piece and installation are based on Schafenacker's poetry which explores her own relationship to mental health, grief processes, reproductive rights and women's health. Schafenacker is supervised by poet and health researcher, Dr. Sarah de Leew, and is an employee of the Health Arts Research Centre at UNBC.

About the Artist-Researcher

Nicole Marie Schafenacker is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher and activist whose poetry and performance addresses issues of mental health as well as trauma and resiliency, especially in intimate or colonized spaces. Her research interests include creative interventions in institutional settings such as hospitals and schools and land-based healing initiatives.

Event Information

The project will take place in the Spiritual Sanctuary on the main floor of UHNBC. It will be open to the public from November 20th-25th, 2018. Nicole will be performing as part of the installation during 4:00-7:00pm nightly. Please contact Nicole at nicole.schafenacker@gmail.com or (778) 675-7131 for more information.

Blue Rituals: Writing the Self

Created by Nicole Schafenacker
MA Interdisciplinary Thesis Project, UNBC
with music by Ingvild Langg rd



Welcome to *Blue Rituals: Writing the Self*. This is a contemplative art experience. *Blue Rituals* is an experimental translation of Nicole’s poetry collection, *Blue*. Over the course of the week (3 hours/day x 6 days) she will transcribe *Blue* onto pulpboard and arrange it in the space to create an immersive installation. For one hour day Nicole will interpret the text through authentic movement and Butoh dance (5:00-6:00) in short intervals. Every day the installation will grow a little bit more – come visit more than once if you can! This project is meant to spark conversations on personal narratives, mental health and wellbeing, and the resources for resilience available in our bodies and environments. Thank you for participation!

There are several ways you can interact with the installation during your visit:

- 1) Read the poems transcribed onto pulpboard (scrolls) and wrapping paper (on “clothesline)
- 2) Hang out at the free-writing table and do some reflective writing. There are writing prompts in the mason jar to help you get started. Feel free to add your writing to the installation or keep it for yourself.
- 3) Choose a line of “found text” from *Blue* to take with you
- 4) Sit on a birch round or chair and just enjoy the atmosphere
- 5) Choose a glassbead or shell and place in the jar to mark your attendance at *Blue Rituals*

- 6) Place an object on the found object shelf that symbolizes something that gives you a feeling of connection, or alternately, something you want to let go of.
- 7) Come back on Nov. 22 at 6:00 for an Open Dialogue on the value of arts initiatives and creativity in healthcare spaces, especially for women who have experienced trauma– this is a chance to contribute to research on how hospital settings can provide more humanistic, holistic care.

Schedule

Nov. 20, 21, 23, 24, 25

4:00-5:00 Activity: freewriting, reading the poems, or engaging with the space

5:00-6:00 Performance: authentic movement and Butoh dance improvisation by Nicole in short intervals over the course of the hour

6:00-7:00 Activity: freewriting, reading the poems, engaging with the space

Nov. 22

4:00-6:00 Activity: free-writing, reading the poems, or engaging with the space

6:00-7:00 Open Dialogue on arts-based initiatives in healthcare settings as an act of social justice

Some information about the movement forms and materials in *Blue Rituals*

Authentic Movement: Authentic Movement is a simple form of self-directed movement. It is usually done with eyes closed and attention directed inward, in the presence of at least one witness. Movers explore spontaneous gestures, movements, and stillness, following inner impulses in the present moment. The witness watches and tracks inner responses to the mover with the intention of not judging, but focusing on self-awareness. (authenticmovementcommunity.org)

Butoh Dance: is a form that originates from Japan after World War II. It explores fragility and “cracks” in the body/psyche as a source of “truth” that provide fertile territory for creativity and transformation. (contemporarydance.org/butoh)

Birchbark was chosen as a central image for this project because of its history of being used to record language. Birch has been used as a symbol of renewal and regeneration through several cultures across the ages.

"To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe -- to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it -- is a wonder beyond words."

— Joanna Macy

"Experiencing fragmentation is another way of experiencing connection." — Dana Caspersen

Ecologies of Intimacy Artist Statement

We vanish, sometimes to ourselves.

Writing is a way of picking up my own tracks

And rekindling the fire.

This project is a gathering of three creative interventions: *Blue Rituals*, *Swale* and *Transformation: A Personal Engagement* all completed over the course of my masters. *Ecologies of Intimacy* draws from the three projects as source material and examines the interconnections between these projects. Each of these creative interventions explores a different facet of health: individual health, health in relation to social justice, and health in relationship to the environment.

To explore health, I found I also needed to examine times where I feel disconnected, fragmented, in transition, or even broken. The medium of collage allowed me gather some of these pieces and stories through natural and found objects. Emotional and somatic knowledges tapped into through visual and performative methods can be a source of resiliency and nurturing showing that narratives are far more porous than words alone can capture. As celebrated writer Louise Erdrich notes, "the whole is always located in the details." Encounters with fragmentation offer insight into wholeness. I am curious about the porousness of narrative and its ability to extend beyond the body to the broader ecologies we inhabit through evocative metaphor and images. *Ecologies of Intimacy* aims to foster a deeper reciprocity between our personal wellness and the wellness of the world around us.

Feminist theorist and writer Hélène Cixous speaks about the limitation of writing and art to ever fully convey another's experience. The beauty of the human ability to empathize, however, is that even when it is not possible to articulate a state of being, the willingness to bear witness to another allows for a different kind of exchange to take place. Cixous refers to this as an experience of being "separaunited". My hope is that the space provides you, the viewer, with a contemplative experience to reflect on your lived experience and relationship to health and the health of your environment, and potentially an opportunity to engage in a broader empathetic dialogue on wellness.

Thank you for your presence at *Ecologies of Intimacy*.

Cixous, H., & Calle-Gruber, M. (1997). Hélène Cixous, rootprints: Memory and life writing. Psychology Press.
Cools, G. (2015). Imaginative Bodies: Dialogues in Performance. Valiz/antennae.
Erdrich, L. (2017). Future Home of the Living God.



**Research Ethics
Board
(REB)**

Office of Research

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Prince George, BC,
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(250) 960-6735
Email: reb@unbc.ca

Protocol #:

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Romeo #:

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Research Ethics Protocol For Research With Human Participants

New Applications

Please refer to the [UNBC Policy on Research Involving Human Participants](#) prior to completion and submission of this application. Reviews are conducted according to the principles and spirit of the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2014 \(TCPS2\)](#). If you have questions about or require assistance with the completion of this form, please contact the Office of Research at (250) 960-6735 or reb@unbc.ca.

SECTION A – TYPE OF APPLICATION

- ☒ **This Application is Minimal Risk (Please review the [Research Risk Assessment Guidelines](#) and complete the [Risk Matrix](#) on Page 2 of this Application)**

Please complete sections [A](#), [B](#), [C](#), and [D](#) and the [Supporting Document Checklist](#). **Incomplete applications will not be processed.** Please submit the completed and signed application electronically to reb@unbc.ca. Please allow 2 weeks from submission for a response from the REB.

- ☐ **This Application is Above Minimal Risk**

Please complete sections [A](#), [B](#), [C](#), and [D](#) and the [Supporting Document Checklist](#). **Incomplete applications will not be processed.**

For submissions made September to June, please submit **8 copies** of all documents to the Office of Research, Room 2015 (2nd floor, Administration Building). Applications above Minimal Risk will not be reviewed during the months of July or August. Please allow 3 weeks from the submission deadline for a response from the REB.

If your Application is Multi-Jurisdictional, with two or more Research Ethics BC partners*, and is to be processed as a harmonized research ethics review for the involved partner institutions, please complete an application through the Provincial Research Ethics Platform (PREP). Information and resources can be found online at [Research Ethics BC](#) and on the [UNBC research ethics webpage](#).

***Research Ethics BC (RE BC) partners at this time are:**

- University of British Columbia; University of Northern British Columbia; Simon Fraser University; University of Victoria;
- Fraser Health; Interior Health; Island Health; Northern Health; Vancouver Coastal Health;
- BC Cancer; BC Children's Hospital; BC Women's Hospital, Providence Health Care.

Does Your Project Meet the Standard of Minimal Risk Research?

The following matrix will help you judge whether or not your project meets the TCPS2 definition of minimal risk. Please locate your research protocol in the matrix by ranking both the vulnerability of your research participants and the risks involved in participating in your project on a scale of Low, Medium, High (see [Research Risk Assessment Guidelines](#)).

<u>Risk Matrix</u>			
B) Participant Vulnerability	A) Research risk		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low	<input type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> High
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Low	<i>Delegated</i>	<i>Delegated</i>	Full board
<input type="checkbox"/> Medium	<i>Delegated</i>	Full board	Full board
<input type="checkbox"/> High	Full board	Full board	Full board

Justification for Risk Assessment (optional)

The box below offers you the opportunity to elaborate on the level of risk you have assigned the study. This box provides an important way of justifying your risk assessment, especially if you feel that your study might be considered sensitive and risky to an outsider, but you have evidence to suggest that it is not. If you choose not to avail yourself of this option, please simply write N/A.

This research is carried out in safe conditions in a public space and is entirely voluntary.

- If your study includes a low or medium level of research risk and a low vulnerability population, it is eligible for delegated review.
- If your study includes a low or medium vulnerability population and a low level of research risk, it is eligible for minimal risk review.
- If your study falls anywhere else on the matrix it must be submitted for full board review.

SECTION B – APPLICANT INFORMATION (Please complete all sections that apply)

i.	Principal Investigator: • For students, please include the name of your Supervisor below	Nicole Schafenacker		
	Program/Department/School: • Identify institution if not at UNBC	University of Northern British Columbia		
	Phone Number:	778 675 7131	Email:	schafenac@unbc.ca
	Supervisor's Name:	Dr. Sarah de Leeuw		

Please append additional pages with co-investigators' names, if necessary

ii.	Co-Investigator(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> separate page(s) attached		
	Program/Department/School: • Identify institution if not at UNBC			
	Phone Number:		Email:	

SECTION C – RESEARCH PROJECT DETAILS

1. Project Dates:

Expected Project Start Date:*

*This date should be no sooner than 2 weeks from the application submission

November 20, 2018

mmm-dd-yyyy

Estimated Project Completion Date:**

**REB approval is for 12 months at a time. Renewals will have to be sought if the project duration will be longer than 12 months

November 1, 2019

mmm-dd-yyyy

2. Title of Project

Embodied Narratives: A qualitative study with public health spaces and creative bodies in Northern British Columbia using arts-based methods and social justice methodologies.

3. Type of Project

Undergraduate

☐ Research (including Honours Thesis)

☐ Classroom Project (Undergraduate student)

Graduate

☒ Research (including Thesis/Dissertations/Projects)

☐ Classroom Project (Graduate student)

Post Doctoral

☐ Research

Faculty

☐ Research

☐ Classroom Project (Faculty)

Other

Please explain: [Click here to enter text.](#)

4. Source of Funding

Please refer to [TCPS2, Article 7.4](#), for more information on Financial Conflicts of Interest.

N/A

5. For projects that have funding, have you submitted a Grant and Contract form to the Office of Research?

☐ **Yes** Date submitted: [Click here to enter a date.](#) Romeo # (if known): _____

☐ **No**

☐ **n/a**

6. Purpose of Research: Describe the purpose of the proposed project. State the hypotheses/research questions to be examined. The rationale for doing the study must be clear.

(Max. 300 words)

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, “By the time we reach 40 years of age, half of us will have had or will develop a mental health problem” (CMHA, 2018) The recently released B.C. Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy report states that a gap in best practice is awareness and prevention: “Research tells us that doing a better job of promoting mental wellness, preventing mental illness...is a wise investment.” (BC Ministry of Health, 2017). The purpose of the research is to develop a wellness-focused narrative and installation project Columbia using arts-based research (McNiff, 1998) and autoethnography (Adams, Jones, Ellis, 2015).

I will offer a creative intervention exploring identity politics as well as my relationship to mental health and healing based on my own prose-poetry in the form of an art installation within the Spiritual Sanctuary at UHNBC **between November 20-25th 2018,** and in the Rotunda Gallery at **UNBC UNNBC between December 9th-January 22, 2019.** This research adds to a growing body of work evidencing that mental health experiences must not be addressed through deficit models but, instead, should be addressed through creative and population-informed narratives of success and strength (Diamond, 2007). The broadest question of my research is: can practices anchored in creative/performative autoethnography and body-attuned narrative help women – primarily myself - in northern landscapes attend to healing?

Creative, humanistic (as opposed to didactic or close-ended) engagements and methods prompt and open new spaces of understanding in research. (Adams et al., 2015). The use of arts-based methods is intended to evoke participants’ intuitive ways of knowing, leading to (re)connection with self, body, and land/place: in short, to resilience. Another outcome of this research is an effort to provide meaningfully articulated feedback about how aspects of a healthcare system may be further prompted toward being a holistic site of care.

7. Summary of Methods: Please describe all formal and informal procedures to be used. Describe the information to be collected, where and how it will be obtained and how it will

be analyzed. Please include a description of your own role in the research and that of any of your team members.

(Max. 500 words)

This is a qualitative and arts-based study. The purpose of the research is to develop a wellness-focused narrative and installation/performance art project first in the Spiritual Sanctuary of the University Hospital of Northern British Columbia (November 20-25th 2018), and then in the Rotunda Gallery at the University of Northern British Columbia (December 9, 2018-January 22 2018) in order to open a broader dialogue on processes of healing. The first phase of the research is based on creative practice and involves the production of a collection of prose poetry. This phase is already complete. I will undertake two more phases.

Phase one: Creative Practice - Creating "Blue" as a Poetic Text (complete)

Phase two: Translating "Blue" into an Installation

Dates: November 20-25th 48th-24th Spiritual Sanctuary (UHNBC) with Open Dialogue November 22rd; December 9th- Jan 22 with Open Dialogue Jan 17th Rotunda Gallery (UNBC)

I will feature text from Blue onto sheets of pulp board arranged sculpturally in order to create a visual art installation shown first at UHNBC (Spiritual Sanctuary) and then UNBC (Rotunda Gallery). There is a performative element to the project in that I will be writing the poems out in real time and will incorporate dance. In both installations viewers will have the opportunity to engage creatively with the visual art described in detail in the Information Letter (appended).

The installation at the Rotunda Gallery will also include materials from two other short creative projects: "Swale/mni wiconi", and "Transformation: A Personal Engagement" as two other examples of the applications of creative research for social justice and climate change, respectively. The creative materials from these two project include performance elements, found object sculptures and text.

A semi structured "Open Dialogue" event will be featured at both installations where audience members will have the opportunity to engage in a public conversation about the value and effectiveness of engaging in art as a means to address mental health and processes of healing. This will also be an opportunity to share reflections on how healthcare sites can be improved to provide more holistic and humanistic care, especially attuned to the needs of those self-identifying as women. The Open Dialogue will be structured with two "talking points": 1) How do creative initiatives in healthcare spaces impact your relationship to your own healing in these spaces? 2) How can engagement with creative initiatives in healthcare spaces help provide safer, more holistic spaces especially for women accessing healthcare? I will begin the dialogue by speaking to the process and motivation behind Blue Rituals with regard to each question before opening the questions up to the audience. As a facilitator I will expand these talking points further expanded to address the body as a site of knowledge and the value of body attuned spaces, land and place as resources for personal narrative, and envisioning stigma-free spaces, as time allows. Chairs for participants and facilitator (myself) will be arranged in a circle. If the conversation does not unfold organically, I may offer an object to pass around the circle as a "talking object" to provide each person an opportunity to reflect.

The Open Dialogue event in the Rotunda Gallery will also include arts-based research as means of addressing social justice and environmentalism. A third talking point will be added for this Open Dialogue and points 1) and 2) will be altered to inquire into public spaces: 1) How do creative initiatives in public spaces impact your relationship to your own wellbeing in these spaces? 2) How can engagement with creative initiatives in public spaces help provide safer, more inclusive spaces for women in particular? 3) What are the broader implications for social justice, environmental health and the health of our communities spurred by creative initiatives in public spaces? Participation in the Open Dialogue will require participants

to review the Information Letter to sign a Consent Form (appended) prior to engaging in the Open Dialogue activities.

An opportunity to provide anonymous written reflections will be made available during both Open Dialogues (6:00pm on November 22nd, and 6:00pm on January 17th). The purpose of this is for participants of each Open Dialogue who would prefer to reflect through written form on the value of arts based research in healthcare spaces as opposed to verbally have an opportunity to do so. These written reflections will be included in the research.

At the beginning of each Open Dialogue I will pass out an Information Letter and Consent Form, as well as two sheets of paper with the talking points listed for the purpose of written reflection, to each audience member and review the letter with the group. Pens will be provided. At this time audience members will have an opportunity to ask questions before deciding to participate. They will also be made aware that the Open Dialogue will be filmed and transcribed. I will also emphasize the "Participant Consent and Withdrawal" section and verbally reiterate that participants may withdraw their consent at any time and their verbal or written comments will be omitted with no consequence to the participant. I will then collect the signed Consent Forms. Following the Open Dialogue participants will have an opportunity to provide a written reflection on the paper supplied to them if they so choose. Participants will be requested to reflect anonymously. Written reflections will remain confidential (discussed further in the appended Information Letter). The end of the Open Dialogue will also be the end of participant engagement in the study.

A public guestbook will be available for the general public to provide reflective feedback about their experience viewing the installation. This guest book will not be included in the research, it although it may impact my autoethnographic reflections about the installation. The public guestbook will be set on a side table inside the Spiritual Sanctuary and will be available throughout the duration of the installation at UHNBC (Nov.20-25th) and at UNBC (Dec.9-Jan.22nd).

~~A guestbook will also be available to for viewers wishing to provide written feedback about the installation after reviewing the Information Letter and providing consent. Viewers may choose to sign and date the entry or to comment anonymously. The guest book will be available to sign between 4:00-8:00pm when Nicole is present in the performance space in order to ensure that viewers have an opportunity to review the Information letter with Nicole and provide consent.~~

Phase three: Autoethnographic reflection

During the two public art installations and following these creative interventions I will reflect autoethnographically on the experience of carrying out a creative intervention in a public health space. I will also reflect on viewer feedback contributed through the verbal and written reflections in the Open Dialogue.

My own autoethnographic reflections and the participant feedback provided in the Open Dialogue including the written reflections will form the datasets that will be analyzed and used to answer my research question.

Data Compilation and Analysis:

I will use a carefully designed mixed methods approach to data collection for this project. These methods will include the conversational semi-structured Open Dialogue in which I will share my process and motivations for developing Blue Rituals. I will then invite participants to reflect on the value of arts-based research to address mental health and wellbeing in public healthcare spaces and in public spaces and how

this relates their experiences of healing using two “talking points” (noted above). This conversational Open Dialogue may take the form of a story exchange in which the participants are invited to share stories about their experiences with creative initiatives and healing processes (or lack thereof) in healthcare settings. Participants may choose instead to provide a written reflection. Participants are under no obligation to provide written or verbal reflections.

I will analyze my autoethnographic reflections for both the benefits and challenges of an arts-based research project that is personally sourced and its impact on my own relationship to healing. I will analyze participants verbal and written reflections from the Open Dialogue according to 1) the benefits and risks of bringing arts-based research into public health settings; and 2) the potential for art-based methods to alter public health settings to provide improved humanistic, holistic care, especially attuned to the needs of women. These two components will constitute my findings.

Data storage: The Open Dialogue will be filmed using a Health Arts Research Centre (HARC) video camera. The recording device will not be linked to the internet. This film will be uploaded onto a HARC laptop and stored in iMovie. The transcription of the video will also be stored on the HARC laptop. All materials including the ~~guest book~~ **written reflections**, video footage and transcription of the Open Dialogue will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Health Arts Research Centre following the study and will only be viewed by myself.

Anonymous viewer freewriting will be included as material in the installation, but will NOT be collected as data. **A public guestbook will be available for viewers to sign but will NOT be collected as data.** Freewriting will be available to be picked up by participants at the end of the installation or shredded at the Faculty of Medicine department (where HARC is located). Likewise, the transcription of the Open Dialogue and the ~~guestbook~~ **anonymous written reflections** will be shredded. Photographs will be taken of the installation **materials** for documentation purposes but will not include images of the viewers or of their freewriting. The Open Dialogue video will be digitally shredded. All print and video data will be destroyed one year after the event on November 1, 2019, or sooner.

8. How will participants be recruited? Please specify *both* how potential participants will be identified *and* (if applicable) the means by which they will be contacted. Please also append

a copy of any recruitment materials (e.g. posters, letters, and media advertisements, etc.).
(Max. 300 words).

Both the installations and the “Open Dialogues” will be advertised via event posters posted on campus, in UHNBC and in the Prince George community. I will also share the poster images on social media. Attendance is open to the public and is free of charge. The posters are appended.

As the Spiritual Sanctuary is a spiritual space open to anyone, it is possible that individuals may enter the space wishing to engage in their own private prayer or reflection. There will be a poster on the door detailing the times and dates that I will be in the space as well as note that this project includes sensitive material about mental health.

In the instance that an individual enters the Spiritual Sanctuary and does not wish to view or engage with the installation individual may choose to leave and return at a different time for privacy in the space. There are double doors for the Spiritual Sanctuary and one door will remain open at all times.

- 9. Please append a complete copy of the research project proposal, including any interview protocols, questionnaires, or other research instruments (e.g. focus group scripts, participant screening tests, etc.) to be used in the study.**

Attachments:

☒ Research Project Proposal

☐ Data Collection Forms/Protocols (please list):

(As per [TCPS2, Article 10.5](#), in studies using emergent design in data collection, final versions of questionnaires or interview schedules **must** be submitted to the REB as soon as they become available)

☒ Other (please specify):

Event posters

10. Where is the recruitment and data collection taking place? (Please tick all that apply and **attach all necessary consents** pertaining to each of these research locations.) Please refer to [TCPS2, Chapter 8](#) for more information on Multi-Jurisdictional Research.

- ☒ University of Northern British Columbia
- ☐ Other university, college or institution of higher education (please specify)

- ☐ Primary or secondary school (please specify)

- ☒ Hospital, clinic or other medical facility (please specify)

Spiritual Sanctuary, University Hospital of Northern British Columbia

- ☐ Government office (please specify)

- ☐ International (please specify)

- ☐ Prisons (please specify)

- ☐ Aboriginal (First Nations, Inuit or Métis) community or territory (please specify below).
Please refer to [TCPS2, Chapter 9](#) for more information on Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada.

- ☐ Yukon or Northwest Territories (please specify)

- ☐ Other (please specify)

11. **Conflict of Interest:** Do any of the researchers conducting this study occupy multiple roles with respect to potential participants (e.g. acting as both a researcher and a therapist, health care provider, caregiver, teacher, advisor, consultant, supervisor, manager, student, employer, etc.) that may create a real, potential, or perceived conflict of interest that could affect the integrity of the research? Please refer to [TCPS2, Article 7.4](#) for more information on Researchers & Conflicts of Interest.

☐ **Yes** Please provide details in the space below (Max. 150 words).

☒ **No**

12. **Describe how any conflicts of interest identified above will be avoided, minimized or managed.** (Max. 150 words)

☒ Not applicable

13. Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members receive any personal benefits (for example a financial benefit such as remuneration, intellectual property rights, rights of employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options etc.) in connection with this study?

☐ **Yes** Please describe the benefits below. (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are part of the conduct of research generally). (Max. 150 words)

☒ **No**

14. If applicable, describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the financial sponsor of this project has placed on the investigator(s). (Max. 150 words)

15. Possible Risks:

a) Please indicate all potential risks to participants as individuals or as members of a community that may arise from this research:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| i. Physical risks (e.g. any bodily contact or administration of any substance): | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| ii. Psychological/emotional risks (e.g. feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed, or upset): | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| iii. Social risks (e.g. loss of status, privacy and/or reputation): | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| iv. Legal risks (e.g. researcher's obligation to report certain unlawful activities): | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

b) Please briefly describe each of the risks noted above and outline the steps that will be taken to manage and/or minimize them. (Max. 300 words)

This project includes a level of emotional and social risk for both myself as the researcher and for potential viewers of the installation. The opportunity to reflect autoethnographically on the experience of engaging in creative practice that touches my own mental health reality includes the risk of being potentially emotionally upsetting and/or fatiguing. I may also feel vulnerable after sharing creative work that is personally sourced to viewers of the installation. For this reason I have included periods of reflection in between the two installations that will allow me to debrief with my supervisor, and if necessary with a counsellor at the UNBC Wellness Centre.

I have built in a level of flexibility for the project in terms of the material I use – I may elect to alter the creative source material on any given day of the installation in order to manage my emotional health and the level of vulnerability. As a professionally trained artist with a decade of experience sharing my work, I am confident that I am equipped to manage the vulnerability this project poses and to provide myself with the necessary supports and debrief processes.

Regarding the opportunity for viewers to engage creatively with the installation and to contribute to the Open Dialogue, procedures for minimizing risk are further outlined in the Information Letter (attached).

As mentioned, one door of the Spiritual Sanctuary will remain open at all times. There will also be a poster on the door with a note that this project contains sensitive material regarding mental health and references sexuality. I will be working closely with Lauren Aldred, the Spiritual Health Manager at UHNBC and a certified counsellor. Lauren Aldred will be onsite throughout the duration of the installation at UHNBC and will be available to provide counselling or debrief to myself or any viewers of the installation should the need arise. In the event that a viewer should become distressed and I am not able to reach Lauren I will walk the viewer to the Emergency department where they can be further directed to care. In extreme circumstances I will contact UHNBC security to assist me. Contact cards for the BC Crisis Centre which offers 24/7 phone and chat services for youth and adults will be provided on a side table at the entrance/exit of the installation at the Spiritual Sanctuary and at the Rotunda Gallery.

While the installation is on display at the Rotunda Gallery I will also display contact cards for the UNBC Wellness Centre which offers drop in counselling services Monday-Friday in addition to the phone number for the BC Crisis Centre. In extreme circumstances I will contact UNBC security should anyone become distressed and require immediate assistance.

16. Possible Benefits:

- Describe any potential direct benefits to participants from their involvement in the project
- Describe any potential benefits to the community (e.g. capacity building)
- Comment on the potential benefits to the scientific/scholarly community or society that would justify involvement of participants in this study

(Max. 300 words)

There is increasing evidence to show the benefits of engaging in creative practice as a means of cultivating resilience, fostering connection to self and community and to create meaning from lived experience (McNiff, 1998; Diamond, 2007). This study is meant to be beneficial for myself and the viewers and to provide a means of engaging the topic of mental health from a strength-based model and narrative. Viewers of the installation and participants who choose to engage with the installation through their own freewriting or through the Open Dialogue may come away from with a deeper sense of connection to themselves and others in the Prince George community who have experienced a disruption in their mental health. They may experience a deeper valuing their own mental health realities and experiences as being formative and meaningful. This research might contribute to participants' cultivation of empathy for both themselves and others in the Prince George community.

Autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis writes about the deep value of bringing a responsible level of vulnerability to your research in order to help improve social life and to address hard-to-broach topics humanistically. As a researcher engaging in autoethnography, I too may come away with a deeper sense of resilience and appreciation for my lived experiences and the value of my own embodied knowledge when translated into a creative project.

An added benefit may be that this event informs individuals about the Spiritual Sanctuary as a resource in their community and may potentially foster a connection between individuals and the Spiritual Health Manager, Lauren Aldred. It may improve individual's connection to Northern Health as a holistic site of care.

17. Will participants be competent to give consent? Please refer to [TCPS2, Chapter 3, Section C](#) for more information on the Consent Process and [TCPS2, Chapter 4, Section B](#) for more information on Research Involving Children, the Elderly and Participants Who Lack the Capacity to Consent for Themselves.

☒ **Yes**

☐ **No** (e.g. Children and cognitively impaired people.) How will the issue of consent be addressed? In the text box below give us a brief summary. (Max. 150 words)

As this research takes place in a hospital setting there is potential for people who are cognitively impaired to enter the Spiritual Sanctuary. However, only information gathered during the Open Dialogue will be collected as data for this study. Certified counsellor and UHNBC Spiritual Health Manager Lauren Aldred will be present for the duration of the Open Dialogue. At the beginning of the Open Dialogue I will thoroughly review the Information Letter and Consent Form with participants. Should a concern arise as to whether or not an individual is cognitively impaired Lauren will assess if this individual is competent to provide consent based on her expertise as a counsellor. If there is a doubt as to whether or not an individual is cognitively impaired and able to provide competent consent they will not be included in the study.

18. Will consent be obtained from each participant either in writing or recorded? Please see [TCPS2, Article 3.12, Chapter 5, Section D](#) and [Article 10.2](#) for information.

☒ **Yes** Please attach a copy of the Consent Form and (if applicable) the Information Letter to be distributed to participants. Each participant must receive one copy of the signed consent form. Note: A *Consent Form and/or Information Letter Checklist* are available at <http://www.unbc.ca/sites/default/files/sections/research/checklist.pdf>, as well as a [Sample Information Letter/Consent Form](#). If Consent is to be obtained verbally, please explain the process for administering and recording that consent.

☐ **No** Please provide justification below for why consent will not be obtained (Max. 150 words).

Participants in the Open Dialogue **on the impact of arts-based research on health and wellbeing in public healthcare spaces and public spaces** Nov.22, 2018 and January 17, 2019 will be provided with an Information Letter and Consent Form which will be reviewed verbally as a group prior to beginning the Open Dialogue. At this time, and as noted in the Information Letter, participants will also be made aware that the Open Dialogue is to be filmed and transcribed. Participants may provide an **anonymous** written reflection in the guestbook **during the Open Dialogue instead of sharing their reflections verbally on handout with "talking points" listed provided. All participants of the Open Dialogue, whether providing verbal or written reflections, will be required to sign a consent form.** Prior to filling out an entry in the guestbook participants will be made aware verbally that if they wish to include to their comment as research they must read the Information Letter as well as review and sign the consent form. The guest book will only be available to sign between 4:00-7:00pm when Nicole is present in the performance space.

19. Will participants be compensated? Please refer to [TCPS2, Article 3.1](#) for information on Incentives.

☐ **Yes** How? In the text box below provide us with a brief summary.
(If providing an honorarium, please indicate the approximate amount.) (Max. 150 words)

☒ **No**

20. Does the project involve any deception? Please see [TCPS2, Chapter 3, Section B](#) for information on Departures from General Principles of Consent.

☐ **Yes** Justify the use of deception and indicate how disclosure and/or debriefing will be addressed.
(Max. 150 words)

☒ **No**

- 21. How do you propose to distribute results to participants?** (Max. 150 words) (e.g. Will you be providing the opportunity to have your thesis and/or summary report mailed or emailed to participants, or informing participants that your thesis will be available in the library?) Please see [TCPS2, Article 4.7](#) (section on Equitable Distribution of Research Benefits) for more information.

Participants will have the opportunity to request that I email them a pdf of my thesis. It will also be made available to the public through the UNBC library.

- 22. Will Research Assistants and/or Transcribers be hired for this project?** Please see [TCPS2, Chapter 5](#) for information on Privacy and Confidentiality

☐ **Yes** Please attach a [Confidentiality & Non-Disclosure Agreement](#)
☒ **No**

23. Will any research contract(s) be signed in connection with this project?

- ☐ **Yes** Please attach a copy of the research contract (in addition to the Grant and Contract form). **Note:** It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that there are no conflicts between the research contract and the information provided to research participants in the project information/consent forms.
- ☒ **No**

SECTION D – SIGNATURES

All researchers participating in the project must sign below in order for this application to be processed and reviewed.

As the Principal Investigator on this project, my signature confirms that I will comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and all University of Northern British Columbia policies and procedures governing the protection of human participants in research, including but not limited to, ensuring that:

- the project is performed by qualified and appropriately trained personnel in accordance with REB protocol;
- no changes to the REB cleared protocol or consent form/statement are implemented without notification to the REB of the proposed changes and receipt of the subsequent REB clearance;
- significant adverse effects to research participants are promptly reported to the REB; and
- a renewal application is submitted to the REB for continuation of the study beyond the initial 12 month approval period.

As a **Student Researcher**, in addition to the above, my signature **also** confirms that I am a registered student in good standing. My project proposal has been reviewed and cleared by my advisory committee (where applicable), and **my REB application has been reviewed and approved by my supervisor**. If my status as a student changes, I will inform the REB. ***For all students, the signature of a Faculty Supervisor is also required.***

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Co-Investigator(s): _____ Date: _____

As a **Faculty Supervisor**, I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and correct, and I certify the scientific merit of the research project.

I understand that as principal **Faculty Supervisor**, I have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study, the ethical performance of the project and the protection of the rights and welfare of human participants. I agree to comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and all University of Northern British Columbia policies and procedures governing the protection of human participants in research, including, but not limited to, ensuring that:

- the project is performed by qualified and appropriately trained personnel in accordance with REB protocol;
- no changes to the REB cleared protocol or consent form/statement are implemented without notification to the REB of the proposed changes and receipt of the subsequent REB clearance;
- significant adverse effects to research participants are promptly reported to the REB;
- a renewal application is submitted to the REB for continuation of the study beyond the initial 12 month approval period.

Signature of Faculty Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

☐ I have reviewed and approved this REB application.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

Please indicate which of the following supporting documents are appended to this application (please add extra lines where necessary). Please ensure that all documents are **clearly labeled**, that all pages are **clearly numbered**, and attach them **in the order in which they are listed below**.

- ☒ Other REB approvals
- ☐ UNBC Institutional consents (e.g. Vice-President Research / Program / Department / School)
- ☐ Consents from Aboriginal groups or organizations
- ☐ Other consents (please specify) _____
- ☐ Research contract(s) _____
- ☒ Participant information letter(s)
- ☒ Participant consent form(s)
- ☐ Research assistant/transcriber confidentiality agreement(s)
- ☒ Participant recruitment materials (e.g. posters, letters, email scripts, etc.)
- ☐ Questionnaires or survey instruments
- ☒ Research proposal
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

***Applicants are reminded that research with human subjects
cannot be undertaken prior to
obtaining approval by the Research Ethics Board
per [TCPS2, Article 6.11](#)***

Please allow 3 weeks from the submission deadline for a response from the REB.

However, please note that applications submitted in July and August will be assessed subject to the availability of REB members, and as such the REB cannot guarantee a specific turnaround time for the review process.