


# The gap between; an open-ness

...episodes of love would describe a certain exposure to the other. The gap, fracture of absence that is their origin equally  
...always entails an openness" (Wylie, 2009: 284)

Davina Kirkpatrick



I'm staring at the gaps between the illusory belief that one is in control of life and the reality of sudden and unexpected death; between dying and disposal of your mortal remains; between the light presence of an alive being and the dead weight of a cadaver.

*I want to understand but there is nothing to understand it's just what happens - death. I want to look for reasons and patterns because the random is too scary it means I could go to sleep and not wake up. Death is so close, breathing on my neck, whispering in my ear - and it changes everything, irrevocably.<sup>1</sup>*

Conversations about death, memorials, places - the co-production of a ritual enactment that acknowledges a continuing bond in the work created with Rob Irving on Hergest Ridge.

We planned a ritual journey, with the musical accompaniment of Glenn Miller and reading from Rob's mum Dorsey's diary of 1943,

bringing her voice into the car. Material fragments of her life - her doll and a shoe from her horse Robin, apocryphal tales of her life before Rob's existence and some of her cremated remains.

On the day we found ourselves in a snow-covered landscape - a difference between the imagined act and the actuality of experience. Mike Pearson's statement felt pertinent "this is as much a weather world as a landscape, and it conspires to bring about affects" (2010: 29). Our attention was fully on how we walked and breathed - shared physical intention, the balance of leading and following. Reaching the summit of the ridge and with the clay welded to the icy whetstone, we modified our rituals sprinkling ash onto the clay and leaving it for the elements.

Returning in the spring the only visible traces of our first visit a slight staining of the whetstone, the ritual expanded to include a third person (Christine Baeumler), a picnic and a successful casting.

There is reciprocity in the exchange of time and gifts - objects and images, and personal narratives. The artworks sit alongside the transitory nature of ritual experience. I am making a physical manifestation of absence - a cast of the materiality of that specific place also containing cremated remains of a person both real and imagined - Dorsey, a collection of selves known and not known, the stories told through the veil of Rob's self.

We laid some small trace, a thread that is tied into a place that stretches both back and forward in time. I notice how this shared history/heritage impacts on my experience of the place.

But as people search, as they make places, as they ritually return, they often encounter, even evoke ghosts.  
(Till, 2004)

The words I repeat are the telling of sudden death, finding a way to hold the shock, transform it into the collective re-envisioning of a sacred space - the gap between what has been and what will be; a paying attention to the particularities that embody a unique living presence in the preparation of my partners body and the creation of his funeral.

We create a sacred space around us, with the power of collective energy my undivided attention could be given to the task of creating the fullest embodied sense of this man - the coffin, the music to be played, the person to write and speak the eulogy, the shape and arc of the ceremony and celebration.

*We lit candles, burnt sage and I gently let the smoke rise along his body, put Bob Dylan on the CD player. I removed my rings, his watch and cardigan, which I have worn since returning to the house. And so we began, Mary and I, to wash his body - so gently and rhythmically. I let my hands linger longer as I gently pressed the flannel to his so cold and solid flesh; the skin had reddened where the blood had settled. We moved slowly, tentatively. I was scared to move his limbs, unsure how much pressure to apply not wanting to damage the skin. He was already clean, having been washed after the post-mortem, so this was a ritual washing - more about love, care, touch, giving back the smell of his body wash. We dried him with soft paper towels pressing them so they absorbed the moisture we had introduced and the moisture that emanated from his skin. Penny drew as we moved around him. Dressing him was a much more visceral, physically demanding task. It took four of us, Debbie the undertaker joined us, he was heavy and the damp, and clamminess of his so cold skin meant it was a challenge.<sup>2</sup>*

Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know that we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it is filled completely, it nonetheless remains something else. And actually that is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetrating that love which we do not want to relinquish. (Freud, 1961: 386)

1 Davina Kirkpatrick, Morning pages, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2011

2 Davina Kirkpatrick, Morning pages, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2011



Photos by Rob Irving, 2010-11

JUN:

MON:

TUES:

WED:



FLA



- transport to arrival  
to crem.  
- a group of forty  
calling out of funeral



two  
Cora  
Sarah  
Henry H.  
with  
Linda



Nov 1  
playful & calm  
intensity

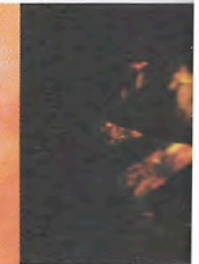


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