



Embodying Grief:
Filming as a Somatic Feminist Practice

close your eyes
listen

breathe in
taste

stand still
feel

look

at all that is around you
and all that is within you
and all who are speaking with
you
the sounds, the earth, the sky

Welcome and thank you for joining the Embodying Grief workshop

Before we begin....

Somatic work can be challenging, particularly for those of us who are survivors of trauma. I want to acknowledge that the somatic practice of connecting with the body can be retriggering and bring up unexpected emotions and sensations. As a trauma survivor, I want this workshop to be a safe space. So, please feel free at any time to take a break, or do what will help you to feel comfortable, and/or speak directly with me about any challenges you are experiencing.

In addition, I want this workshop to be accessible to people with different physical and sensory challenges and abilities. I will endeavour to ensure the workshop is accessible for all participants through a flexible program that has a lot of alternative options for engagement with the content and practice of embodied filming. Please speak with me if you have concerns or questions about this.

The sharing of this method through a workshop seeks to break down hierarchical notions of artist as author and privileged executor of visual storytelling. I hope that offering this workshop opens the creative method to more people to experience and share the liberatory possibilities of this practice. I do not claim any authorship or copyright to this method and encourage participants to share widely. If using my writing or images, please include a mention of my name, as an acknowledgement of the labour involved in my exploration of these ideas.

Embodying Grief: Filming as Somatic Feminist Practice was developed from a diverse range of influences including feminist theory, practical approaches, and personal experience. This text will provide some background to the workshop, and some references to further explore.

As an artist, my work is deeply tied to my lived experiences, as well as my political values and beliefs. My personal history as a survivor of inter-generational trauma and violence was the starting point of my interest in somatics as a therapeutic practice in my ongoing recovery. In addition to this, I was engaging deeply with feminist philosophies, particularly decolonial and anti-imperialist positions. These perspectives were also informing the conceptual and practical aspects of my artistic practice. As I developed as an artist, a method of filming emerged that I felt was able to hold these diverse concerns within a visual practice, as a way of seeing or understanding the world, and sharing this understanding with others.

On a personal level, this method provides me with

a way of navigating the world as a trauma survivor. In the political sphere, I truly believe in this method for reconnecting to ourselves, our communities, and the world, and that this reconnecting process can be understood as an essential element of feminist and decolonial struggle, against racism, colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchal oppression.

Somatics as a practice that engages with and trusts the body's own wealth of knowledge is inherently political (Haines, 2014), because it reverses the Western imperialist hierarchical separation between body and mind, and the privileging of rational thought above other forms of knowing. Combining this method with the work of capturing and translating the world from a physical perspective expands the field of human engagement with landscapes and space into the imaginative possibilities held within radical feminist and decolonial political philosophy.

In my visual practice, I seek to make a separation between this method of engagement with landscape, and the western imperialist approaches that privilege the individual self in relation to landscape as a conquering force or separate entity

that either seeks to control or be all powerful. This method envisions the self as an inextricable part of the landscape or ecological sphere and finds this immersion in the body through somatic approaches that focus on physical sensations including breath, smell, sound, touch and sight. The method also requires a distancing of the self from human understandings of time, sensing into the other spatial and time dimensions of the spaces that we are a part of as more-than-human.

The process of working in this way and spending time in the landscape can be understood as more important than a finished result, which could be a text, a video or sound work. At the same time, I understand my own visual work as a way of expanding this philosophy outwards into the world, through representing visual, sonic, writing, and other material fragments of this experience.

The focus on filming as a medium is also part of my broader feminist approach to artistic practice, which acknowledges the specificity of mediums as historically male dominated, and often utilized as a tool of an oppressive white male gaze. The method is also inspired by recent discourse like Joey Soloway's lecture on the potential of the 'female

gaze' (Soloway, 2016), and more historically the writing of Laura Mulvey on the gendered nature of cinematic tropes (Mulvey, 1975). These perspectives inform my approach of utilizing a filming practice as something that can be embodied and imbued with feminist agency and radical possibility.

The method can be understood as an urgent political practice, given the current situation of ecological collapse and climate crisis due to rapid human induced climate change. As we are going through a sixth mass species extinction and the slow-moving collapse of our own societies due to irreversible temperature warming, a method of connecting with landscapes that also involves a deeper reconnection with ourselves as parts of a larger whole can inform and support political actions towards containing or responding to this crisis. This method offers a practice which can be utilised for envisioning ways through and beyond climate crisis, for imagining futures in which the oppressive structures that drive climate collapse can be left behind.

The title 'Embodying Grief' alludes to the worldwide phenomenon of mental health issues in

relation to the climate breakdown, in particular the increasing presence of ecological grief and Solastalgia (Albrecht, 2007). In my artistic work, I am using this filming method as a way of understanding and processing the ongoing emotional states of grief and loss induced by the climate crisis. I encourage a reflection upon this within the workshop if only as the start of an ongoing conversation and broader question that this method raises, which is: how do we move through this time while holding the complexities of loss, grief, and simultaneously our ability to dream?

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