

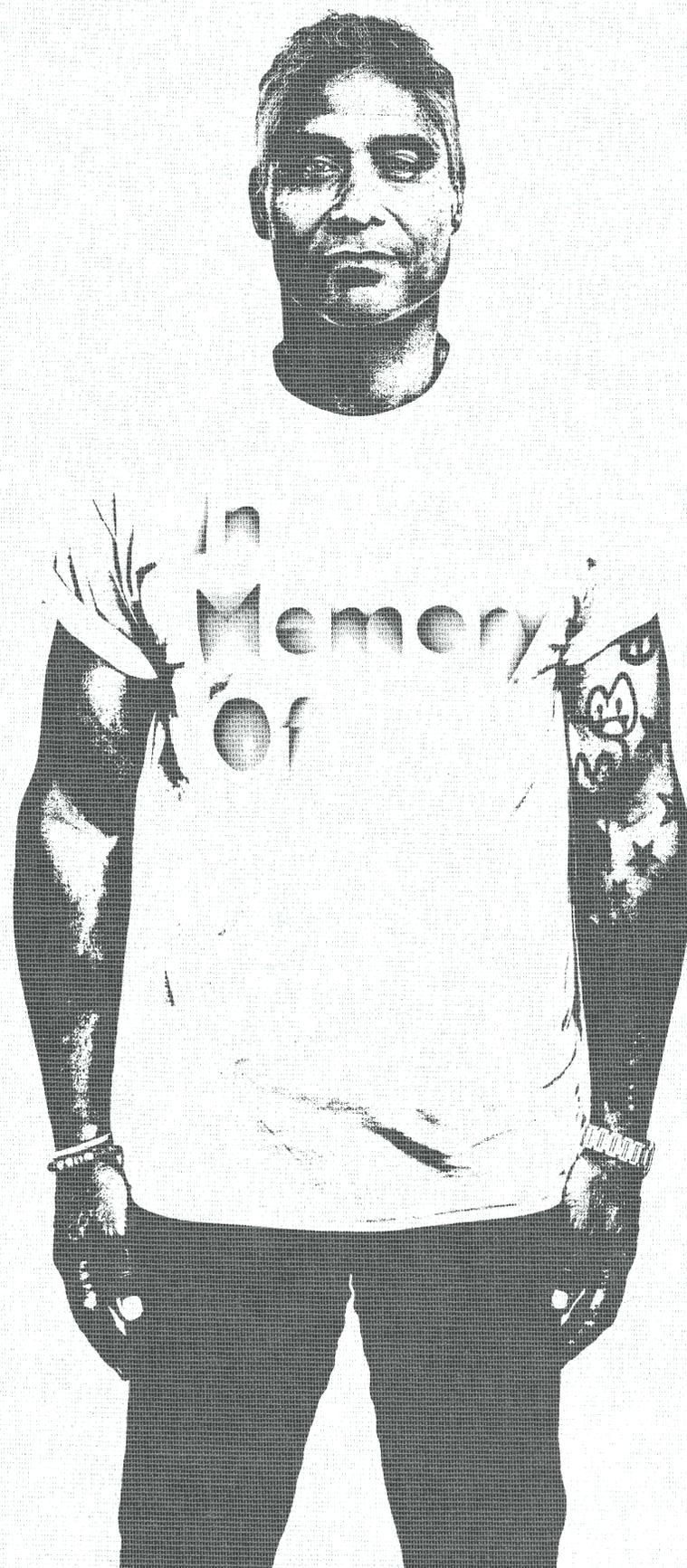
*This Grief Thing* is a multi-component output in the form of a participatory arts project, that encourages people to talk, think and learn about grief, by creating new public spaces, physical objects, visual materials and mechanisms for interpersonal engagement. Historically articulated and experienced in social, relational ways, grief has been rendered largely absent from public, social settings by shifts in societal attitudes as a consequence of two World Wars, developments in medical technologies and consequent disengagement with death. This has resulted in a lack of developed skills for communicating about grief, with recognised impacts on health and wellbeing. *This Grief Thing* renders grief visible, through material cultures, through social encounters and by interventions in public space, and develops new partnership and participation models for engaging diverse publics with grief, helping build resilience in individuals, families and communities.

At the heart of the project is a collection of clothing and accessories that incorporate words and phrases about grief, proposing new strategies to think about it and communicate it. These objects are distributed via temporary shops which also function as spaces for meetings and exchange, through which people engage with the subject of grief. A billboard campaign and a free leaflet, distributed through spaces such as libraries, cafes and print distribution channels, make grief even more visible in public spaces. In a context where the social invisibility of grief diminishes opportunities for engagement with it, research and creative projects which offer mechanisms for learning and exchange are increasingly necessary.

In development since 2015, the project appeared in UK towns and cities from 2018–20. During this time, 3569 participants directly engaged with the project by visiting temporary shops, 341 people participated in structured conversations about grief, 1400 free leaflets were distributed and over 535,000 people encountered the billboard campaign.

This Grief Thing

David Harradine



Materials which comprise or support this submission can be found inside the box or on the USB drive  embedded in the box's interior lid. Within this publication, references for components of the submission are found in the right margin using a lettering system A–J. Items marked with an \* are components of the output, all other items are contextual.

- A\* Grief = Love scarf
- B\* Pack of statement cards
- C\* Grief is Like the Weather T-shirt
- D\* Don't Panic if I Cry badge
- E\* In Memory Of brooch
- F Film documentation of *This Grief Thing* 
- G Film describing Grief Gatherings 
- H Evaluation report
- I\* Contextual leaflet
- J Blog posts written about *This Grief Thing* for feveredsleep.co.uk 

Further information on these materials can be found on the reverse of the box's interior lid.

David Harradine

## THIS GRIEF THING

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama,  
University of London

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David Harradine

ORCID ID 0000-0003-0376-6063

Published by The Royal Central  
School of Speech and Drama,  
University of London

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The Royal Central School of Speech  
and Drama, Eton Avenue, London,  
NW3 3HY

[www.cssd.ac.uk/research](http://www.cssd.ac.uk/research)

Series Editors:  
David Harradine, Maria Delgado  
Associate Editors:  
Joe Parslow, Sally Baggott  
Editorial Advisor:  
Tony Fisher

Images:  
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FIGS 12–14 (STILLS) Adam Lewis, 2019

Design: Valle Walkley  
Print: Push / Boss

A catalogue record for this publication  
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-8383968-0-0

David Harradine is co-artistic director  
of Fevered Sleep and Professor of  
Interdisciplinary Practice at The Royal  
Central School of Speech and Drama,  
University of London, where Fevered  
Sleep is Associate Artist.

He works across artforms, from  
theatre and dance, to film and audio,  
installation, text and digital art. Placing  
collaboration and participation at  
the centre of his practice, he has  
developed, with Fevered Sleep, a  
research-led approach to making art  
that is simultaneously challenging,  
compassionate and inclusive.

His research proposes new ways  
of thinking about interdependence,  
care and the connectedness of the  
human and more-than-human world.

Acknowledgements: *This Grief Thing*  
was created and led in collaboration  
with Sam Butler, and produced by  
Fevered Sleep.

Thanks to Louisa Borg-Costanzi Potts,  
Dimitry Nicholls, Amy Davies Dolamore,  
Amelia Ideh, Annabelle Sami, Louise  
Blackwell, Fraser Muggeridge Studio,  
Alison Proctor, Ali Beale, Sophie Eustace,  
Kate Wakeling, Susanne Burns, Dance4,  
Sick! Festival, Wellcome Collection,  
Middlesbrough Town Council, The  
Whitworth, Derelict, The Good Grief  
Trust, Arts Council England, Wellcome,  
Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

I	Overview	4
II	Questions, aims and objectives	10
III	Context	12
IV	Methodology	17
V	Timeline	25
VI	Findings	29
VII	Bibliography	37

## Overview

*This Grief Thing* is a multi-component output supported by contextual material. It was produced by Fevered Sleep, the company of which I'm co-artistic director.

Developed and presented publicly over a 5-year period from 2015–2020, the project aims to develop strategies for inviting people to come together to think, talk and learn about grief, specifically the grief of bereavement following the death of a loved one. The research proposes that as grief is a social, interpersonal state, produced through an ongoing relationship with someone who has died, and further articulated, or indeed suppressed, through relations amongst the living, in social, community and family settings, so research on grief should itself be conducted through interpersonal interaction, dialogue-based methodologies, and disseminated through forms that are predicated on conversation, listening, talking and exchange. Through this process, the research helps build resilience in individuals, families and communities, as well as developing partnership and participation models which increase engagement and impact in research and creative practice. The research, and the creative practice through which it takes place, innovate in form, methodology, approach to partnerships and participation and dissemination.

The research grows out of a social context in which grief is encouraged to be suppressed, hidden or ignored. This can be understood as a consequence of post-World Wars, late-twentieth-century sequestration of death and its removal from public life through social and medical technologies (care homes, hospitals, pharmaceutical advancements). At every stage and in every part of the research, from its title to the ways in which it is woven into quotidian social and cultural practices such as clothing and shopping, *This Grief Thing* aims to counter this invisibility. Social visibility provides a framework for personal engagement with grief: grief's social presence is a pre-requisite for personal learning, expression and acceptance (Gross 2016).

The research took place through a dialogic process, rooted in conversation and interpersonal exchange, which spanned several years. In keeping with the participatory model upon which it is built, this development was itself participatory, involving experts, researchers, academics (working in Bereavement Studies, Death Studies, Fashion

and Dress History); diverse members of the public across the UK; and partner organisations who hosted the project and fed into its ongoing evaluation and development. The research deliberately draws on a wide range of perspectives, and seeks to foreground the asingularity of grief and the proliferation of experiences that vary from person to person encountering it. The notion that grief is an emergent, dynamic and interpersonal process, without template or pattern, is key to the project's methodological approach, its form and its findings.

Central to the project is a collection of clothing that reimagines, in simple and accessible contemporary forms, various cultural and historical practices of 'mourning dress': clothing that signals the grieving state of the wearer — such as the wearing of black (and then a progression of coloured dress) in nineteenth-century Europe, or the Jewish grief ritual of *keriah*, the rending of clothes. All of the clothing in this collection bears words and phrases about grief (see FIGS 5, 6 & 8 for examples). These propose ways to think about it ('Grief is Like the Weather'), invitations to acknowledge it ('Hold Me'), and directives to those who encounter the person who is wearing the item ('Don't Panic if I Cry').

Along with a range of accessories, such as badges, brooches (FIG 9) and cards (which also carry words and phrases related to grief), this clothing collection is made publicly available — on a 'pay what you want' basis — through temporary shops that have been opened in various locations across England. Clothing (specifically, clothing worn as part of a ritual or signalling of bereavement) plays a central role in the project as it makes grief visible on the surface of the body, rendering it materially present, and offering the wearer a tangible strategy for indicating their grief, initiating conversation about it or inviting its acknowledgement. Examples of items in the collection include a Grief = Love scarf, a pack of statement cards, a Grief is Like the Weather T-shirt, a Don't Panic if I Cry badge, and an In Memory Of brooch.

By conducting and disseminating the research in public spaces, such as a high street shop or shopping centre retail unit, grief is made visible at the heart of everyday life (FIGS 1–3). The shops function as a recognisable and accessible public/retail space in ordinary ways (people visit the shop as customers and can buy items there). They also function as spaces for informal (over the counter) and formal (pre-booked) meetings and exchange, through which participants (members of the general public) engage with the subject of grief.

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## I Overview

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FIG 1 *This Grief Thing* during Sick! Festival, Manchester, 2019

### Key development and dissemination points

2015 2017	June– December	Contextual reading, contextual practice review. Meetings with academic advisors (from Bereavement Studies, Death Studies, Fashion and Dress History) and collaborators (graphic designers, manufacturers and fabricators). Focus group conversations about grief (see iv. Methodology for full details).
2017 2018	June– June	Developing partnerships for the project (host organisations, including shopping centres and high street consortia; partner arts organisations; community, health and grassroots organisations); fundraising and producing.
2018	January– June	Development of the collection (in collaboration with graphic designers Fraser Muggeridge Studio); design of the shop space.
2018 2019	September– October	Five project residencies and temporary-shop openings, in Preston, Middlesbrough, Manchester (twice) and Nottingham. A supplementary programme of Grief Gatherings (group conversations about grief) took place in collaboration with a number of partner organisations across the UK.
2020	July  September– December  December	Pilot online Grief Gathering.  Online Grief Gatherings.  Collaboration with The Good Grief Trust on National Grief Awareness Week, leading to a social media campaign to raise awareness of grief, and a programme of Grief Gatherings.

### Partner/host organisations

- ⊙ Derelict and St. George's Shopping Centre in Preston: Derelict is an organisation producing contemporary performance in Preston (shop residency);
- ⊙ Middlesbrough Town Council and Captain Cook Square Shopping Centre (shop residency);
- ⊙ The Whitworth art gallery and Manchester Royal Infirmary in Manchester (shop residency);
- ⊙ Dance4: Dance development agency in Nottingham (shop residency);

- ⊙ Sick!: Arts festival focused on physical and mental health, Manchester (shop residency);
- ⊙ Wellcome Collection, London (Grief Gatherings);
- ⊙ Compton Verney art gallery, Warwickshire (Grief Gatherings).

### *This Grief Thing* was funded by

- ⊙ Paul Hamlyn Foundation, as part of a 4-year grant to Fevered Sleep, 'Developing New Approaches to Participation' (total grant £230k);
- ⊙ Wellcome Trust, as part of a 4-year grant to Fevered Sleep, 'Experiments in Public Engagement' (total grant £490k);
- ⊙ The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London;
- ⊙ Arts Council England through Fevered Sleep's National Portfolio Organisation core funding.

Rigorous peer-review processes are embedded in each of these funding schemes.

Through a 5-year and ongoing process, the research that drives *This Grief Thing* has discovered effective approaches to engaging diverse publics in conversation, learning and exchange about grief. It has developed new partnership models that encourage and facilitate participation in a project with what, for many, is a challenging subject. It has made grief highly visible in public spaces and through interpersonal encounters of many kinds. It has had impact at all levels, from transformative experiences for individual participants, through to my own participation in the All Party Parliamentary Group for Bereavement Support, where the research has influenced Government and policy development. The *This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* and *This Grief Thing* films provide evidence of impact on participants.

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*Can the use of non-arts spaces encourage the participation of people who would not encounter it in arts sites such as theatres or galleries?*

*Are new project partnership models necessary in order for conversations about grief to be inclusive and accessible, and if so, what models are most effective?*

## II Questions, aims and objectives

In the latter half of the nineteenth century in the UK and other Western societies, elaborate rituals of mourning developed in response to the prevalence of death and dying, in what Machin (2014) calls the “overt mourning of the Victorian era”. In the twentieth century, the First and then Second World Wars led to nation-scale attempts to suppress grief and horror at the number of servicepeople and civilians who had died. With the establishment of the National Health Service in post-war UK in 1948, and parallel advances in the widespread availability of medical and pharmaceutical technologies across the West, mortality rates reduced, life expectancy increased, and illness and death were increasingly removed from domestic and public spaces and sequestered into medical and care settings. *This Grief Thing* investigates and responds to the cultural and social invisibility of grief in public life in the UK which has developed out of these historical, medical, military and social contexts. Ultimately, the project aims to render grief visible and to relocate it back at the heart of everyday life, a space it has historically occupied, by delivering on the following objectives:

- i. enabling, encouraging and facilitating conversations about grief; and
- ii. making it visible in public and private spaces; thereby
- iii. building resilience in individuals, families and communities, when it comes to encountering grief and grieving.

The following research questions were developed for the project:

*What creative and interpersonal strategies can enable, encourage and facilitate conversations about grief?*

*How can historical and cultural practices of mourning dress be reimagined in contemporary forms?*

*How can grief be conceptualised and described, in ways that reflect the complex lived experiences of grief (and which reject linear, stage-based models)?*

*What kinds of settings could effectively invite people to talk about grief, and make it visible in public spaces?*

The two broad focuses of these research questions (the subject of grief and models for partnership, participation and inclusion) are entirely interconnected. When investigating and developing ways to encourage people to participate in conversations about grief, it is necessary to think about all the ways in which people come into contact with the project. As an itinerant project that moves from place to place, partnership with local organisations is key to building bridges and relationships with potential participants. Grief is a relational, inter-personal experience and process, so research questions focused on the subject cannot be separated from research questions that focus on the form and the mechanisms for enabling participation and engagement.

The structure of the project — a participatory space for conversation and exchange, which is presented in partnership with local host organisations — means that research and learning are ongoing and the project develops and changes each time it is presented. This means that learning can be incorporated, research questions can be answered, developed and adapted and, crucially, research and learning conducted collaboratively with the people who participate in the project can be ‘carried’ accumulatively from place to place. This renders the research, like grief, non-linear; rooted in process rather than in outcomes; responsive and bespoke to individual settings, places, partnerships and people. Focusing on a subject such as grief, the project does not seek to find absolute conclusions or answers to any of its research questions. Rather, it proposes that, like grief itself, research can be relational, provisional and evolving: an open-ended process that takes place with and through others, rather than a time-limited event with the potential for closure, driven by the solitary figure of ‘the researcher’. Again, given that grief is fundamentally an experience rooted in interpersonal relations and social settings, the project has developed a form in which all aspects of the research are undertaken collaboratively, collectively and through participation. This principle underpins the connection between the two strands evident in the research questions, inasmuch as research into a *subject* such as grief — when that subject is explored in the context of a public practice research

project — is deemed to be inseparable from the *people and participants* who bring multiple lived experiences to the research.

### III Context

The research departs from a very straightforward premise: everybody dies.

The bluntness of this statement belies grief's strange absence from everyday public life. Despite being a normal, healthy response to death, which will be experienced by many thousands of people every day, grief tends to be hidden, ignored or restricted to the private realms of the home or the inner life. We are afraid of it. We are ashamed of it. We avoid it. We hide it. Whereas historically, in Western societies, grief would have been highly visible, and woven — in ritualised and quotidian ways — into social relations, structures and events (not least through rituals of mourning dress), in the latter half of the twentieth century it has been increasingly privatised and rendered invisible, a process linked to a parallel privatisation and concealment of death.

One of the consequences of this (coupled with the absence of grief and bereavement from curriculums of compulsory education) is a widespread lack of strategies for thinking, talking about, acknowledging or living with grief. *This Grief Thing* addresses this lack, and offers multiple interpersonal, public, accessible routes to learning about it or learning how to (re)incorporate it into the practice of daily life. In so doing, it also attends to the social and cultural invisibility of grief, and the silence that surrounds it. As such, *This Grief Thing* develops in and from a research context marked by the apparent absence of its subject.

The arts might indeed be seen as a place in which grief is unusually present, and a review of creative practices that take grief as their subject is not indicative of its wider social absence. Recent examples can be found in literature (Denise Riley's *Time Lived, Without Its Flow* 2019 or Max Porter's *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* 2015), live art and multidisciplinary practice (Ellie Harrison's *The Grief Series*), contemporary dance (Crystal Pite's *Betroffenheit* 2017), festival curation (Birmingham's 2018 *A Matter of Life and Death* festival), radio (Cariad Lloyd's hugely successful *Griefcast* podcast series) and TV (*After Life*). Countless examples of work exploring grief could be drawn from theatre (going right back to the theatre's origins in rituals



FIG 2 *This Grief Thing* in St George's Shopping Centre, Preston, 2018  
 FIG 3 *This Grief Thing* during Sick! Festival, Manchester, 2019

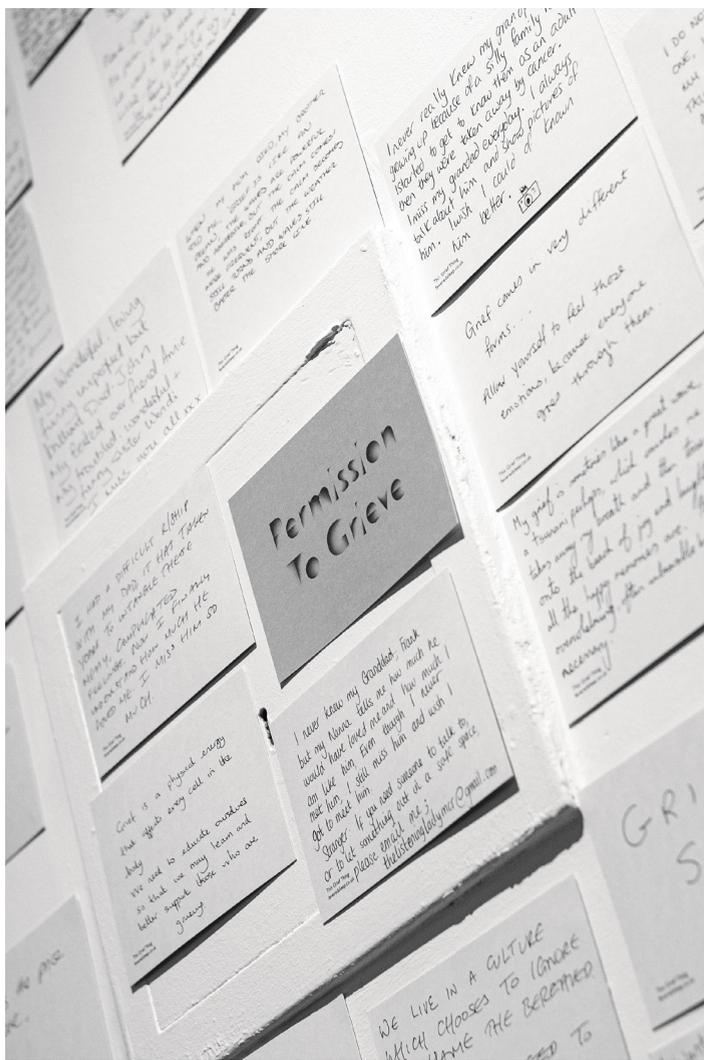


FIG 4 Postcards completed by visitors to the shop during Sick! Festival, Manchester 2019

## THIS GRIEF THING

of death and transformation). Indeed, the very ephemerality of theatre itself provides opportunities to rehearse encounters with loss; theatre *is* the artform of grief.

When the arts, and particularly performance, are so actively engaged with grief, formally and in subject matter, an exploration of grief and its social and cultural representation rooted in artistic practice could suggest that there is little or no need for research which highlights — and counters — the wider social absence of grief (with all the negative impacts on personal, emotional, mental and community health that accompany that lack). This is one of the key reasons why *This Grief Thing* takes the form of a collection of clothing, conversations and a shop. By deliberately avoiding recognisable forms of artistic research and expression (such as performances, exhibitions and creative writing), the project aligns itself instead with cultural practices of everyday life: wearing clothes, going shopping, building interpersonal relations in public spaces where people are invited to come together simply to talk. This innovation gives rise to a highly accessible, inclusive project that has successfully engaged thousands of people in thinking, talking and learning about grief in deeply personal, bespoke and meaningful ways.

Other aspects of the project's context speak more accurately to grief's absence, as evidenced by the growing number of organisations that create spaces for people to talk and learn about grief, bereavement and death. The rise of the Death Café movement from a first gathering in the founder's house in Hackney, London, in 2010, to a globally franchised movement today, is indicative of the lack of non-clinical, public spaces in which people can come together to talk about death and grief. The Good Grief Trust (the UK's umbrella organisation for bereavement support charities and organisations) has a stated aim "to find the bereaved, acknowledge their grief and provide reassurance, a virtual hand of friendship and ongoing support" ([www.thegoodgrieftrust.org](http://www.thegoodgrieftrust.org)). This suggests that grief can often go unacknowledged, with the bereaved experiencing grief in isolation and with insufficient acknowledgement and support, leading to what Machin calls "disenfranchised grief" (Machin 2014). *This Grief Thing* has developed multiple strategies for *enfranchising* grief through quotidian practices such as talking, sharing knowledge and lived experiences and collective learning. Above all, the project — as a mobile public artwork that manifests as shops, billboards and clothing designed to catalyse interpersonal conversation — creates spaces and strategies through which grief commands presence and demands to be acknowledged.

Alongside these social and cultural practices, theoretical/clinical models have been developed for understanding grief. These include so-called 'stage models' based on a recognisable pattern that emerges across individual grief responses, most famously in psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's ideas developed in *On Death and Dying* (originally published in 1969), which proposes, in discussing anticipatory grief of terminally ill people, five stages of grief: shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stage models have often been prominent in popular media, but have widely been discredited. Indeed Kübler-Ross herself has stated that the stages she described were not proposed as a linear structure, rather as a cluster of potential responses that might occur in any order. The particular ideas and phrases that are incorporated into the clothing that forms part of *This Grief Thing* — such as 'Grief is Like the Weather' — explicitly refuse stage models for linear grief. This insistence that grief is a dynamic, unpredictable process rather than a closed sequence is also indicated by the project's form. By sidestepping the dramaturgical closure and 'wrapping up' that is inherently part of the form of theatre and performance, or even by avoiding the physical and conceptual boundaries that come with the written word or visual art, the form of *This Grief Thing* is always in process; always being changed by the participation of people in it, always dynamic, always unpredictable.

Another theoretical model developed in psychology and used for understanding grief is that of 'grief work' (the cognitive effort to confront loss that might lead to grief's resolution and the concomitant risk of developing pathological grief should the work fail to be done adequately). As with stage models, this approach has been widely criticised, due to its predication on capitalist/industrial ways of understanding the 'hard work' of grieving, and because it is built on an assumption that grief can be organised into a linear process with a predictable point of closure (see Machin 2014: 5 and Gross 2016: 15 for an overview of ideas of grief work and the critiques such ideas have received).

Countering the idea that grieving is a job to be done — as proposed through theories of grief work — the idea of 'continuing bonds' (Klass 1996; Mallon 2018) proposes that the bereaved can continue to incorporate the deceased into their lives through the process of grieving itself. *This Grief Thing* speaks to the idea of these continuing bonds between the living and the dead. It does this by offering strategies for acknowledging grief, providing clothing and objects that make it visible and promoting settings in which grief can be articulated in social and relational ways. As such, the project

proposes new personal and social rituals which function as strategies for supporting the bereaved and building individual and community resilience in the face of death.

## IV

## Methodology

As a collaborative and iterative practice research project, *This Grief Thing* is both a research methodology and an output. Public engagement and participation is the project's core methodology and its main aim. Because fundamentally it addresses the social and cultural silences that surround grief — an emotional state that by definition is relational and interpersonal (because grief is a response to the loss of a relationship with another) — it takes a dialogic (conversation-based) approach to build an alternative attitude to grief, and conversation has been the main methodological approach since the project was first developed. Manifestations of this include research-led conversations with a range of academics across disciplines, whose expertise on grief and bereavement provided the initial critical and contextual foundations for the research; group conversations with diverse people across England during the initial research period, whose perspectives were fundamental to the emerging ideas and approaches; the significance of conversations in the public presentation of the project itself; and the networked, collaborative conversations with partner/host organisations who have woven the project into their local communities as part of their programmes. The key marker of the project's success is its ability to enable conversations about grief in the spaces it creates, and in the spaces of everyday life of the people who wear and use the clothing and other objects available in the shops, or who encounter the billboards and leaflet campaigns.

The research is physically and spatially manifested in public through a collection of clothing, which I co-designed, and which incorporates words and phrases about grief that were repeatedly voiced or read during the initial research phase (such as the comparison between the non-linearity and unpredictability of grief and the weather). The methodological decision to focus on clothing stems from two closely related aims. Firstly, to reimagine in a contemporary, everyday context, various historical and cultural practices of mourning clothes: clothing that communicates in explicit and coded ways the (changing) state of bereavement of the wearer. Secondly, in keeping

with these pre-existing traditions, clothing renders grief visible on the very surface of the body, effectively and directly countering the social invisibility of grief to which the project speaks. The project presents this collection of clothing in retail spaces, again for two reasons: firstly, in trying to normalise grief, preliminary research suggested that it would be important to locate the project in the kind of space that people encounter in normal daily life, and retail spaces function as such. Secondly, simply, people buy clothes in shops. The simplicity of this statement reveals a strategic decision to shift the project out of 'official' art spaces, such as theatres and galleries (which are *not* part of the fabric of daily life for most people) and into a public realm of retail space which is more widely accessed and used, and indeed more accessible and *useful*. The clothing collection is deliberately 'low-fashion' and everyday — including items such as T shirts, jumpers and scarves — so that it might appeal to as wide a range of people as possible.

Another key part of the project's methodology, and one of its strategies for dissemination, are small group conversations called Grief Gatherings, which bring together up to 12 people at a time for a 90-minute conversation about grief (FIGS 12–13). These conversations are unstructured and facilitated by myself and Sam Butler. The conversations are deliberately facilitated with as little intervention as possible from myself and Sam, so that the direction they take is defined by the participants, and as a way to reflect grief's unpredictability and emergent quality. For reasons of privacy and confidentiality, conversations are not documented. However, a description of a Grief Gathering from the perspective of a 'participant evaluator' can be found in *This Grief Thing Evaluation Report*. Further documentation of a Grief Gathering is available on film.

These gatherings were initially convened during the early stages of the project, to ensure that the perspectives of a wide and representative range of people could be incorporated into the research, and as a mechanism for developing ways to think and talk about grief (which would later appear on the items of clothing and other objects in the collection). However, it became clear that the gatherings held value for the participants in and of themselves, and participants frequently stated that the gatherings offered a space to talk about grief that was not available anywhere else other than in a medicalised, instrumental setting such as clinical treatment or therapy. Because, for the majority of people, grief is not pathological, these medical/therapeutic settings are not usually necessary nor appropriate.

A 4-month programme of online Grief Gatherings was offered as a response to the increased grief brought

about by COVID-19. These gatherings were hosted on Zoom, following a pilot session in July 2020. The majority of these gatherings were facilitated by myself and Sam Butler. Some of the gatherings were hosted by external partners and organisations with the specific aim of engaging publics that might not engage with myself and Sam. For example, one gathering was hosted by Nubian Life, an organisation supporting older African and African Caribbean people living in West London.

Alongside these structured conversations in the form of Grief Gatherings, informal conversations take place in the temporary shops as part of the transaction between customer/visitor/participant and shopkeeper/researcher (in the project, myself and Sam Butler take on both roles). The form of the high street shop or shopping centre unit was developed precisely because these are familiar spaces which invite social interaction and can effectively function as places to engage others in conversation. Like any interaction between shopkeeper and customer, these conversations are impromptu and ad hoc, but the very fact of the shop as a *grief-focused shop*, and the words and phrases on the items sold in it, steer the conversations towards the subject of grief. The shop is also designed to encourage conversation, with clearly delineated areas separated from each other by furniture, display units and plants. This breaking of the single retail space into a series of smaller spaces introduces a feeling of privacy that helps encourage conversation (FIG 11).

*This Grief Thing's* iterative format means that the project is in a constant process of circular feedback and development, with its inquiry, practice, learning and knowledge exchange carried from place to place. As a practice research project, this process of development takes place in collaboration with industry partners, and — crucially — through the participation of the people who engage with it. Learning from each residency, each partnership, and accrued through the engagement of participants is drawn into Fevered Sleep's internal formative evaluation processes, project evaluations with partners and external evaluation processes. Data is gathered through observation, feedback and monitoring forms, 'vox pop' video interviews (see *This Grief Thing's* films) and formal interviews between the external evaluator, researchers, partners and participants.

This overall approach to ongoing and embedded evaluation and development offers considerable opportunity for the creation of innovative methodologies, tangible impacts and extensive learning (both about the subject matter, grief, and also about how to develop impactful,

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FIGS 5-8 Items from the *This Grief Thing* collection



FIG 9 'In Memory Of' brooch, based on Victorian mourning brooches, from the *This Grief Thing* accessories collection

## THIS GRIEF THING

accessible, inclusive practice research projects). Its dialogic (conversation-based) form means that knowledge developed in, say, Middlesbrough, was shared in London; or research findings that emerged in Manchester were built on in Nottingham. Building effective partnerships was key to this approach. Partners were selected based on a number of criteria:

- i. the relevance of the project to the partner's programming priorities;
- ii. the relevance of the subject of grief to the partner's context;
- iii. the willingness and ability of the partners to fully engage and participate in the ongoing, iterative process of feedback and evaluation that is embedded in the research.

## V

## Timeline

2015	June– November	Initial research and development; reading, literature review, creative context review.
	November	Meetings with research collaborator Amy de la Haye, Professor of Dress History and Curatorship at London College of Fashion. These conversations focused on the development of fashion and dress histories in relation to death and bereavement, particularly in relation to mourning dress in nineteenth-century Europe.
	December	4-day research and development residency at Dance4 in Nottingham, including 1 Grief Gathering, and a meeting with research collaborator Louise Crewe, Professor of Geography, University of Nottingham. This conversation focused on bereavement and clothing-based rituals, ethical clothing production and the international interconnectedness of mortality and labour in clothing supply and production chains.
2017	September	Grief Gathering in London (Shoreditch Town Hall).
	September and ongoing	Meetings with research collaborator Linda Machin, Research Fellow in Bereavement Studies at University of Keele. These conversations focused on the historical roots of grief's social and cultural suppression, social and interpersonal

DAVID HARRADINE

manifestations of grief, theoretical models for understanding grief, the value of art and creative research as elements of a 'culture of grief' and the idea of disenfranchised grief.

October	Grief Gatherings in Nottingham (Dance4). Meetings with research collaborators John Troyer and Christine Valentine, Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath. These conversations focused on the importance of bereavement rituals, death in the context of social media and other public enactments of grieving.
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2017 2018	November January– March Grief Gatherings in London (Shoreditch Town Hall).
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2018	January– June Development of the clothing and other items in the collection (in collaboration with graphic designers Fraser Muggeridge Studio); design of the shop space; producing, partnership development, project planning associated with practice research.
February	Grief Gathering in Leeds (Yorkshire Dance). Grief Gathering in Reading (Southstreet Arts). Grief Gatherings in London (Wellcome Collection).
April	Grief Gathering at Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity, Banff, Canada, during Fevered Sleep's residency as international guest artist at the Banff Playwrights' Lab. Q&A with the director of the Playwrights' Lab (for an audience of the Lab's 2018 cohort), focusing on <i>This Grief Thing</i> and Fevered Sleep's approach to participatory practice.
September	Residency in Preston, in partnership with Derelict. Residency in Middlesbrough, in partnership with Middlesbrough Town Council.
November	Residency in Manchester, in partnership with The Whitworth art gallery and Manchester Royal Infirmary.
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2019	March Residency in Nottingham, in partnership with Dance4. May Grief Gathering at Manchester Royal Infirmary, as part of Dying Matters Week. September 2 Grief Gatherings at Compton Verney art gallery, Warwickshire. October Residency in Manchester, in partnership with Sick! Festival.



FIG 10 *This Grief Thing* billboard, Manchester 2018

FIG 11 Posters during National Grief Awareness Week, December 2020

December 2 Grief Gatherings at Wellcome Collection, London.

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2020 July Pilot online Grief Gathering.

September–December Online Grief Gathering programme.

December Collaboration with The Good Grief Trust on National Grief Awareness Week, leading to a social media campaign to raise awareness of grief, and a programme of Grief Gatherings, as part of a national campaign to influence Government policy on bereavement support. This research was supported by Central's institutional allocation of Research England's *Strategic Priorities Fund*.

### Research postponed due to COVID-19

A 2-week extended programme (including 2 shop residencies) in London had been scheduled for May/June 2020, but was postponed (to June/July 2021) due to COVID-19. This programme would have included:

- ⦿ 2 shop residencies, in Barnet and Newham.
- ⦿ 8 Grief Gatherings in the shops.
- ⦿ 6 Grief Gatherings either co-hosted with Fevered Sleep or hosted independently, which were intended to make the offer to participants more inclusive (co-host organisations would have included The Museum of Homelessness, Heart n Soul, St Margaret's House and Nubian Life).
- ⦿ A 12-hour public 'Conversation Relay': an overlapping series of dialogues between 17 people with 'grief expertise' — from death doulas to academics, undertakers to photographers, writers to bereavement counsellors, etc.
- ⦿ A 4-week long billboard and poster campaign in 2 London locations (Finchley and Stratford).
- ⦿ Commissions for 2 associate artists (dancer/choreographer Akshay Sharma and sculptor/digital artist Rayvenn Shaleigha D'Clark) to make new work on the theme of grief.

## VI

## Findings

Fevered Sleep commissioned independent external evaluator Kate Wakeling to lead an in-depth evaluation process and write a report on the project. Taking an ethnographic approach to this evaluation process — by embedding herself in the project as an observer/participant — Wakeling assessed the project against a number of key aims and objectives which defined the research questions. This formative evaluation process was an important part of the research methodology, as it formalised the learning internal to the project, adding to its dialogic, interpersonal approach, and became part of the iterative cycle of development that informed the progression of the project through different residencies. The evaluation process and report highlighted learning and impact in a number of key areas, which map onto the research questions:

- ⦿ Developing multiple creative strategies that enable, encourage and facilitate conversations about grief;
- ⦿ Making grief more visible in public spaces;
- ⦿ Creating an accessible and inclusive cultural offer;
- ⦿ Developing new partnership models;
- ⦿ Delivering a project which has participation at its core.

See *This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* for full details.

The research undertaken through *This Grief Thing* led to a highly impactful set of public engagement outcomes, with significant levels of engagement and participation. Key outcomes include:

- ⦿ Residency in Preston, in partnership with Derelict. 9 days shop opening, 2 Grief Gatherings, 818 people visited the shop, 18 people took part in Grief Gatherings.
- ⦿ Residency in Middlesbrough, in partnership with Middlesbrough Town Council. 9 days shop opening, 2 Grief Gatherings, 362 people visited the shop, 9 people took part in Grief Gatherings.
- ⦿ Residency in Manchester, in partnership with The Whitworth art gallery. 10 days shop opening, 3 Grief Gatherings, 1582 people visited the shop, 33 people took part in Grief Gatherings. 2 Grief Gatherings also took place at Manchester Royal Infirmary, with 10 people participating.

- ⊙ Residency in Nottingham, in partnership with Dance4. 9 days shop opening, 5 Grief Gatherings, 162 people visited the shop, 37 people took part in Grief Gatherings.
- ⊙ Residency in Manchester, in partnership with Sick! Festival. 12 days shop opening, 4 Grief Gatherings, 516 people visited the shop, 35 people took part in Grief Gatherings.
- ⊙ 14 additional Grief Gatherings (as detailed in v. Timeline), with 127 people participating.
- ⊙ A nationwide billboard campaign, which has been seen by over 535,000 people (FIG 10).

The project aims to render grief visible, enabling and facilitating conversations about it, and building resilience in individuals, families and communities. The research gave rise to the following findings.

The levels of public participation in *This Grief Thing* (3569 people in direct engagements across 5 residencies and the programme of Grief Gatherings) demonstrate that it has effectively developed a format and an approach that can invite people to come together to talk, think and learn about grief. Placing a collection of clothing at its heart has grounded the research in an historical and cultural context (mourning dress) that people find familiar, easy to engage with and useful. The wider collection of accessories and other objects has successfully provided multiple mechanisms for opening up conversations about — or acknowledgement of — grief. The research found, somewhat paradoxically — inasmuch as it is a practice research project — that in order to truly engage people in learning about grief, the research needed to develop forms and strategies which depart from straightforward cultural practices such as performance or literature, and which embrace instead the ‘culture of everyday life’. A significant number of participants stated that they would not have engaged with a project about grief in a conventional arts setting such as a theatre or gallery (see *This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* for more details). As described in the earlier section on context, the research found that creative/artistic explorations of grief that take place in recognisable cultural settings such as arts centres, theatres, museums and galleries give a false impression of the ease with which grief can manifest in day-to-day social and personal interactions. By locating the research instead in quotidian practices such as clothing, shopping and conversation, the project developed an effective methodology that ‘makes space for grief’, thereby giving permission for it to be articulated and explored, learned about and expressed, in a multitude of inter-personal ways. Importantly, these methodologies are rooted

in interpersonal dialogue and exchange, whether that be through conversation itself, or by encountering someone who is wearing an item of clothing bearing words about grief.

Further findings from the research focus on inter-organisational partnership and collaboration. Successful partnership models were developed, which effectively facilitated participation in the project by diverse people across England. One of the key routes to success in this partnership approach has been the building of ‘clusters’ of partners in each residency location. For example, during the residency at The Whitworth in Manchester in 2018, the project was also supported by Manchester Royal Infirmary and the University of Salford, as well as local arts organisations Quarantine (theatre company) and Sick! Festival (whose involvement in 2018 led them to commission a new iteration of the project for the festival in 2019). In Middlesbrough, this cluster formed around a central partnership between Fevered Sleep and Middlesbrough Town Council, and also drew in other organisations including Ageing Better, Public Health Middlesbrough, Acklam Library and Captain Cook Shopping Centre. The research found that such ‘cluster models’ for partnerships around both research projects and creative projects are particularly effective at engaging people in conversation about grief, because potential participants recognise and trust the local organisations within the cluster. This also ensures that those conversations are inclusive and accessible to all kinds of people. For example, participants who would not engage with a project that was included in an arts festival might be encouraged to engage at their local hospital or because a grassroots community organisation is hosting a Grief Gathering. These cluster models also enable research to considerably extend its reach and potential impact. This could have a broad application, increasing the likelihood of research impact in subject areas that extend beyond the arts and practice research.

I have spoken about the research in the following settings:

2018	18 April	Q&A presentation on <i>This Grief Thing</i> and Fevered Sleep as part of the Banff Playwrights’ Lab at Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity, Banff, Canada.
2019	28 September	Panel speaker at ‘Let’s Talk About It: Death, Grief and End-of-life Care’, a day-long symposium on “the emotions and ethical dilemmas that [we] have to address when confronting death head-on”, part of Sick! Festival, Manchester.



FIG 12 David Harradine in conversation with a participant during Sick! Festival, Manchester 2019



FIGS 13-14 A grief gathering during Sick! Festival, Manchester 2019

## THIS GRIEF THING

2020 24 August 'How To Be Hopeful' podcast, episode 20, presented by Bernadette Russell, produced by White Rabbit Presents.

I have written a number of [blog posts](#) about the project, which have been published online at [www.feveredsleep.co.uk](http://www.feveredsleep.co.uk).

The independent [evaluation report](#) (Wakeling 2020) written on the 5 residencies in Preston, Middlesbrough, Manchester and Nottingham reveals the value of the project and the difference it has made to participants and partner organisations:

The impact of *This Grief Thing* on participants has been profound, both in terms of feedback shared explicitly with the company and through observations of the encounters and exchanges taking place in the shop or at Grief Gatherings. These outcomes encompass a wide range of themes [...] and clearly demonstrate how *This Grief Thing* has met its aims.

*This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* (p.50)

The report goes on to say:

A number of participants have spoken about *This Grief Thing* as having a profound and transformative impact on their personal experience of grief in ways that will resonate for years to come.

*This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* (p.76)

Project partners have spoken about the value and impact of the project in their local communities:

There is completely a need for this project. There is an overall loss that hangs in the air here. It's specific to post-industrial towns, ex-mining towns, where there has been a huge unresolved social issue that has been carried down generationally throughout local society. There's a lot that people here want to talk about, to work through, and resolve, but they don't have opportunities to do that. Of course, there are also people who don't feel like they want to talk and open up but who we believe would really benefit from talking. A project like *This Grief Thing*, which revolved in lots of ways around giving people a place to talk, about opening up conversations, tried to engage with both of those groups.

David Tufnell, Arts Development Officer, Middlesbrough Town Council, quoted in *This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* (p.62)

The ways in which partners have valued the project and the results of its research is further illustrated in the report:

In terms of partner organisations, as highlighted in the project's outcomes [...] interviews with staff emphasised the rich variety of ways that the project would live on through their future work. This includes two of the partner organisations now collaborating with artists in delivering social and palliative care, as well as the formation of many new connections and conversations within organisations (e.g. one partner spoke of how "I've been involved a lot more with chatting to our health team about how we in culture and arts can help"). For other organisations, the project's legacy is felt through shifting perceptions and approaches. For instance, the Creative Director of Sick! Festival has stated how Fevered Sleep's approach in *This Grief Thing* "has helped me formulate this idea of 'subject as practice'" which has in turn been "influential" in future approaches to the festival's programming. For some partner organisations, the legacy is even more concrete, however. Certain organisations have said that their contact with *This Grief Thing* has sparked the urge to keep things going, be it through further work with Fevered Sleep itself or through the organisation creating new such opportunities itself.

*This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* (p.79)

This feedback from participants and from partners demonstrates that the project has effectively achieved its aim to create accessible spaces in which grief can be acknowledged, talked about, learned about and shared. A number of the impacts experienced by participants in *This Grief Thing* are also described, by participants themselves, in the film documentation of the project.

The project has also been identified as an exemplar of research-led practice:

These sorts of approaches lodge inside you — seeing this project has helped me formulate this idea of "subject as practice" ... where the artist starts with the subject and everything comes from that. It has an integrity when the form is driven entirely by the subject. Fevered Sleep and this project have been influential in how I've ended up framing this idea when I talk about it ... It's been formative in my thinking.

Tim Harrison, Creative Director, Sick! Festival, quoted in *This Grief Thing Evaluation Report* (p.65)

The research led me to be invited to join the All Party Parliamentary Group on Bereavement Support, of which I have been a member since early 2019. This group, for which The Good Grief Trust (the UK's umbrella organisation for bereavement charities and related organisations) is secretariat, contributes to Government policy development

on bereavement, including through the National Grief Awareness Week campaign, for which Fevered Sleep was the lead arts partner in 2020.

## VII

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