

## What was your experience of Autobiology?

“It was a very challenging week for me, I had problems finding the confidence in what I was doing at first. Maybe I was putting too much pressure on myself, looking so hard for something that I initially was missing very obvious elements that could be worked on. With regards to this, I really appreciated the atmosphere that Helen and Leslie created within the group, I found more and more trust within this safety network as the week developed enabling me to really relax into an exploration. Another moment that really helped this exploration was when Helen and Leslie took a few moments with us individually to highlight what they saw/liked/questioned from the outside, these objective thoughts were a real insight and very valuable.”

“An environment of support and encouragement to inspire creative responses to our own and each others stories; a full, intense and juicy introduction into using internal stories within a performance context. I experienced a variety of strategies to frame personal stories/facts/moments in performance, with a new understanding that in using autobiography to inspire creative materials, one can do so without being self indulgent. I feel more connected within my body having worked with daily Yoga practice, which in turn accessed some stories from a deeper location in the memory of the body and the mind.”

“Autobiology was a positive experience for me. As an artist working with autobiography, I have used my body as a site for political and personal responses to my social, cultural and gendered position in society. This, on reflection had always focused on the visual body, what we can see on the outside. I had been moving toward a highly digitised exploration, masking the body through the telematic. This exploration, although insightful, appeared to disconnect the material body from the mind. Through the workshop I was able to re-connect with my material body working from the outside in. By sharing ideas with the other members

of the group I felt a rich sense of being, in the present and belonging no matter what the difference on the outside may be.”

“My experience of Autobiology was one that caused me question and challenge some of the ways I work within a really supportive group. The experience to constantly make pieces that all linked together in some way provided for a process that brought up new avenues in making for me. It was great to see the wealth of information we can draw out of ourselves to share in performance. It provided me with strategies for making that I will hold on to develop in my practice”

“Autobiology was a really wonderful time and space to connect all my various bodies together and allow new ideas to transform my perception of physical existence, experience and memory. I really enjoyed the interviews with Doctor and the fascinating information that arose from experiences outside the group, (athletes training mentally with results equal to physical training, heart donors acquiring memories with the organ tissue!). I was initially disappointed that we weren't going to be hooked up with wires but I soon preferred the personal self-sustainable processes we could take home, and our ability to refer to the scientific research to gauge our own experiences.

The quick tempo of generating words/movements/atmospheres/discussion worked really well in the context of the group being a safe place for experiment and release of memories. The mass of material generated from within to without was often intense but was nicely tempered with the daily inclusion of yoga as a calm, interior time to explore my awareness of my presence physically and mentally. I think that combination of performance and yoga was mutually beneficial.

The people on the course were very generous, open and respectful, both participants and Helen and Leslie. This created a particular space that allowed a lot work to emerge that I don't think would have otherwise.”

“An enjoyable few days, the opportunity to work with new people was lovely, and the Yoga was great each day. There inevitably moments that I felt under pressure

but these were handled with great care.”

“My experience of the ‘Autobiology’ workshop was a very positive one. It is rare to find yourself within such a supportive group of people and under such excellent facilitation. The general atmosphere was instantly very welcoming and not at all intimidating. However, a certain standard of performance and process was set early on which encouraged us to challenge and push ourselves.

I feel the workshop was very well prefaced, giving just enough information beforehand. The week was set out clearly from the beginning, giving a sense of shape, yet with enough space for ambiguity/flexibility. Exercises were described well, were very relevant, clearly structured and rounded off with very useful critical discussion. It was invigorating to be given a task to complete in a short amount of time and to work in a fairly instinctive way with near strangers. However, having mentioned short time frames real time was always given for discussion and reflection, allowing material to be absorbed and new discoveries to be made/realised. The right amount of pressure was given and creativity was never stifled through stress.

It was helpful to be given personal feedback at the end of week and was incredibly productive to have performance partners giving an outside opinion. The structure of yoga at 12 and interview afterwards provided a foundation of certainty that created a safe/relaxed yet rigorously structured environment.

The experience was better than I could have anticipated, providing me with a set of tools, new contacts and new material to be used in the future.”

“A totally positive and joyful week. I thought that a safe space to play, fail, and try things was fostered very quickly. I loved that there were a large number of different activities/provocations each day, so that you did not have time to get attached to anything. I felt there was a good variety of levity and gravity in the tone of the work, a lot of space for laughter and also for reflection.”

“My experience of Autobiology was very positive. I really enjoyed the focus of the sessions and the depth and diversity of work that manifested through out the week. I felt the way the group was received and instructed set the tone for a safe, supportive, encouraging and challenging process. I got a huge amount out of it in terms of generation of material, working with the body, meeting other artists, showing my work, getting feedback and suggestions for where to go next.

I find the crossing of science and art an interesting and fertile area. I was very pleased to work in a focused way using different methods to generate material for performance. I found the yoga extremely effective for getting in touch with the body and accessing a flow of thoughts and feelings.

I thought there would be a bio feed back machine to produce images with but understood time constraints were a valid reason for not embarking in this direction also keeping with an organic process. Looking back the 'map your body' exercise was a self-penned version with lots of scope and personal insight! I liked the methodology used, I felt care had been taken in devising and tending the shape of the week and even each day with different exercises. The semi automatic writing exercises we opened with were a great way in and sharing selected words or phrases together in an experimental way set a freeing, fun, and experimental group atmosphere.

Automatic writing on flight fight freeze, generated memories and helped to focus on the gut responses. I had an extraordinary experience on Autobiology. “

“The yoga was a good anchor for each day, and the notion of going through movement without a sense of achievement or judgment spilt into the other parts of the week, freeing us up to make work without reproach. The mix of group and individual work was great; I feel I had a brief insight into other people's making practices which was inspiring. I enjoyed the interview with the Gastroenterologist - I would have liked a little more time just understanding the science of how gut and

brain are physiologically linked.”

“I had a really positive experience and thoroughly enjoyed the week – it felt expansive and authentic. It felt like there were lots of gentle approaches for ‘getting at’ the subject. Most of which worked for me – although I didn’t find that I needed the bodily (medical) images or tool/equipment to connect more with an inside bodily feelings. Although perhaps the discussion provoked by these images was interesting and did evoke connections. The yoga and automatic writing worked especially well bodily-connecting things for me. I also really enjoyed the translation of creative bodily experiences into some kind of (unpressured) product. I thought that this was really important (for my practice) as it made the experience not only interesting but also directly relevant and useful for future work.”

“My most overwhelming experience of the workshop was how the structure facilitated a clear, supportive and strong group dynamic. The workshop felt supported by the journey of the group experience as a structure - mutual encouragement, unique vibrancies and quirks were celebrated or challenged and each person took responsibility within this.

I think this reflected the subtle and sensitive nature with which the group and feedback system had been established and sustained by you both. Negotiating working independently and with others created a strong sense of the eclectic and different working practice's and supported the growth of groups 'supportive and honest' dynamic and individual work.”

“I enjoyed Autobiography workshop very much. And I reconsidered that my works has been some kinds of autobiographies of me. In my work, I may have keep saying how this world looks like or what this world consists of and how I am involved in the world, which means I'm telling MY story because the world I am talking about is Me, Myself, My outer/inner body. So, I thought to make autobiographical work, I don't have to tell my father's habit or some anecdotes about my childhood but I can just focus on what I want to perform.”

“At the end I felt exhausted but full of ideas and possibilities for questions to ask, ideas to explore and work to house these.

From the memory of literal gut problems when falling for someone new - being in a downtown Brooklyn corner shop buying lemonade and a huge catering pot of salt to try and create a DIY dialyte style cure. A remembrance of my vision is being hampered. Holding on to walls when attacked with these gut-shifting flashes. This led to toilet image which went towards the first piece I did presented - being horizontal over a loo. Also a reopening of thoughts about the gut, the body and gender and where in the body we feel most masculine or feminine and when and why. A lot of textual repetitions. Texts about big turning points.”

“It was a challenge and maybe a turning point for me. A challenge because I had to do a lot of things that I am not used to do such as writing in English, drawing, Yoga exercises, performances without piano, being just me, working collectively, etc. But everything went very smoothly and surprisingly achievable. Suddenly, I was doing something different and it was making sense! I think the atmosphere that you created was very important to the success of the workshop. I never felt I had to compete with others or that I needed to prove that "I was good". This is very rare; the world is judging us all the time. When or where can we try something different and not be afraid of doing mistakes? This workshop was a place for that. It gave us the chance to experiment something different, to try new things. More, we did that to an audience of experts! It was a great opportunity to challenge ourselves. This was my first non-musical workshop. In the future, I think I will do more workshops like this, just to put myself in an unexpected situation, to do something different, and to see what happens. This is essential to make us lose inner barriers that inhibit us of having, as Lena said, a ‘full life?!’”

“I found it a very hard and confrontational week, but the people were all really brilliant. It was great to work with such a varied mix of artists, all working from a similar curiosity. There was a deep level of trust and respect.”

“It was quite fascinating to be working from the body in this way, for me, quite unusual in some respects and definitely out of my comfort zone which at times was difficult but ultimately very rewarding. I found it picked up towards the middle of the week when it was more performance and action based with quick group and solo performances these were great fun and I didn't have time to think which was great!!! I found the semi-automatic writing a real challenge and its something I will try to continue as my usual method is to take quite a long time over words so I am trying to work with text a lot more fluidly now. Overall I had an amazing experience - my worst moment was the group words session - thinking up new words for biofeedback my body froze at this point! The best part for me were the 5 minute feedback sessions, the quick 'on-the-spot' performances and group performances as this was such a challenge for me.”

“I felt privileged, challenged, moved. The experience of attending Autobiology was both sensitive and political at the same time. Very sensuous and intensive. I felt like being cut off from the world, but at the same time connected to my inner self in relation to the world. Very dark (in a good way) time of life. Deep. Textual. Bodily.”

“I found the workshop extremely liberating and it enabled me to tap into abilities/possibilities I'd not been aware of or tried before. This was partly due to the subject matter, partly due to it being the first time I was involved in performing in about 12 years, and a lot to do with way that you created an environment for creativity that was at once generous and supportive, and at the same time professional and no nonsense. I hugely enjoyed your manner - both informal and properly serious about the work, and I was impressed by the way you handled the very different kinds of experience (both professional and personal) that the different participants brought to the group.”

“This was a dynamic workshop that challenged the practitioner creatively and intellectually. The workshop exercises were provocative and presented different ways of interrogating the body as a source of creative material – notions of cellular

memories, genetic encoding and kinetic stories were explored. Senses were examined as a source for narratives, which provided a unique position to begin generating written and physical texts. The use of yoga was exceptionally interesting, because as you became aware of the body, as the body was awoken it became a mnemonic – stories, memories and recollections hidden within the everyday body, were stimulated to the surface through the physical exercise. There was a spaciousness that permitted the body to speak and most importantly, be heard.”

“It was a good week, very engaging. I do love(/hate) to be in a situation where you are forced to create stuff without over-thinking or second-guessing yourself. So, tight deadlines, pressured situations, frequently turn out to have been productive once safely over.

One of the things that happened was I got reconnected to ways of making things up, or playing, that used to be typical for me, like being silly, or using doggerel verse, or getting an idea very quickly and decisively without trying too hard. The time pressure meant that I had to go with my natural response so in a way, the workshop has been like permission to be that person.”

“As a writer I found the speed writes liberating and challenging. The challenge was bypassing the censoring that naturally occurs – the reluctance to articulate certain memories – especially if they were traumatic and pre-expressive when they originally happened. I especially struggled with tenses. One exercise focused on the family in relation to what is passed onto to us subliminally, genetically or overtly. The exercise was presented in the present tense and as my parents died a long time ago (26yrs), I closed down to the exercise – but that in it’s self was interesting, because the choice to close down was made by the child in me, rather than the adult. I should have just written about that, but the child wouldn’t even let me do that. In many respects my parents became very present through this process, I felt that I was able to honour them and delve into deeper memories that went beyond their deaths in 1983. There was something really lovely about that – I found their

laughter again. I also found an interesting way to write about it too. A poetic form that wasn't self-indulgent and gave me confidence to explore this further."

"As a performer I gained a great deal of confidence through this process. I haven't actually performed in over twenty years – not seriously and I am desperate to get back into it. I felt that the exercises we undertook, pushed me to think beyond the norm, to take risks and to find the beginnings of my own methodology as a performer. I felt grounded through the process of performance and enjoyed the chance to work individually and with Clare as part of a duet. I also appreciated watching other's work. This autobiographical way of working generates unique and dynamic work, because everyone's autobiography and biology are unique. In many respects I discovered a new appreciation of my body as a viable site for performance – the physical and spoken text."

"I found it hard at first because I have a habit of forgetting a lot of my memories and experiences. Or evoking specific ones can be very difficult. It's sometimes frustrating to work with your autobiography and your own feelings because it can get so 'samey'. The method of working was really rigorous and it really forced you to stay with it. The yoga made you be in the body and in the moment. I got into it in the end when I had less to worry about outside the workshop; Friday was a really nice day for me. Seeing yourself and your work through somebody else (and their work) was immensely useful. Working with a performance partner was brilliant."

"This was an amazing opportunity to work with well-established and inspiring artists, learn about their working processes and receive invaluable feedback about my own practice. Autobiology was also a good networking opportunity through which I managed to meet many diverse performance makers. A really well managed group, and well-structured workshop. We worked really hard, which was very rewarding and I feel like time frames were well considered so that we could get the most out of the week. The subject matter we were working with was really

interesting, and it was great to meet so many other artists and observe their working methods and different approaches to this stuff. It felt like a safe working environment, everybody was very respectful of each other, and I feel like the kind of exercises we were doing, and the way that Helen and Leslie both led sessions encouraged a really good mix of fun/play/experiment that could sit quite happily with, and amongst the more serious kind of issues that always arise when people start working with autobiographical material. I also enjoyed the amount of time given over to solo work, as well as group work, timed feedback, and especially our half hour 'tutorial'/feedback type slots on the Friday, it felt very beneficial to have quality one to one time with another member of the group”

“I enjoyed the whole week very much, particularly the hard work involved in working five days a week 10-6. It showed me that it is actually possible to work full-time as an artist. The physical activity, such as Yoga and the morning warming-up were very effective in achieving this. I have incorporated the Yoga practice into my working day since then, with amazing results. I also enjoyed that the workshops took place at Artsadmin, it contributed even more to the sense of ‘artists at work. I was exploring themes of biography and biology in my work when I heard about the Autobiology workshops, it was very interesting to work with artists from different disciplines that were interested in the same subject.”

**Can you briefly describe how you experienced working with gut feelings? What particular images, texts, memories or ideas were generated from the gut?**

“When working with the gut, I feel I was working with my physical memory to enhance my visual memory. By thinking of a time that I had a strong experience of a gut feeling I was generally reminded of what it felt like rather re-accounting a story of it. However, as the week progressed I was able to work amongst the two. Playing with verbally visualizing and physicalising the memory and literally

remembering the body memory. I realised that by thinking with gut feelings I was more able to take risks with what I was making because the choices I made depended on what, I suppose, I instinctually felt was right at that moment. I then had to contend with when I was censoring myself and whether that was necessary. The body map I drew of myself was a great generation of material within this process of making.”

“Using the body as an interior research resource was quite new to my art practice. I found the dynamic very stimulating and it yielded a surprising reservoir of memories, ideas and imagery. Some were quite unusual to me, e.g. an intense observation and fascination of a particular part of landscape, a stone, that I remembered experiencing. This surfaced from unknown depths and I found myself moving in a way that made my bodily centre the landscape object. It was very curious to try to describe with words after performing the movements for the group; I revealed my thoughts on it to my own verbal conscious and simultaneously to the rest of the group as I wasn't thinking verbally during the exploratory and performance process. That connection my body made between memory and observation made a lasting impact on me and the scope for understanding through my body. In terms of the week this specific exercise wasn't one that I repeated, (instead exploring words and audience interaction), but the approach of leaving verbal explanations and logical considerations to the post-performance analysis continued to be important.”

“I found it easier to work from the gut when I had limited time to put together a 'performance moment', when there was limited time to create something practical I was forced to work intuitively (whether this worked or not), this was the thrill of just doing it and 'trusting' in it!

Drawing specific memories and stories from the body was much more challenging - as the week went on it became clearer that this was because this way of working is unfamiliar territory for me. My working process is more spontaneous, automatic emotional responses collected and formulated to illuminate nuances, fragments re-

formed to re-create stories, moments that are not literal, distinct moments from my own history. Slowly I allowed my way of 'interpreting' how the gut feeds into the material that surfaces to form and then things began to surface of an ephemeral nature (not so specific) but resonant of times in my life and stories I had heard - the views (ways of looking and perspectives coupled with longing and waiting), letters and telegrams (notes and memories notated) - felt more like a call (re-call) and response tactic where something of the essence of a memory lingers in the body - a certain frequency, a flavour or colour that tints your world and how you exist and respond within it. I associate this with 'smells' - a resonant smell has a physical impact of such an extent that I am transported back to a place and time, this is potent and physically re-felt but is not a specific memory or story. It could remind me of my grandmother or of a route I walked home from school..."

"I experienced working with gut feeling by developing a trust in my decisions, whether they were right or wrong, they were trusted. Allowing this feeling as a basis for decision-making often means risk taking, and it's from this that the work created goes in directions you cannot pre-conceive. I had a distinct experience from the body memory work we spent time with. I felt like I was being pulled and pushed by a tide, which I feel is linked to the birthing canal. This was at a point in the workshop where I felt connected in my body so to go through it in this memory way allowed for internal connections to become externalised."

"It is interesting to notice that the majority of useful material generated in the week arose through the automatic writing and body memory exercises. I feel these exercises particularly tapped into the gut, encouraging an instinctive way of working. In the body memory exercise in particular I experienced a particular connection between mind and body and felt my body was 'moved' rather than consciously 'moving'. I was surprised that unintended words arose vocally.

I was also surprised that instead of developing material I had brought with me or

directly extending material created through the week, the culminating performance reflected on my process itself. Certain exercises highlighted this e.g. in the body memory exercise I began to speak of holding a bird, of letting a bird go and of watching it fly. In looking back over the week and taking into account outside feedback I realized that personally and creatively I often hold on/try so hard that I don't allow enough space for things to fly or fully live. This was an incredibly useful acknowledgment. One that hopefully will lead to an improved practice, but that has also provided extensive subject material to be developed.

“It was hard to access gut feelings living in my head I had to analyse this response. Did I think I had a gut feeling just when a suspicion or anxiety turned out to be true? However it is a great phrase to bring up these mind body links or lack of them.

The lead pipe description by my Dr. The awareness of a part of my body that I measures my stress level so I cant hide them. A measure of my hormones my place in my cycle. The childhood phobia of lengths of it being wrapped around a tree trunk. My sisters toilet anxiety dreams.”

“I guess I already felt some affinity with working with gut feelings (prior to attending the workshop), in that I'm aware that I often use bodily feeling as a guide both to making creative decisions as well as more everyday ones. In the workshop I found the creating of the body map to be a moment where I felt particularly in tune with gut feelings. I felt like I was checking in with my body (especially the gut area) when making choices about the creation of my map. I'm aware that I was using the bodily practice of staying quite physically connected to the work I was creating - which gives the process an authenticity - the feel that it's really coming from the mix that makes up me in that precise moment (rather than a me I would like to be - and as a result work I would like to make). It's sort of like saying, “even if this doesn't work out 'well' - this is what I *feel* like doing” and trying to stay true to that feeling in the act of creation. I guess I can be pulled away by a more rational,

intellectualising critical part of me (perhaps a more thought based part of me) that makes me do things I don't feel so physically connected to but intellectually justify them as the "right" creative actions. I guess I feel some sort of push and pull between these two places of creation– and I try to find strategies to stay connected with the more instinctive (trusting, authentic) process then a more detached intellectual one. It depends on the day as to which wins out. The resulting colours and style or realisation of the map was very much a result of a feeling, gut, instinctive process – I remember trying very hard to trust in that process of creation – and the short and focused time limit allowed me to maintain that for the most part. I felt a real sense of presence in that exercise. I think that this presence or really 'being in the moment' is something I particularly enjoy both about moments in the creative process when everything is flowing – and in performance experience (when I feel present a lot of the time).

I guess there is a "calm waters" sort of feeling in the top of my stomach (diaphragm) area and also I'm sensitive to feelings in my throat and chest (even if it's quite deep down and masked by conflicting or overlaid thoughts – but it's still there underneath that – and asking gently seems to get an answer. Conversely when something doesn't feel "right" it's much more of a choppy sea, and a feeling of ants in my body – a twitchiness and an uncomfortability and 'things being out of place'ness, like the feeling I get when my house is quite untidy.

In some ways the automatic writing exercises feel quite gut generated. Partly because the form of the exercise permits a letting go of the control of what you are creating. Somehow this facilitates a return to something more instinctive or as the title of the exercise suggests, automatic. I was regularly surprised by the content of my writing particularly the emotional family based stuff – which feels quite deep down – almost forgotten but still important to me.

The body memory exercise generated quite strong “gut-felt” images and a strong ‘sense of something’ for me – images of a golden birdcage, lined with silk with little pockets in for hiding things. An expandable birdcage with a place for everything – that could also be very small when necessary. A place with an invisible way of getting in, a secret door. Very magical, intriguing and reassuring.”

“I guess I am wondering how to describe my gut feeling of how I experienced working with gut feelings! I am much more aware of the small brain in my stomach now, this is quite active at the moment (generally and whilst typing this response)...Working with gut feelings was very emotionally draining at times, particularly in the body memory exercise, I was completely alien to where and how my body was accessing emotions which left me feeling quite tired and physically and emotionally breathless. I feel as though generally what was generated from the gut was fairly tiring, often accessing emotions that as humans we often suppress a little. This is something I would like to be able to convert, I would love my body to unexpectedly access moments for pure joy or ecstasy!”

“My experience of working with gut feelings reminded me of the importance of being connected with the body. In our current climate with the attack on the senses through advertising, the internet, television, radio etc our visual appetite becomes bigger swelling the brain with all kinds of information which grow to be numbing and second nature. With all this going on, how can we listen to ourselves, for ourselves with so many channels clogging our biological systems?”

I was surprised at how much memory was held in the depths of my biological systems, particularly the way it made me feel and brought up various answers and realisations to questions I had never cared to ask or didn’t even know I was looking for. I had memories of physical traumas, illnesses, likes and dislikes of foods and habits I still keep. The yoga exercises offered me a space for reflection during the week and it felt healthy to feel myself working again. I experimented a lot with movement which I had not previously worked with, this gave me exciting new ideas

for possibilities in performance work.”

“Oddly, I have been much more aware of colour ever since the workshop, and of the lack of distinction between the cerebral and the gut: thoughts being felt throughout the body. Because we worked in such an intensive and structured way, it is difficult to remember how I came up with the ideas that I used. The process itself lent itself so strongly to using gut reactions (not least because there was little time for anything else) to the instructions, that it is difficult to remember. I did have some gut feeling at the beginning of discomfort with the workshop, which were to do with my own nervousness about performance and generating material in this way (I find it difficult to regard my autobiography as in any way interesting as performance material), but this vanished as I became used to the activities, came to trust the group, and found material that felt right.”

“I found it surprising how possible it was to tap into memories, both recent and past, by recollecting a particular gut feeling. And that these invoked memories were full of detail - extending into remembering sensations of touch, smell, temperature and taste. The body memory exercise on the first day I found tough - trying not to self-censor - but again the images, songs, words and rhythms generated/remembered seemed to come without my head being involved, which I found fascinating. Again, the automatic writing work seems to bypass your head and let you just write from somewhere else, perhaps the gut. So it was almost like spending a few days with this other bit of yourself who has a lot to say but who is usually ignored. Starting with the gut, rather than the head, put other parts of the body in focus, parts I would normally not think about so much. For example working more with hands, fingers, arms. When working with other people's secret body information, I noticed the group came up with decisions about how to present them very fast and stayed with them, and they seemed authentic and truthful instincts to follow.”

“What I chose to explore through my performance was the disassociation – the juxtaposition between the physical feminine/masculine body recollecting love and loss; the live and dead; presence and absence. The text played with the notion of touch of grasping and letting go, of love and letting go and of honouring the person you love most in the world as they decide to give up the fight.”

“I think that apart from the first day, in which I felt I was using ideas just because I had to do something, it was a case of using gut feelings to make decisions about what material to use and how. It has been very interesting to explore my personal relationship with gut feelings: I think everything, in terms of ideas, comes from there, and is very quickly translated into more cerebral ideas/images/intuitions. I've noticed that”

“It is impossible (for me) to create auto-biographical or biological work without connecting with the deepest parts of my being. On those 'excavations' I was bound to run into things I would like to keep buried for just a little longer. I then realized that this was part of the work I could take inspiration from. Working with the awareness & simultaneous resistance of digging for information and wanting to cover it up at the same time. A sense of dancing in between the two. The final performance piece was expressing the notion that if you try to cover up your bodies voice, it will only start shouting louder. The blanked out body (by a shower curtain;) then becomes a projection screen for the body to tell its story.”

“This is personal for me, it was not, light subject matter that came out, it really surprised me - I always laden my ideas and performances with many layers so that you almost cannot see the personal - but as it was gut feelings I felt the personal came to me a lot more freely and unapologetically. I worked with the gut feeling that I'll never be able to conceive naturally with my partner, I worked with gut feelings of my responses to fear, memories of my body and of my families bodies and mannerisms. Images and text that came out were to do with the stomach, the

head, touch and gaze I worked with quite strong visual images by wearing a torch headlight and the use of string.”

“Gut feeling is from dantian. It sharpens our senses up to let us avoid some dangers, tell our love and change our future by accelerating our decisions and reactions. The color is thick yellow or orange. AH! It must be the magma from the volcano on the continent I drew on my body map (refer to it and see the pelvis). It explodes from dantian to the other body parts and occupies them, even breaths and brains.”

“The immediate image that came to mind was that of my partner the moment she gave up hope of recovering from a brain tumour – as such it was an intense thing to focus on. I couldn’t shift it either, I tried to push it away so I could find a ‘nicer’ recollection to work with, but I couldn’t. I sat with the memory for a while and I could feel the adrenalin within my body, had recollections of heart palpitations and the sensation of disassociation. Of physically being present in the ICU and yet my consciousness screaming outside, no doubt somewhere by the sea. It was interesting going back into that moment – recollecting the physical memories as well as the emotional memories. Remembering the sound of the machines that were keeping her alive, the sterility of the room, the bandage around her head, the nurse at the foot of her bed choreographing the medication – it became such a potent moment and yet the writing was quite sparse – maybe there are no words. As a performer maybe you’re selective with the language – maybe the language can only ever define the disassociation of that moment – the body remains the true site of memory.”

“Constant feeling of being in love. Pleasure, pain and guilt. Past – kind of replay and fiction. Detailed past through imaginative memory. Emotionally draining and exciting at the same time. Something forbidden. Tomatoes, SMA Gold baby formula milk,

Baby lotion, sounds from the throat. Idea for constant movement. Sharp exchanges between movement and stillness. Swaying. Always out of balance.”

“Because I was a very shy child, I always experienced the gut feelings in me (as they are described by the doctor in your documentary). It happened every time I was in an unusual, unsafe, or unexpected situation. Through the years I learnt to control them, i.e., instead of letting me being dominated or blocked by them, I use them to do something greater than my fear, to do something bigger than me, to break inner barriers, to do more and better. Gut feelings are part of my life now. Nowadays they are generated by situations where I need to expose myself to others (as a performer or speaker, in conferences for instance) or to someone in particular (like "I love you" and/or "I have to leave you" situation). Gut feelings run both my professional and private life; that is why I've said that I am a professional of gut feelings! I always tried to avoid them but the fact is that I achieved great things in life because of them. I accept them and I enjoy nowadays experiencing all the biochemical changes in my body. Gut feelings make me feel alive!”

“I was reminded of where my heart is as it pumped away whenever I got nervous. And I was reminded where my gut is as feelings of tiredness kept coming out if it all the time and I realised how powerful it is. In that respect, yoga was useful although (or because) my body kept fighting it. I find working with gut feelings difficult as I seem to forget a lot of my memories and the automatic writing was often like walking in tar and I somehow kept censoring myself or took the instruction too literally. Things like running with Steve in our short performance about fight/flight/freeze were useful because it was about literally working with the body. Making a gut manifestation was useful because it allowed me to rehearse the experience and see if other people could join me in feeling it too.”

“Working with gut feelings is not a totally new concept to me, but it was unusual for me to focus so much time and attention on them, so that the things I thought I

knew about these kind of feelings sometimes gave way to other feelings which I didn't know were there, and encouraged a deeper exploration of the ones I was aware of...for example, although the story I told to the camera about 'all the glass falling from the windows', being punched in the stomach, can't move, can't speak, time freezes, everything changes, but everything is the same, no-one has noticed, Big Love, swallow it whole sort of sensation...is a strong memory that I am very familiar with, and have written about before, and even located it in that centre/gut sort of a place, but I had never before noticed that the sinking-sick-heavy-fish scales-and-fishbones, dangerous-warning sort of feeling that I also talked/wrote about, seems to be located in the same place. I think there was something in the approach to these images/ feelings that was different to my normal way of working, and made me access them in a different way- normally I have a feeling or sensation, and even if I feel it very physically or viscerally, it is normally fairly quickly translated into words or images and sort of leaves the body behind. This week I felt like a lot of those similar images/memories/texts were being accessed from the body first, and encouraged to stay there, to feel the weight of them without dislocating them immediately (if this is making any sense to you?!)- like the bolt!! Ha ha, which was a new image and total surprise but can be traced back to all sorts of experiences and physical and emotional memories. I think the kind of yoga we were doing really helped with this kind of physical and mental focus and freedom- I do do yoga sometimes anyway, but I have never stayed in the poses for so long or been able to focus on breath so successfully- this is something I will definitely endeavor to integrate into my practice! So the particular sensations that were generated from the gut for me were STRONG ones- Love, Hate, Fear, Danger...and were articulated in images/texts that involved sensations and to some extent physical gut function- the taste of certain foods (salt, orange soup, fish), the idea of swallowing a feeling, swallowing fish bones, swallowing your heart, swallowing your fear, and holding it down in your stomach like you would food, fighting with yourself to reject or accept it. Sinking and rising (fear/ hope or bile!) The feeling of being punched in the stomach and winded. I also noticed with amusement, that throughout the

week, although I felt perfectly happy and safe, and even familiar with most of the personal material and 'gut feelings' I was dealing with, my body was reacting physically, beyond my control- I had trouble eating (and swallowing), my stomach was unsettled, I had trouble sleeping, I felt homesick (for nowhere in particular, or nowhere that exists anymore!), coughing, headaches and other such familiar ailments that are often my body's reaction to things that are happening, which in this instance weren't even 'happening', but I was thinking about and accessing the memory of such things. It was fine, I knew I would be back to normal afterwards, and I am, I just found it interesting to note these uncontrollable reactions, and ways we can find of working around or with them.

“I associate gut feelings with imminent change, things that I should change myself and I am actually in the process of changing. The gut feeling is the realization of the process of change that it is happening and should continue without fear. I also associate thinking of death with changes that are about to happen and gut feelings.”

“I tried to operate spontaneously and not allow myself to edit out first inclinations. On one occasion I added something to a performance almost as an afterthought, without any strong feelings about it and this was the only part that didn't particularly work. Interesting!”

“Did I get gut feelings? I don't know. (I didn't feel them as gut feelings). I did get very awake – that's a great feeling, it's also very calm. Deep and calm, and alert. Wearing off slowly, dammit! – but I'd call it a whole body feeling. A whole body and extending into the aura feeling.

So whether it's possible to call up that alertness at will, I don't know – I suppose the argument behind the workshop is, yes, by following this process, you can – that I'm not sure of: there was a very supportive group thing going on, and that isn't

easily reproduced. Also, I have got into that deep alertness state doing work before – it feels very normal when you're in it so you don't always notice until it wears off, or you might notice odd things are happening (like total strangers inviting you home for dinner, that sort of thing). In the drawing I did I was glad to notice the calm person who watches, whose eyes are wide open, is actually still there. These things are like a gift that I take from the workshop:

That my deep and engrained silliness is a huge part of my creativity.

That I'm still here. (I wrote 'her' for 'here' at first...hmm).

Oh, and, I suppose, permission to spend time on ones body as explicitly part of practice.

Another thing I noticed from the photographs. Sometimes the photographs really show what happened in the performance; sometimes whatever it was that happened in the performance is just not there in the photograph at all. Odd.”

“The work on gut feelings took place in several ways or approaches at the same time. In a range of tasks and exercises I was introduced to stories, facts and experiences on gut feelings, which I then 'digested' and which 'fed into' the work I produced in these five days.

I enjoyed a lot the tasks where we had to develop a scene or small performative moment in 10min as that meant to go with the first idea and follow it up without thinking too much. You asked us at some point in the very beginning of the workshop if a story/ experience we came up with was our first idea that came into our mind. So I think some of this work was generated more from the gut as there was no time to think it too much through. I found it very liberating to go with these 'gut ideas'.

Also I was interested in the performances we developed on the Wednesday with

the task to share a certain gut feeling with the audience. How can you share a gut feeling beyond conventional ways of representation/empathy?

Images, texts, memories:

- The text of my grandparents almost fleeing on the Wilhelm Gustloff boat
- The idea to let a paper boat embark on the water in front of the Arnolfini
- The idea to let audience members swallow baguette bread to experience a 'lump in the throat'
- Producing a milk lake...and many more"

## Is this a methodology or way of working you might incorporate into your practice in the future?

“This course has completely transformed my practice. As a visual artist the only time I had used writing in the last few years was for proposals and catalogues. I have found a storytelling voice and style a new way of working. It has increased my confidence to be heard and seen, my performance fear is much more manageable. After my performance at the Little Angel Theatre last night (developed from one I created at Autobiology) I couldn't sleep I had so much adrenaline, excitement and change going on.”

“I intend to continue and further the yogic practice. I found this very difficult at first, but by the end of the week could really feel the benefit in terms of connecting mind and body through breath as well as calming the conscious mind. I have not used automatic writing as a tool to generate performance before, but will definitely continue to do so, (especially extending the idea of combining different people's automatic writing). Autobiographical material was always something I had approached in a rather abstract manner whereas now I feel I could make more obvious use of it as a resource. I can see now that autobiographical text can provide the perfect structure for an audience to relate to, whilst addressing broader subjects.

I will try to maintain some of the playfulness present within the workshop and will try to set myself structured tasks under time limits to help myself 'do' more often without worrying about a final product.

Very much appreciated the collaborative exercises. E.g. I felt it was a very useful technique to tell each other stories and then perform those stories back to the teller. The week confirmed to me that I need to work with others and confirmed the importance of both an outside eye and of working within a supportive community.

The week was particularly fruitful in terms of initiating collaborations and in informing my decision to move to Bristol and into the performance scene here.”

“Yes, I think I would. I feel the group really helped the atmosphere in being really enthused by trying these ideas out and making really interesting work.”

“Definitely. If not using gut feelings as subject matter, using them to feel out research and realisations of art! Although I may not singularly pursue the interior, subtle abstractions of the stone-inspired exercise, the yoga offers me a similar approach to body awareness. As my own multi-body awareness improves I feel my ability to relate to my environment and will improve and my (often site-specific) art practice - be it performance based or sound, video or installation. I have continued with yoga and this has also been a wonderful asset to my recent practice in helping me to calmly inhabit a project that was being constantly restricted and changed by forces outside of my charge: a truly important tool when a deadline looms as it allowed me to continue to make creative decisions and process in a responsive way rather than as a stressful reaction!

The expectation to use personal text and words as a tool in the workshop reacquainted me with writing which I have previously almost always kept separate from my practice. Experiencing the rest of the group’s approach to text and their ways of involving it in performance was really rich for me and encouraged my to lose the personal/professional boundaries that crept into my artistic practice. I am happily continuing writing all sorts of material now in one notebook again and my latest exhibition incorporated a text sound piece.”

“This is defiantly a methodology I will use in the future, previously I was cautious of making autobiographical work but this workshop has led me to understand that it doesn't have to be extremely self conscious even if it is autobiographical, I simply

found that the work that was generated was so much more poignant because it had come from an extremely real place within the artist. This seems so obvious in hindsight but it really took this experience to fully appreciate that.”

“Absolutely – I feel like it is a rich way of making work, because it’s sort of using the entirety of you to create the work. Also I think there is a lot of trusting yourself that goes on to allow you to make decisions when creating work. In that intellectually ideas can be difficult to justify/explain particularly when they are just emerging – so it’s often a process of sensing, and feeling and allowing something to breathe and live for a bit. Although I feel that there is a place for reflection, criticism, looking at the way the work you have made/or are making sits in the world – I sort of feel that this is a separate stage. I’m really interested in something someone told me about Disney – that he thought about different stages about making. Creating a space for the dreamer, realist and critic – and how his staff had separate rooms to go into to do these activities. I haven’t been able to find anything that backs up this story but find it interesting. As I feel that the separation of the dreamer phase has always been really important when I have made work and I know that I’ve often used the phrase “let’s just dream”. I think that for me the dreaming state has always been a place of gut feeling too – although of course it has some kind of more mind based image stuff as well. I think that I’ll find some of the strategies of gut/bodily connection we explored really useful devices to use in future work. I also found the week a more enjoyable process than usual. More intellectual rooted processes can make me feel like a pressure cooker and quite trapped and bound. Conversely I found the creative process we were exploring throughout the week expansive and like I had room for all the things going on when trying to make things during the week. Also I’d like to bring the yoga (and the bodily time out it gave me) into my practice – or if not yoga strictly, then something else that might give this. It directly showed (reminded) me that the answer doesn’t always lie in diligently working through something – but time out, particularly doing something bodily seemed to open up things in an indirect way.”

“I feel more relaxed about approaching new work now. I feel a good sense of beginnings with the exercises practiced during the workshop. I want to begin everything from the body and use automatic text as a method to communicate what comes out. I think I have always used gut feelings as a trusted source for decision making while working on projects, but now I’m interested in starting from the gut.”

“I have always avoided autobiography work as what I had seen before had been self-indulgent; however now I understand that it is not the topic that forms this, but the individual. It’s a hugely rich area to explore and has every potential to become any number of performance styles. It feels like a new tool to play with and a vehicle of sharing, although the story may be very personal the way in which it is used could articulate an image or moment within the viewer. It’s such a diverse area, and can be translated to a variety of contexts. As a young practitioner, the connections between my work and my ideas are emerging into themes. The connections created and developed during this week of exploration have given me the space to learn risk again, and connect to performance through a different frame.”

“Gut feeling is something that I know about and use from time to time, but I equally allow my "committee" to talk me out of decisions, such that I can spend a long time going around the idea before returning to it: I will try and avoid going around the houses in future.”

“I would like to try it in my teaching and see how other people work with it. “

“What I take away from these workshops is that working from memory is an authentic way of working too, this opens many possibilities for my work in front of the camera as I don’t have to rely only in recording events or actions as they are

happening. I will continue to investigate visceral changes in reaction to events and consider expressing them through the body, especially through the facial expressions. Making the internal changes apparent is very important in my present work.

It was interesting for me to explore my family biography and mannerisms, as we live in different countries, I don't always have our history present. I wasn't able to incorporate these in the final performance, but I feel they should be present in future work as where I come from defines who I am, even if those memories feel quite distant from where I live now. I'll also consider exploring the impact of world events to my biography to add more layers to the work and to connect with a wider number of people through it. I found the automatic writing quite helpful in exploring concepts and materializing ideas with more detail."

"To have a daily practice that includes generating imagery? Yes, this remains an ideal which to be honest I struggle with like a Catholic struggling to give up all earthly pleasures for the sake of the Holy Souls.

To continue the attempt to incorporate the physical into a daily practice? The workshops gave some very useful pointers as to how this might be done. Probably I shall continue with the specific yoga moves you showed us. I've been stretching daily for about a year now, though from a book, not from classes, so I know it does actually work long term – I'm trying to open out my upper back so's not to develop dowager's hump like my mum – the yin yoga felt very different.

Text and movement - I'll go with what develops. I have a verse to go with that thing with the sweeties, might try it out in public soon."

"As I work at the moment on solo-productions I don't have much time restrictions on developing performative material in my studio. As a result from this workshop I

definitely want to try to incorporate some time restrictions in my work such as coming up with an idea/ little performative scene in 10min. It is more difficult however if you are on your own to stick to such a 10min time regime and go with the first idea, but I want to experiment on including this in my work.

Also I am interested to work more on handing out material/ food etc to audience members... hmmm I can't really describe what it is, it's actually a kind of gut feeling that there is something interesting in that approach that I want to explore..."

"I've done the yoga a number of times, and find myself actively wanting to do it (my general relationship with yoga is great enthusiasm for it by the end of a session, and extreme disinclination before starting and for the first five minutes or so...).

I'm so used to being the one who has to structure the time and activities, whether working on my own or in a group that I found it a real pleasure to be responsive and take my cue from what was being asked of me. I now feel more confident about working solo - and aware that I would have to set myself clear tasks within a structure for creating work to be able to develop work effectively on my own."

"I'm stealing it all! I aiming to make a solo performance and will definitely be developing the work I generated. I'm actually interested in looking at death on a cellular level. Looking at the how it impacts those observing someone die, (grey hair in a matter of months, heart palpitations, insomnia, a stutter etc.), but also what happens to the body of those dying and dead. I'm going to look at absence and presence and further develop my creative and analytical methodology."

"Yes! First, for my upcoming performance *Masha Serghyeevn'* – there I plan to incorporate some movements/sounds/sensations from the workshop. Secondly in my lecturing work: I would like to start my teaching next year on Solo Performance Practice module (3<sup>rd</sup> year students) from the gut, rather than the mind. Bodily politics. Still doing yoga (both alone and with students, when suitable)."

“Definitely I came to the workshop looking for new techniques to generate material and have certainly come away with that and more. The body memory techniques, the writing, the immediacy of action has really strengthened by practice. It was refreshing to have so many people from different backgrounds, music, theatre, drama, contemporary and fine art - it has really shown me the breadth of live art. I am already working into my practice the text techniques and body memory and have found it a great way to work on collaboration too.”

“Yes. The mix of scientific and personal starting points was very fruitful for creating new ideas. I enjoyed the exercise combining autobiographical events with world events and will think more about that. I'd be interested to further explore the body memory work to see how it can provoke me, as my comfort zone has been to start with text.”

“I really enjoyed the automatic writing exercises... although I did find those hard to start with. I felt surrounded by all these brilliant writers, poets and wordsmiths and felt a little embarrassed about the clumsy sentences I managed to get down on paper. But the experience of freeing up the mind and allowing to express what ever comes up as an association felt very inspiring.”

“It's not easy for me to answer this because I need to write a PhD proposal that is not centred on me and that is difficult right now. I feel I am on an impasse. On the one hand, I would like to continue exploring my personal way to make "performances with music" but, on the other hand, this theme is very particular, very focus on my specific profile as a performer, and because of that it does not suit the "universal" aims of a research. I feel that I can only be free outside academy and I am a bit sad? This workshop, by focusing on my experiences and autobiography, encourages me to pursue another path in my work, centred on my stories, on the realness of me (which comes in line with my aim to be the "author of me", instead of imitating others!); but if I want to do a PhD, I cannot follow this way.

I need to find a balance between me and the academic standards; otherwise, I will need to make a hard choice between them. I don't know yet what I will do..."

"I definitely intend to carry on using the yoga practice as a way into beginning work with the right kind of physical and mental focus. Also the breathing is so helpful to me, and my rubbish lungs! I think as well, that this workshop has been good for identifying strong recurring images and themes that I think hold a stronger resonance for an audience when they come from 'the gut', there is an honesty there that I think most people can relate to. Something that is proving really useful to my current solo project, is trying to develop the use of humour, storytelling and addressing the audience in my work, in an attempt to add some light to my performance work which often seems so serious and dark. This is something that I started to work on in Autobiology, and will continue with."

## Other Comments

“The variety of ways we tell stories/impart ideas was very inspiring to me, and to experience how various participants exchanged with their audience was a great insight, as were the mini-revelations of practice that could not help but be felt by the rest of the group as we were all working so closely and on such a personal level.

The workshop was uncanny in how relevant and appropriate an experience it was for me on a personal and professional level. I've dealt with sensitive guts for years so I became consciously detached from them, observing them through a filter of medical terminology and food intolerances. This proved to be a big mistake. The revelation that the stomach has its own nervous system, a rudimentary brain, is such a pivot to how I now approach my guts. Its so interesting that stomach problems are so prevalent in the modern world and I think that the potential for a workshop such as this to have an important resonance with people on a purely personal level is really huge. “

“Thank you very much for this unique and supportive experience. I don't know where else I would have found it.”

“The structure of the week really worked for me – both the performance peaks, the yoga and the some sort of pattern but not super-rigid format. I also liked the variety of time limits you gave us during the week both in the way it gave us structure – but also that there was enough time (particularly in preparing for the Friday project) to just sit with something – and allow an idea to *germinate* a bit more (while you aren't looking at it directly). I also really enjoyed the critical feedback sessions and the “no replying” limit you placed on the Wednesday session. I thought the mix of the group was great and felt both inspired and held by the other participants.”

“Thank you Helen and Leslie for an unforgettable experience, the week has opened up new doors and I just can’t wait to start walking through them. No more walls!”

“Without the experience becoming therapeutic I accessed areas of a personal history that I feel have now been understood through a different frame. A framing. A frame. Frame.”

“I appreciated the supportive network; I felt there was a great sense of community within the group which allowed for our experiments to be generously received, considered, which was supported by detailed feedback.”

“Thank you for an incredible week, it was the right mixture of everything and I enjoyed it right up till the last second.”

“During Yoga I had an experience of going back into childhood. I remember thinking this was not usual but accepting the moment; it’s this acceptance that needs to be a focus for my development of body and mind connections. As the attention was drawn down the legs I went back in time and was standing looking at my feet holding an adult’s hand, as the attention came back up the legs into the hips I came back into my body.

I have also found a poetic written language surfacing during automatic writing, which demonstrates clearly the trust between what you instinctively create and structured ideas. I have begun to use this to generate words/text, and allowing the patterns to emerge organically. This way of creating text gives my writing an interesting rhythm, something I wasn’t aware I could do.”

“I would like to congratulate you for the workshop. It was very well designed and had the necessary flexibility that is vital to put us all comfortable with what we do. It had the right amount of personal and collective activity and you paid great attention to all of us, to the details of our stories, which is great! I think I have said everything I feel compelled to say at this moment. I’m sure its full impact will arrive later in my life. How will this be a reference in my future decisions? How will I pursue a different

kind of 'performing'? How will the body be important to my work? I still don't know the answers."

"During the workshop, I came up with this idea: I collect family resemblances of bodies, faces and manners and combine them all up to make it My family stories. So all the collected sentences start with "My..." and I will read it all as My stories. I'll do this someday. By the way, my last performance has got entitled "A Performance For My Husband" which was true..."

"I was wondering as you worked a lot with writing tasks, maybe you could also explore writing in certain body conditions/ situations, like some writers say the ideas they come up with change if they write for instance sitting in a hot bath or on the table...Hope this is helpful. I very much look forward to see performance/video work of you in the future! Thanks for being very generous and inspiring!"

"Thank you for your support, comments and feedback. It was a really beneficial week."

"It was brilliant and very generous, I hope to come across something as creative as this week in the future."

"One very nice thing that has happened is links between us workshoppees, which I'm sure will continue. Thank you both so much for a very productive event."