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# **The Space and Place of Grief in Geography: The “Avalanche Lady”**

by

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fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
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The children left at Te Pohue and I said to James 'Give me one last hug mate'.

He sprang backwards from me and said 'Mum, this is not a last hug'.

*But it was* (Robyn's personal diary).

*Dedicated to James Gordon (1982-2000)*

# Abstract

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This thesis makes an original contribution to the socio-cultural and emotional geographies literature by focusing on Robyn Gordon's (the "Avalanche Lady's") experiences of grief. I argue that space, place, and emotions are mutually constituted. Thus, geographers are aptly positioned to examine the complexities and contradictions of spatialised emotions. Ideas about space and place do not exist in a vacuum. Also, the two terms, space and place offer geographers more when conceptualised as a complementary pair rather than individually (see Agnew 2005).

By drawing on a wide range of contemporary geographical and social science literature, I explore how notions of space and place can be stretched to include "the beyond", and how they can be conceptualised as fluid, contingent, and unfinished. In order to convey these "new" configurations of space and place from within an experience of grief, I employed three key methods. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with Robyn. Further, she created a digital story using photographs, her choice of music and narrative, and kept a research diary. This empirically unique approach enabled me to produce a rich and contextualised account of what grief felt like, and continues to feel like for my respondent.

Although grief is often touted as an individual experience, I contend that it radiates out into the wider social milieu through emotional, virtual, national, and international communities. Thus, connections between people and places are made and remade. I found that space, place, and grief interrelate on many levels including, private-public, personal-social, and specific-ethereal places. Robyn's home, her local community, and Japan were integral to the way in which she contextualised her grief. However, these conceptually "traditional" places pale in comparison to Robyn's spiritual (re)connections with James. This unexpected information required me to expand the analysis of place to include spirits in this research. Finally, representations of grief in public and media spaces were found to be paradoxical. Still, the digital story and this research as a process and as a representational space were considered by Robyn to be therapeutic. Overall, Robyn's grief is evolving, changing, complex, and contradictory, and something she lives with every day.

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Someone said the value of a thesis is the process of doing one, the learning, growing, and experience. How true, but I also include the sharing of that experience. It all started with a thought. Due to the instant and constant support I received from my supervisors, the thought has flourished into a thesis. So, to my supervisors Robyn and Elaine who crafted and shaped my ideas into a coherent whole – thank you so much. You edited, comforted, mentored, read, and re-read over and over. I also thank you for your wisdom, insights, and enabling me to share your valuable time and expert knowledge.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

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Why grief? How did I come to study the topic of grief? I was talking to a neighbour at a local “get-together” who asked me ‘what do you study?’ I told her a convoluted tale about geography, space, place, and all things human. We ended up talking about people that were affected by places. The neighbour (a midwife of some 20 years) relayed a tale of a woman who, after watching her premature baby fight for some time, lost him. The trauma that this mother experienced was huge. For two years afterward she could not go near Waikato Hospital in Hamilton, New Zealand. If she had to go to Hamilton City, she would circumnavigate the Hospital, going no nearer than two blocks away. To go closer caused extreme anxiety, hyperventilation, and nausea. Her suffering was akin to acute phobia and was directly linked to a place. My research senses twitched.

I linked this tale to many others I had heard over time, such as, not being able to go past the site of a road accident, visiting Gallipoli, War graves, or Holocaust sites. These were all cases in which people were profoundly affected by place. Conversely, people sometimes visit the favourite places of those who have departed, to commune with them in some way, to remember, and to share. I decided to use grief as a platform from which to explore the lived reality of someone who has experienced loss in order to “lay bare” the relationships between space, place, and emotion.

Place is not a specialised piece of academic terminology. It is a word we use daily in the English-speaking world. It is a word wrapped in common sense. In one sense this makes it easier to grasp as it is familiar. In another sense, however, this makes it more slippery (...) (Cresswell 2004: 1).

Space and place are two terms which remain *fundamental* to the geographical imagination (see Cresswell 2004; Hubbard 2005). As such, there are aspects of the grieving process that connect to geography. One such aspect is that grief is profoundly influenced by space and place. Grief is located somewhere. Nestled in both landscapes of emotion and the physical landscapes of remembrance, place connects to grief and vice-versa. There are important reasons to explore the space and place dialectic of people’s lived experiences, from the geography of the incident causing loss, to the geographies of the present. In spite of these

crucial connections between place and grief, geographers have largely ignored the topic. I wish to help fill this lack in geographical literature and add to the growing body of work that links emotions to spaces and places. In academia more generally, grief is not a novel topic. Authors have considered multiple aspects of loss in a range of books and articles (see *Death Studies, Mortality*, Hockey *et al.* 2005; Hartig and Dunn 1998; Klass *et al.* 1996; Reimers 2003; and Robinson 2005 to name a few). Nonetheless, there has yet to be much of a specific focus on the spaces and places of grief in people's lives within the discipline of geography.

This thesis aims to make an original contribution to social and cultural geographies by being both methodologically unique and focused on exploring the interconnections between space, place, and emotions (grief). 'Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world' (Cresswell 2004: 12). Moreover, place can be conceptualised as space that is invested with complex meanings, including the emotions that people attach to places. Place became a central tenet in humanistic geography in the late 1970s, but I find some of the thoughts echo through to current theories in emotional geographies. Tuan (1977) uses the dual concepts of *topophilia* and *topophobia* to refer to desires and fears that people associate with specific places. Further, Tuan's (1977) work 'alerted geographers to the sensual, aesthetic, and *emotional dimensions of space*' (see also Hubbard 2005: 42 italics added). It is these aspects of place that provided the impetus for this research.

In this introductory chapter I present the context of Robyn Gordon's experience of grief and indicate how I approached researching a sensitive topic such as this. Then, I briefly investigate how grief has been portrayed in formal literature. And follow by discussing the underpinning philosophies of cultural and social geographies as the bedrock of my research. Finally, I introduce the main research questions and then finish the chapter with an outline of this thesis.

### ***Robyn, James, and Stuart Gordon***

I did not meet James before his tragic death. Robyn and Stuart Gordon's son, James, was killed in an avalanche in Japan on 19 February 2000. Matt Skinner was videoing James Gordon (18), Chris Coster (23), and Craig Mowat (25) snowboarding in the "outback" of Happo-One, Japan (see Figure 1) when the avalanche swept down the valley engulfing everything in its path. Matt dropped

the camera and went for his life, and help, but there was no sign of the other three boarders. Robyn, her husband Stuart, and James' two sisters boarded the next flight from New Zealand to Japan thinking they would find James, Chris, and Craig alive. Robyn and Stuart did not realise their son was buried deep under the avalanche.



Figure 1: Happono Ski Routes and Hakuba Village

Source: Adapted with permission from [www.hakubatourism.com](http://www.hakubatourism.com): Retrieved 17 November 2008.

Arriving in Japan, the three families used the media for support and funding, and tried to launch the Japanese authorities into rescue-action. The unfolding story was extensively covered in local and national newspapers in New Zealand, with a critical examination of the lack of skilled mountaineers in Hakuba, Japan<sup>1</sup>. Media accounts highlighted the supposed conflict between friends of the trio and Japanese officials. Search and rescue techniques, the location of the boarders at the time of the avalanche, and liability for the costs of continuing to search, filled article after article (for some examples see Appendix 1). The three families' feeling of unreality was heightened by what they experienced as the culturally alien surroundings of Japan. Prompting the authorities to have a sense of

<sup>1</sup> Happono was part of the 1998 Winter Olympic site with Hakuba village close-by. Both are located in Nagano Prefecture.

urgency, combined with adverse weather hampering rescue efforts added to their fears and frustrations. Initially, the “geography” of their experience was overwhelming. The physical harshness of the mountains during storms, as well as the cultural separation from New Zealand, underpinned Robyn’s feelings. Communications with family and friends were constant and conducted by email, giving a sense of closeness and distance at the same time.

However, it was rapidly becoming apparent that the window of opportunity to find the young men alive was closing. The families were left with a feeling of frustration: was it “too little too late”?<sup>2</sup> The thought of leaving James behind in Japan was unbearable. It was vital to have James near, in an environment that felt familiar and comfortable. To leave him in Japan made Robyn’s grief dislocated, and a sense of abandonment prevailed. James’ body was the last to be found four months later in the spring-melt. Three services were initiated during that four month period. The first one was held in Hakuba to aid those involved in the search and for friends of the three young men. The second was a memorial service in the Gordon family’s farming community, Pongaroa, to provide closure for close friends and community members who had all known James. The third, four months after the avalanche, was a formal family funeral in Katikati, a meaningful place for James. Thus, the need for closure was a dominant feeling for Robyn.

Since the accident, Robyn has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of issues of mountain safety, particularly in relation to the occurrence of avalanches. She has been named the “Avalanche Lady” due to conducting an extensive speaking tour of New Zealand about avalanche safety. Robyn advocates the use of a special backpack kit, so that people caught in snowfalls can be immediately located and hopefully saved. She travelled all over New Zealand to promote her message, approaching schools, colleges, ski areas, and outdoor-pursuits camps. Robyn and Stewart have also advocated for an exchange programme between New Zealand and Japan to be set up to train mountain rescuers internationally. Furthermore, Robyn is currently working for Victim Support. Her grief has led her to helping others, with an underlying mission to save families from unnecessary loss.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the families harbour no ill feeling towards Japanese search and rescue teams, still, the stories continued in news reports.

### ***How to Research Grief: 'Won't You Just Upset People'?***

To provide some background for this research I have read a selection of literature on grief (see Attig 1996; Irving 2005; Klass *et al.* 1996; Littlewood 1992; Riches and Dawson 1996a, 1998; and Walter 1999). Reading current literature is one approach toward building a picture of the implications of researching individuals who are grieving. Using qualitative methods, Riches and Dawson (1996a) offer some insights into researching grief. They argue their research approach 'has not caused distress – rather the reverse' (1996a: 362). The research setting, they contend, is an opportunity to "tell it like it is" which enables parents to explore painful experiences while maintaining a sense of control over their self narrative (Riches and Dawson 1996a: 357).

The predominant findings in some literature on grief show that, first, grief is as individual as a fingerprint, thus we all experience it differently (Irving 2005: 174). Second, Western clinical models of grief resolution, that is, "letting go" to "move forward" has been identified as unhelpful to grieving individuals (see Walter 1999). Rather, what is considered to be of significance is reconnecting to the deceased and including them in everyday conversation (Riches and Dawson 1998: 126). Third, it is important to note that for grieving parents, maintaining a bond with their deceased child allows the parental identity to remain intact. This "bond" may include narratives (shared memories), photographs, and items of significance belonging to the child (see Riches and Dawson 1998). Therefore, a collaborative and trusting relationship between researcher and participant (rapport) is identified as particularly important when researching grief. Riches and Dawson (1996a: 362) found that 'for a short while we shared a small part of the tragedy of their deaths, but we also helped celebrate their lives ... through conversation, sharing photographs, school books, and scrap books'.

Often in literature on loss, bereavement, grief, and mourning are intermeshed, each term could stand in for the other. However, I offer a brief discussion of each of these terms (based on Attig 1996: 8). First, the term bereavement refers to that state or condition caused by loss through death. Second, grieving and mourning are processes of accommodating to loss. Grieving and mourning are coping responses to the deprivation and disruption that enter people's lives when they are bereaved. One of the uses of the term mourning is to refer to the ways our societies and cultures tell us to behave in response to loss through

death, including prescribed practices in the funeral period and thereafter, depending on culture (Attig 1996: 8).

Grief is a process leading toward a personal resolution of the intense emotions and inner turmoil commonly experienced after bereavement. When someone dies we are reminded of the fragility of life and the irreversible changes that can be wrought upon it (Irving 2005: 171). Throughout history, the experience of grief has been portrayed in literature, art, and music. The closing decades of the twentieth century saw innumerable books on bereavement, as it has been explored more formally by researchers and writers.

These writings ‘formed a part of an entire intellectual and clinical paradigm whereby the experiences of loss, grief, and mourning were fixed within a predominantly psychological set of understandings and interventions’ (Walter 1999: preface ix). In this genre, “stages” and “phases” that researchers, such as Kübler-Ross (1969), originally used in order to *describe* complex data are reformulated as *prescriptions* (Walter 1999: 162 italics in original). Conversely, Klass *et al.* (1996: 3) explain that people ‘maintain a continuing bond with the deceased, finding places for them in their ongoing lives’. Such bonds, they assert, are not denial, but rather a source of strength. Thus, Klass *et al.*’s (1996) work has become significant in (re)interpreting grief, providing a nuanced context for the personal expression of loss.

Furthermore, Reimers’ (2003) research is useful because she overviews how representations of grief are culturally dependent and manifested in and through discourses. Western society disciplines and controls eruptions of strong sentiment, such as grief, by delineating boundaries for what is considered to be “normal” and permissive, by questioning those who exceed those boundaries. My study will extend Reimers’ (2003) work by connecting to geography. I argue that the places in which grief is represented are also important. Thus, social and cultural geographies allow me to focus on the correlations between space, place, and emotions.

### ***Cultural and Social Geographies***

The “cultural turn” in geography is widely acknowledged as eclectic. As part of this “cultural turn”, I focus on the interrelation between space, place, emotion (grief), and subjectivities. Shurmer-Smith (2002: 3) has a working definition of

cultural geography which I believe gives some of the flavour of the discipline and its breadth. She states that cultural geography:

(...) becomes a field of study which concentrates upon the ways in which space, place, and the environment participate in an unfolding dialogue of meaning. This includes thinking about how geographical phenomena are shaped, worked, and apportioned according to ideology; how they are used when people form and express their relationships and ideas, including their sense of who they are. It also includes the ways in which place, space, and environment are perceived and represented, how they are depicted (...)

My topic is located in the broad field of “cultural geography”, however, I am reluctant to choose one area of scholarship over another. It is sometimes argued that there is a tension between social and cultural geographies (see Peach 1999, 2002; Philo 2000), but I maintain there is also significant overlap between the two. Perhaps they are not easily separated. As my discussion develops, it becomes apparent that one cannot talk about culture divorced from society and social processes and vice-versa. Consequently, Valentine (2001: 1) explains that the “cultural turn” ‘lead to a shift in emphasis away from issues of structural inequality toward one of identity, meanings, representation, and so on. It is, therefore, increasingly difficult to distinguish between social and cultural geography’. As I mentioned earlier, space and place are crucial to the geographic imagination. Tuan (1977) includes the emotional dimensions of space and place in his analysis, thus, I will briefly consider the “evolution” of place.

Although “new” meanings have been associated with the term “place”, I reflect on Tuan’s (1977) perceptions of place. Rather than having a particular scale, he argues that place is ‘created and maintained through the “fields of care” that result from people’s emotional attachment’ (cited in Hubbard 2005: 42). Tuan’s (1977) notions were important in “preparing the ground” for a renewed interest in cultural geography and, furthermore, emotional geographies. I think Tuan had an endearing influence as he infused his work with a sense of humility and wonderment of the world (Rodaway 2004: 307), surely an admirable incentive to study and research? Furthermore, I concentrate on Tuan (1977), because he connected notions such as “experience” and “feeling” to place (Cresswell 2008: 55).

Although there is no direct link to Tuan’s (1977) work, it is interesting that a number of feminist geographers have asserted the value of personal experience,



subjectivity, and self-discovery, as the personal became political (Rodaway 2004: 309). Furthermore, geographers focusing on emotion have recognised Tuan's (1977) careful attention to the idea that geographic discovery is also about self-discovery. This notion of self-discovery resonates clearly with the feminist methodological approach of positionality and situated knowledge. However, Bondi (2005: 436) cautions:

The legacy bequeathed by humanistic geography to the emergent sub-discipline of emotional geography is simultaneously suggestive and problematic. On the one hand, humanistic geography's commitment to attend to the full richness of subjective experiences of places and spaces has provided an important source of inspiration for geographical engagements with emotion. On the other hand, its failure to unsettle the alignment of emotion with individualised subjective experience meant that it has not developed in ways that necessarily problematise the politics of liberal and neoliberal individualism.

There are critiques of Tuan's (1977) work and humanistic geography more generally. Humanistic geography is noted for theorists' tendencies to mine for universal characteristics of being human, including an inclination to universalise traits across cultures. Furthermore, humanistic scholars sometimes espouse essentialist and gendered assumptions, and lack a critical engagement or edge in their work (see Rodaway 2004: 308). As an additional note, people have been "put into" and connected to places. However, one cannot "romanticise" the notion of place. Once people demarcate spaces and places as "theirs" exclusionary practices (racism, bigotry, and xenophobia) spring to the fore. Indeed, place is a powerful concept (Cresswell 2004: 11). It is important that these critiques stand, and are observed. Rather than ignoring the original concepts, one can pick up the *intent* of these ground-breaking arguments, learn from the critiques, and move onto productive ground better informed by three decades of theoretical discussion.

### ***Space, Place, and Grief***

Robyn has a keen sense of space and place when she talks about James. There are times when she needs to (re)connect to James, to be closer, and to bring him nearer. She achieves this sense of "nearness" by talking to him, thinking about him, and maybe a visit to a medium (a person who believes they are able to "contact" spirits). These processes of remembering and creating a continuing relationship with James are an important element of the grieving process which I

highlight. I also draw attention to the opportunity that Robyn has afforded me. Researching grief covers sensitive and emotional terrain and I *have not and do not* take that for granted.

This research is concentrated around two main questions. To address these questions I have conducted a case-study based on Robyn Gordon's experience of grief. I carried out two semi-structured interviews in order to convey how space and place interact with emotions (grief). Furthermore, I asked Robyn to create a digital story based on her grief. Following this, I conducted a third interview in which I asked Robyn about her experiences of producing the digital story. My aim is to provide a methodologically unique investigation that generates a nuanced understanding of the spaces and places of Robyn's grief. The first main and overarching question is: *in what ways do space and place interrelate with the grieving process?* As a geographer writing a thesis based on human subjectivity, it is vital that I explore the interrelations between these key concepts.

I argue that space, place, and emotions exist in a dialectical relationship and, accordingly, geographers are able to convey some of the paradoxes within spatialised emotions by acknowledging and including subjective accounts into their research. As places and emotions are not static but are constantly evolving, it is important to ask: *how do space and place change through experiencing grief?* This is my second research question. I consider how Robyn has conceptualised the spaces and places her grief has taken her to, while at the same time, I pay particular attention to the variation in her accounts.

### ***Thesis Outline***

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined how space and place have evolved as important geographical concepts when describing emotions. Tuan (1977) and other humanistic geographers have contemplated the complex webs of emotions involved in knowing places, and have included the notion that places become centres of meaning. However, current socio-cultural geographers strive for a more critical edge to their work, and critique universalist, gendered, and essentialist assumptions about what it is to be human. Moreover, conveying the complexity of Robyn's emotions and the place grief has in her life, requires paying attention to discourses of grief as they underpin representations of loss in our socialised life-worlds.

I have also explained why my research is important. I have argued for comprehensive investigations concerning the place of grief and emotions in people's lived realities and in the geographic discipline. The interconnections between space, place, and grief have largely been overlooked in socio-cultural geography, thus my research aims to extend the analyses of these key concepts. As I have contextualised Robyn's grief experience it should be clear that the opportunity for researching grief empirically is a unique one. It is not every day that scholars are able to examine sensitive emotional terrain with their respondent's permission.

In chapter two, I explore and describe key geographical literature from within socio-cultural geography and the social sciences. Beginning with space and place, I discuss the interrelationships between the two terms. Then, I examine emotional geographies as a sub-disciplinary area that underscores the value of including emotions in research. Following on, I survey geographic writing on grief and underline that links between place and grief have not yet been sufficiently addressed. By drawing on Cresswell (1996) I explain more clearly how place and grief interact. Finally, by delving into geographic literature, whose writers deliberate on broad notions of place, I pay particular attention to Whatmore's (1999) "topological imagination" and Thrift's (1999) "ecology of place" to illuminate how place is fluid, mobile, and contingent.

I present and discuss the research design in chapter three, taking time to carefully consider a methodology that supports research which includes sensitive material, emotions, and subjectivities. I begin with a critical review of feminist methodologies and briefly evaluate a debate concerning reflexivity. I then contemplate the relational aspects of emotions and research by investigating Bondi's (2005) ideas on combining psychotherapeutic methods and geography. In the remainder of the chapter, I critically assess the research methods I have utilised which include: the case study approach, semi-structured interviews, diaries, and visual methods (digital storytelling, photographs, and video).

Chapter four is the first of three analytical chapters, devoted to and centred on space, place, and Robyn's grief. I begin by focusing on material places to develop an understanding of the correlations between more "traditional" ideas of place and loss. I outline the ways in which Robyn's perceptions of home were changed and transgressed by her grief experience, and how her home community enacted their role as supporters for the family. Next, I illustrate how collective memory is

physically displayed on the landscape as reminders and as concrete forms of remembrance. Through the acts of memorialisation and commemoration, grief is inscribed onto places. Lastly, I reflect on geography as a visual discipline and explain how “seeing” and “being there” are important facets of Robyn’s experience of grief.

In chapter five I review the spaces and representations of grief. The ways in which grief is represented in social discourse (media, funeral participation, clinical analyses, and so on) gives clues as to the type of places where these behaviours are acceptable in a Western cultural framework. Consequently, I evaluate how grief is “place-policed”, that is, which behaviours are deemed to be in or out of place, and explain how people can feel uncomfortable when faced with a grieving individual. After that, I review communities, emotional, virtual, and national, to assess the media spaces based on Robyn’s loss.

Chapter six is devoted to exploring the spiritual places of Robyn’s grief. Informed by an extended notion of place (Thrift 1999), this chapter investigates fluid and ephemeral places and grief. I initiate the study by focusing on funeral rituals and how they are spatially located. Then, I offer a discussion of the place of spirits in geography. Subsequently, I contemplate Robyn’s spiritual connection to James and the ways in which traditional notions of place dissolve under this type of scrutiny. As a final point, I consider Robyn’s private remembering and the importance of the places where this occurs.

I conclude this thesis in chapter seven. I revisit the research questions in light of the analytical chapters and summarise the main findings. I then draw the chapter to a close by offering a brief discussion of the implications of this research combined with ideas surrounding possible avenues for future research.

## Chapter Two: A Space and Place for Theory

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I am interested in extending “traditional” conceptualisations of space and place and investigating the ways in which places intermingle with emotions (in this case grief). Thinking about emotions has drawn me to current literature surrounding the emotional content of our social, political, and professional lives. In response to an ever-changing world, socio-cultural geographies provide a supple and nuanced way of seeing and thinking. This nuanced way of exploring socio-cultural issues allows geographers to study new cultural formations that emerge and develop as their social worlds transform (Atkinson *et al.* 2005: xv). Thus, the excitement of socio-cultural geography lies in the geographers’ ability to explore diverse topics and the ways in which these topics often mirror the interests of the researchers (Atkinson *et al.* 2005: xv).

In this chapter, I examine key socio-cultural geographic literature that supports my research. Beginning with space and place, I consider the correlation between the two terms and how geographers have worked with them in the past. Then, I describe emotional geographies, because emotions and feelings are integral to the way in which people experience the world. Further, I review the term “paradoxical space”, as a way to explain the complex and contradictory qualities intrinsic to emotions. Next, I contemplate geographic writing on grief to illuminate that place and grief have not yet been given significant attention. As a final point, I examine Whatmore’s (1999) “topological imagination” and Thrift’s (1999) “ecology of place” to clarify how place and people’s emotions are fluid, mobile, and always in the process of becoming.

### ***Space and Place***

Space and place are two terms which remain central to the geographical imagination ‘providing the basis for a discipline that insists on grounding analyses of social and cultural life in appropriate geographic contexts’ (Hubbard 2005: 41). Like many key concepts in academia there is a history or foundation of previous theoretical positions that underpin the use of a term. Each “turn” in knowledge production is reflected upon and added onto a concept, making precise definition impossible. Perhaps, however, the aim is not to be precise, but rather to keep “troubling” terms and concepts. Hubbard *et al.* (2004: 11) illustrate the

point more clearly by stating 'it has become apparent that different approaches to geography are never completely overthrown'. Instead, concepts continue to resonate and echo through with their particular historicity attached, incorporating critiques and absorbing (re)workings. Thus, theories emerge changed over time, fresher perhaps but not "new".

Space and place as concepts are not "pure" but have transpired as ideas that have become legitimated and contested according to particular material and social constructs. I wish to underscore the importance of acknowledging the situations and conditions in which the ideas of space and place have come to light, as they do not exist in a vacuum (Hubbard *et al.* 2004: 11). My project aims to add to and disrupt "traditional" notions of space and place. I intend to follow cultural geographers into a critical reading of space and place to reveal the concepts' "polysemous" and ephemeral natures. While I acknowledge that I am separating space and place for the conventions of a structured thesis, in "reality" they require one another for definition and cannot be readily categorised. 'Both space and place are made and remade through networks that involve people, practices, languages, and representations' (Hubbard 2005: 47). Yet, I wish to advocate for going 'beyond' representation, and include the 'beyond' in my analysis of space and place. However, I begin with a short discussion of the pairing of the two terms.

Agnew (2005) argues that an adequate understanding of either term space or place requires that each be theoretically related to the other. He states 'as conceptual twins they [space and place] offer more together than the use of either does separately' (Agnew 2005: 82). In spite of this, the terms have not always and easily been paired in the past. The polarisation of positions on space and place is important in geographic thought as the two terms are seen as representing alternative conceptions of spatiality. Thus, space has been associated with objectivist theories, for example spatial analysis, while place has been affiliated with subjectivist theories, such as postmodernism (Agnew 2005: 81). I uphold Agnew's (2005) contention that space and place offer more together than individually as I consider grief in geography.

Throughout this research I unpack the concept of space as having an intangible quality and place a material reality. It is important to reiterate the "false separation" of space and place. Often both terms apply or one could stand in for the other. Authors theorising the correlation between emotion and place have

also entwined the two terms. Davidson and Milligan (2004: 524 italics in original) state:

We can, perhaps, usefully speak of an “emotio-spatial hermeneutic”: emotions are understandable – “sensible” – only in context of particular places. Likewise, place must be felt to make sense. This leads to our feeling that meaningful senses of space emerge only via movements between people and places.

Perhaps through an exploration of diverse senses of space, scholars could become more attuned to appreciating the emotionally dynamic spatiality of contemporary social life (Davidson and Milligan 2004: 524). Therefore, attempts to understand emotion or make sense of space are somewhat circular in nature. The quoted passage (above) speaks directly to the main focus of my thesis. I am concentrating on the attachments and connections between people, their emotions (grief), spaces, and places (Cresswell 2004: 21). Further, I argue for geographic work that conceptualises emotions as an integral part of people’s lives which occur in spaces and places. Indeed Davidson and Milligan (2004: 524) call for research that provides ‘an explicit engagement with the spatiality of emotions (...) as a means of helping us to interpret and understand the people/place relationship’.

### ***Emotional Geographies***

Emotional geographies encompass a growing interdisciplinary body of scholarship that combines the insights of geography, gender studies, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines to understand how the world is mediated by feeling. ‘Collectively this still nascent work carries forward poststructural challenges to a strictly “rational” and masculinist social science (see Rose 1993) by addressing the spatialities (and places) of emotions’ (Thien 2005: 450-1). The increasing volume of literature in this area is testament to a growing recognition of the significance of emotions in all aspects of our lived “realities” (for an overview see Davidson and Milligan 2004). As the literature advocates, emotions are important agents through which we experience the world.

Davidson and Bondi (2004: 373 italics added) state ‘emotions are without doubt, an intractable if intangible aspect of all of our everyday lives. They are embodied and mindful phenomena that partially shape, and are shaped by our interactions with people, *places* and politics that make up our unique, personal geographies’.

Furthermore, Anderson and Smith (2001: 7) argue that to neglect emotions is to 'exclude a key set of relations through which lives are lived and societies made'. This neglect creates a 'gaping void in how to both know, and intervene in, the world'. An awareness of emotional involvement with people and places rather than a detachment from them (Davidson *et al.* 2005) explains that who and what people are, is deeply related to how they feel.

Feelings are spatially mediated through personal relations and interactions. Place is, therefore, intrinsically coupled to emotion and emotion to place as a continuing dialectic (Davidson and Milligan 2004). In particular, it is this continuing dialectic between emotion and place which forms the basis for my inquiry. People transform places through their emotions and interactions in and with them. They are also altered by the places themselves. Indeed, much of the symbolic importance of places stems from their 'emotional associations, the feelings they inspire of awe, dread, worry, loss or love' (Davidson *et al.* 2005: 3). An emotional geography, then, attempts to understand emotion experientially and conceptually in terms of its 'socio-spatial mediation and articulation' rather than as 'entirely interiorised subjective mental states' (Davidson *et al.* 2005: 3). Grief is a powerful process through which to explore the "articulation" of emotional attachment uniting with place, and how places are intrinsically valued and/or devalued by individuals.

Anderson and Smith (2001: 7-8) argue for a broad scope of emotionally inclusive topics of study in mainstream scholarship and policy, instead of the segregation of specific 'emotionally heightened spaces' (personal joys or tragedies). Nevertheless, I maintain there is still work to be done within emotionally charged spaces through connecting emotions to, and grounding them in, fundamental concepts, such as, space and place. 'Whether joyful or heartbreaking, emotion has the power to transform the shape of our life-worlds, expanding or contracting, creating new fissures or fixtures we never expected to find' (Davidson and Bondi 2004: 373; Davidson *et al.* 2005: 1). Heightened personal emotions make for a poignant and sensitive space of research, however, in people's life-worlds most experience "highs" and "lows" at some point.

To focus on grief, bereavement, and loss is not to be sensationalist, but rather, to explore the full spectrum of people's lives. Thus, Davidson *et al.* (2005: 3) argue for a 'non-objectifying view of emotions as relational flows, fluxes, and currents, in-between people and places rather than "things" or "objects" to be studied or



measured'. In particular Bondi (1999; 2005) has described what cultural geographers interacting with the emotional content of research gain by adding psychotherapeutic aspects to the research encounter. Lipman (2006: 620) alerted me to a tension that I faced throughout my research, and that others have also faced (see Davidson *et al.* 2005), on negotiating between the intimate practices of emotion and a desire to transcend individualism without becoming too abstracted from situated experience.

Furthermore, Lipman (2006: 622) contends that '(...) people continue to have, and to be shaped by, private experiences, or by events or affects to which they ascribe personal meanings'. As most writers are aware, the way these events are articulated and accumulated through a lifetime creates a complex uniqueness. 'The emotional self may be socially responsive, even socially created, but remnants of individuality remain' (Lipman 2006: 622). In order to extend these thoughts on emotions, whether they are social and/or private (interior/exterior), I wish to draw attention to the paradoxical nature of emotions and their co-existence in space and place.

### ***Paradoxical Space of Emotions***

The intersections between place and emotion are complex, complicated, and shifting (Rose 1993: 140). Therefore, by focusing on emotions I am able to convey the multiple, fluid, contradictory, and flexible (Keith and Pile 1993) emotions and places that make up Robyn Gordon's experiences of grief. Following Mahtani's (2001) lead, I borrow the concept of "paradoxical space" (see Rose 1993) as a way to extend understandings of contextualised (read: placed) emotional experiences. Mahtani (2001) has fruitfully engaged with "paradoxical space" to broaden perceptions of racialised identities. Her research considers the experiences of "mixed-race" women in Toronto, Canada. Place sits at the heart of Mahtani's (2001) focus, as she wishes to unravel the complex ways racialisation is socially constructed in particular places. Thus, context and location play a key role in the way the women are perceived racially (2001: 300).

Although the metaphor of "paradoxical space" is more than a decade old, the term remains useful as a tool to understand the complicated and complex emotional lives of people (be they racially identified, gendered, classed, or similarly labelled). Rose's (1993) notion of "paradoxical space" acknowledges the subversive potential of being located in several social spaces simultaneously, challenging binaries such as insider/outsider and centre/margin. Paradoxical

spaces 'imply radically heterogeneous geometries' that are 'lived, experienced and felt' (Rose 1993: 140-141; Mahtani 2001: 299). Rose's (1993) notion of "paradoxical space", though, has been critiqued (see Bondi and Davidson 2005: 20-25; Desbiens 1999; Longhurst 2008: 167). Desbiens (1999) argues that "paradoxical space" implies a "utopian space" where one can escape 'inescapable regulatory regimes' (see also Bondi 2004: 7).

However, conflicting emotions are not a "new" aspect of feminist academics' life-worlds. Bondi (2004: 5) discusses the inseparability of ambivalent feelings and her own experiences as an academic, stating 'we cannot undertake feminist academic work without colluding in practices of which we are also critical (...) I argue for a politics of ambivalence' which is 'about creating spaces in which tensions, contradictions, and paradoxes can be negotiated fruitfully and dynamically'. Therefore, like Bondi (2004) and Mahtani (2001: 300), I uphold "paradoxical space" as a useful way of describing the contradictions in people's lived experiences.

I find the ebbs and flows of feeling, the ambivalence, interesting and at the heart of being-in-the-world. To me, ambivalence occupies the centre of emotions and feelings about places. As people are rarely one dimensional with their feelings, they interact within a paradoxical emotional space that embodies notions of love and hate, good and bad. Robyn's feelings ebb and flow, they contradict, and coalesce in spaces and places. Further, "paradoxical space" reflects my own multidimensional geography which weaves in and out of this research. Bondi (2005: 238) describes this as 'learning something of the layering of emotions'. Thus, I envisage Robyn's grief experience as being made up of complex, contradictory (paradoxical), layers of emotions toward a broad sense of space and place.

Hubbard (2005) touches on the ambivalence of emotions. He takes into account how people can feel differently about places at different times. Hubbard (2005) uses people's emotionally charged experiences of the city (Leicester, England) at night to convey some of the contradictions in feelings toward a particular environment, in this case "going-out" in the city at night. Hubbard (2005: 132) utilises social geography to examine the evening economy, and argues for studying 'emotions as a necessary accompaniment to the interactions between people and place'. My study extends these thoughts to include feelings in particular spaces and places, concrete *and* esoteric, through the lens of grief.

It is important to add that throughout my thesis I predominantly focus on Robyn's grief toward James. However, one month after our second interview, her mother passed away. Robyn's grief was different, it had a different pattern, and had different feelings attached to it. People are capable of grieving in a multitude of ways, which underscores the contradictory and flexible (fluid) nature of emotions. Therefore, I stress that by studying grief, geographers are well positioned to add to works that consider a full continuum of people's emotional experiences. Grief, like all emotions, is not only contextual but also evolving, changing, unpredictable, and contingent.

### ***Grief and Geography: At a Glance***

Grief is not a new topic of research, however, to date geographers have largely but not completely, ignored the issue. I have located some geographic work that incorporates aspects of grief using material culture, homeless spaces, and collective grief in public space as focal points. First, Robinson (2005) uses the notion of spatiality as a central tenet of the discussion of young people's homelessness. She views displacement as a form of loss. Furthermore, Robinson (2005: 47) argues that grief is rarely explored as an embodied practice or as a key factor that underpins 'trajectories of homelessness after initial exits from home'. By choosing grief as a focus, like Robinson (2005: 50), I found that grief underwrites and structures specific relations of disconnection and connection linking place and self. Whilst she explores pathways of homelessness, I remain committed to investigating the emotional meanings that are created as a flow of relations *between* place and self.

Second, Hockey *et al.* (2005) analyse the relationships between loss in later life, memory, and material culture. Their aim is to examine how older adults' relationships with domestic and public space might change with the loss of a heterosexual partner (Hockey *et al.* 2005: 137). Although we share theoretical insights into bereavement, emphasising continuing bonds between the living and dead (see Hallam and Hockey 2002; Klass *et al.* 1996; Riches and Dawson 1998), our studies differ as I bring space and place into central focus. While I acknowledge that these two articles from critical geographers connect spatiality and grief, neither pay particular attention to the spaces and places that grieving individuals negotiate and invest with meaning.

Third, Burk (2003) has analysed monuments in the public sphere (collective grief) to explore the “politics of visibility” in Vancouver, Canada. Her investigation includes constructions of public space, the role of memory in society, and the differences and boundaries characterising cultural approaches to trauma, art, and privacy. However, Burk (2003) does not include grief as an emotion, nor “emotions” within her framework. Thus, I wish to add to geographical literature by concentrating on space, place, and grief in order to “flesh out” the meanings and representations of those key concepts through empirical investigation.

### ***Grief and Place***

I examine how space and place interrelate with the grieving process by generating qualitative data on Robyn’s experience of grief. Grief is an emotion that is deeply interconnected to space and place to the point where certain places can come to feel impossible for an individual to interact with. Consequently, places may have the power to reignite all the feelings surrounding the event both “good” and “bad”.

Foote, in his book *Shadowed ground* (1997) argues that places have the power to force hidden and painful memories to the foreground through their material existence (Cresswell 2004: 90). When talking about Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp in Poland, Foote (1997) reasons ‘as a geographer I could not help but notice that the sites themselves seemed to play an active role in their own interpretation ... the sites, covered by the ashes of tragedy, force people to face squarely the meaning of an event’ (1997: 5-6). Therefore, place and memory connect and have the capacity to make the past come to life in the present. Places contribute to the production and reproduction of social memory, and, arguably, personal memory as well (Cresswell 2004: 86-87).

When something life changing (like the loss of a child) occurs, the place(s) where the incident transpires - physical, conceptual, metaphorical or otherwise - stand out in relief on the terrain of personal lives. Teather (1999: 3 italics in original) argues that there is a ‘vital link between stages in our development as individuals – our socialisation, or *becoming* (Pred 1984, 1990) – and the locales where this *takes place*’. In this way, place and identity are inextricably linked. This interaction between emotional life and place is the driving-force behind why I want to make a start on addressing the lack in literature on place and grief. To extend work on place and emotions I argue that when talking about emotions, the body also comes into focus. The body is in place (located somewhere) and is

infused with emotions (in this case grief), hence, I aim to explore some of the social aspects of being and having a grieving body.

Cresswell's book *In place/out of place* (1996) is of interest when studying grieving processes and how these are "place policed" in a Western cultural framework. What are considered to be acceptable public displays of emotion when one is grieving? What is considered to be a transgression? The saying "everything in its place" illustrates a notion of ideological rights and wrongs associated with places. Cresswell (1996: 4) argues that expectations about behaviours in particular places are important components in the constitution, maintenance, and evolution of ideological values. He continues 'one way to illustrate the relation between place and behaviour (emotion) is to look at those behaviours that are judged as inappropriate in a particular location – literally as actions out of place' (Cresswell 1996: 10).

Clearly different groups of people have different ideas about what is and is not appropriate, and these different ideas are translated into different normative geographies. This process of reaction and definition in the media and elsewhere constitutes a rich source of evidence for the normally unstated relations between place and ideology (Cresswell 1996: 10). Ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are transmitted through space and place. Thus, the geographical setting of actions plays a central role in defining our judgement of whether actions are deemed to be "good" or "bad". Socially, some grieving behaviours are judged to be "normal" and healthy, while others are considered to be "pathological" and unhealthy. Judgements of grieving behaviour are intimately linked to space and place and differ in the public and private spheres. The power of social discourses to inscribe notions of right and wrong behaviours onto bodies and in places in a continuing dialectic, is discussed throughout Foucault's (1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1988) work.

Foucault (1977) interpreted discourse far beyond speech to include the inscription of social relations (and thereby the exercise of power) on and through the body itself. The complex interplay of social relations of power both enable and constrain the body in certain ways, that is, the capacity of the body to be shaped and to act (see also Duncan *et al.* 2004: 86). As Lupton writes:

The importance of the body for the emotional self is not simply that emotional experience is related to bodily sensation, but also that

notions of the self are inevitably intertwined with embodiment, that is, the ontological state of being and having a body (1998: 32).

Foucault (1977) refers to the emergence of what he termed “technologies of the self” – disciplinary actions that have been taken-for-granted (see also Duncan *et al.* 2004: 86). I argue that this also includes people’s emotional selves. Bodies and emotions can be influenced by discourses or be discursively inscribed, and I maintain that the places where this happens can become important sites of meaning. However, is this *always* the case?

### ***The Place of Mobility in Geography***

As the research unfolded, I came to realise that Robyn’s feelings about the places she has interacted with since James’ death have a lot to do with *when* the accident happened (the stage in their lives), as well as her deep spiritual connection to James. In the end, the physical places became less important than the emotional and spiritual spaces she shares everyday with James. The place James has in Robyn’s life and her grief is fluid and mobile and I required a finer distinction of place to foreground these aspects. Conventionally figured places demand thoughts which reflect assumed boundaries and traditions while placelessness (see Relph 1976) or non-places (see Aúge 1995; Webber 1964) demand new mobile ways of thinking.

The debate concerning place as a useful term (Agnew 1984, 1987; Sack 1992) has tended to divide scholars into two “camps” where some have proposed its demise and others have argued that place still matters (see Castells 1989; Massey 1997; Massey and Allen 1984). The influence of modernity (telecommunications) and globalisation has had significant implications for notions such as community and place. Scholars have considered how contemporary urban landscapes reflect non-place or placelessness (the ubiquitous landscape) as loss of meaning (Arefi 1999: 183).

However, Knopp (2004) argues for placelessness as practice or embodied experience, rather than the opposite of place (absence or lack of place). Placelessness as practice provides proponents with feelings of anonymity, a perceived homogeneity, and is conceived as transitory in character. Placelessness, thus, offers feelings of emotional and/or ontological security to individuals otherwise identified by “traditional” notions of place (Knopp 2004: 124). The inherent movement implied by placelessness releases one from the

boundaries and social labels attached to specified (discursively constructed) places or locales. Massey's seminal paper, *A global sense of place* (1997) rejects bounded and fixed notions of place and encourages geographers to think of place in a way that combines bodies, objects, and flows in new ways. 'Place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic' (see also Cresswell 2004: 53).

Knopp (2004) discusses ontologies of place and placelessness as potentially empowering through Actor Network Theory (ANT) (see also Serres and Latour 1995; Whatmore 1999) and Non Representational Theory (NRT). First, ANT has salience for my project because theorists focus on transcending binaries and adopt a useful approach to the concept of agency. In the context of ANT, agency is conceptualised as something that is the product of 'collaboration between all kinds of actors with seemingly autonomous (but actually mutually interdependent and determined) capacities' (Knopp 2004: 125; see also Whatmore 1999). ANT's conception of agency is ontologically liberating, as phenomena, including humans, are *not* considered to be passive or controlled by external forces (natural science) but, as Knopp (2004: 126) argues:

[phenomena] can be material, discursive, individual, collective, active, passive, symbolic, "natural", social, intuitive, mechanical, spiritual, and corporeal all at once. This is, of course, much closer to our actual lived experiences than more traditional theoretical imaginations allow.

This "topological imagination" (see Whatmore 1999: 31) allows scholars to focus on connections, flows, contingency, and becoming, rather than on fixed spaces, surfaces, or logical ordering. Instead of a collection of "truths" awaiting discovery, the world is conceived as an 'elusive and ephemeral flurry of activity marked by constantly changing topological relationships' (Knopp 2004: 126). Indeed those grieving are described through this framework as highly contingent. Grief then becomes a contextualised progression involving all manner of human and non-human forces in a continually unfolding process of emotional experiences in fluid places (see Knopp 2004).

Second, NRT is used to describe that which is considered to be beyond text and eludes discursive forms of representation (see Crang 2005; Thrift 1996, 1999; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). Additionally, Lorimer (2005: 83) illustrates that NRT is 'an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks better to cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual multisensual worlds.' Thus, in

the famous words of the philosopher Michael Polanyi, 'we know more than we can tell' (cited in Thrift 1999: 316). I must note that one cannot miss the inherent paradox of NRT. How can texts ever "do justice" to that which lies beyond the scope of discourse? (Bondi 2005: 438). Bondi (2005) points out that 'words too are performances and all performances, however non-verbally immediate, are meaningless unless they can be related to certain interpretative pre-figurations' (see also Smith *et al.* 2009: 13). Since NRT seeks to challenge the privileging of cognition, affect encompasses proponents' interpretations of "feeling" (Bondi 2005: 437) rather than emotion.

### ***Emotion or Affect?***

Thien (2005) cautions against using a framework that focuses on affect that has 'a distinctive, intentional bent towards the "transhuman" – a state of being after or beyond human'. This political move to get after or beyond humanity seeks to surpass a 'simple romanticism of somehow maximising individual emotions' (Thrift 2004: 68, cited in Thien 2005: 450). But, Thien (2005: 452) argues, the disavowal of emotions as "personal" then sets up a binary distinction between emotion (feminised/personal) and affect (transhuman/political). Briefly, emotions are considered to be made up of specific states (for example joy, shame, pride etc.) and affect with the body (pre-discursive and non-individualised). Thus, affect is mobilised conceptually (Bondi 2005: 437). Using the term affect, Thien continues, *should* aim to 'discourage an engagement with everyday emotional subjectivities that fall into a familiar pattern of distancing emotion from "reasonable" scholarship' (2005: 450). However, I argue for emotions (grief) of an individual that goes further than one person, and also past humanity, stretching out through space and place taking in that which is "beyond".

In contrast, placing emotion in the context of "performed identities" and interpersonal relations, might offer additional space for politically relevant and insistently human geographies (Thien 2005: 450). Further, by embracing a feminist and cultural geographic approach to emotions, one turns away from a technocratic and distancing perspective on affect, thus envisioning emotion as part of an intersubjective process which acknowledges that distances between people (on both sides of the research experience) are relational, and 'indeed that we are intimately subjected by emotion' (Thien 2005: 453). Therefore, within



the framework of emotional geographies, there is a continuing dialogue between emotion and affect (see also Anderson and Harrison 2006; Tolia-Kelly 2006).

Whether one chooses emotion, affect, or both terms in a coexisting and complementary context, their importance for giving social research a “human-touch” cannot be diminished. For this research I have used the term “emotion” rather than affect to say something about a grief experience. Robyn’s grief may be emotional and individual, however, I argue that her feelings have wider consequences than to remain with a single person. Robyn’s grief ripples outwards into the social fabric of everyday life encompassing spaces and places, such as, the home and communities where connections and networks between people and places are made and remade.

Affect “affects” my research, as I envisage emotions in terms of ‘intersubjective fields of affective intensity that merge between individuals’, things (non-human/technological/biological entities) and places (Conradson 2005: 107). Continuing to explore a NRT theme, I examine Thrift’s (1999) notion of “ecology of place” to expand ideas about place, and incorporate Whatmore’s (1999) “topological imagination” to (re)formulate “impossible spaces” into my analyses of grief.

### ***Toward an Ecology of Place: Let the Spectres Gather***

At the heart of NRT is a way to illuminate the more elusive qualities of emotional states that exceed representation. Still, theorists remain wary of forms of meaning-making. Some of these thoughts overlap with a feminist perspective on the embodied situatedness of knowledge, but there are tensions between the two approaches. Bondi (2005: 438) sums up that NRT is perhaps a little too abstract, and conversely, feminist work is perhaps a little too reliant on cognitive ways of knowing. Further, by incorporating a de-centred notion of agency and Whatmore’s (1999) ideas of a “topological imagination”, Thrift’s (1999) “ecology of place” perspective *includes* ANT under his rubric of NRT (Knopp 2004: 126).

Place, then, becomes a framework for analysis which is more elastic and compelling. Conradson (2005) draws on Thrift’s (1999) notion of “ecology of place” to highlight the significant material exchanges between people and their environments. Where the notion of “ecology” is important is in highlighting an interest in the broad spectrum of entities that comprise a place and the interactions between them (Conradson 2005: 106). In promoting an awareness

of non-human “others” and things, an ecological conception of place shifts the frame of reference beyond humans alone. Thus, as Thrift (1999: 312) notes ‘things are folded into the human world in all manner of active and inseparable ways and most especially in the innumerable interactions between things and bodies’.

I draw on “ecology of place” because it has a base in NRT that seeks to go beyond individual feelings of happiness or sadness and instead witness the ‘complex affections, ambivalences, and antipathies that at times pass through places’ (Conradson 2005: 107). Emotions then are visualised as more than individualised formulations. An “ecology of place” perspective seeks to be attentive to those complex dynamics of feeling that sometimes lie ‘at the edge of semantic availability’ (Thrift 1999: 313). Again, I reiterate that I am “going beyond the individual” with one person, as I aim to contextualise grief in a wider social milieu. Grief does not stop with Robyn, it does not stay bounded and static, clinging to her, but rather, radiates beyond her through places both transient and “concrete”. Place, then encompasses the messy and ephemeral aspects of our experiences and practices (including those involving non-human forces). Thus, place is conceptualised as including, and importantly, appreciating a place for the knowable, as well as the unknowable (Knopp 2004: 124).

Davies and Dwyer (2007: 261) explain that geographers studying place as a key integrative site of inquiry have started to include ‘the ephemeral, the fleeting, and the immanence of place through ideas of performance, embodiment, memory, haunting, and the spectral’. Such research, they argue, offers further resistance to the dichotomy between “material” and “immaterial” by fusing the two (Davies and Dwyer 2007: 261). Interestingly there is already speculation of a “spectral turn” in contemporary cultural criticism (see Luckhurst 2002: 527), from which geographers have not been entirely left out.

To me, highlighting “turns” indicates the twisting, winding, and zigzagging of contemporary thought. Yesterday’s impossible becomes today’s possible. Recently, geographic work on the city has used notions of horror, ghosts, angels, haunting, and the uncanny to interpret city spaces (see Battista *et al.* 2005; Kelly and Morton 2004; Till 2005; and Pile 2005), rural spaces (see Bell 1997) and geographies of literature (see Kneale 2006). Many of these “impossible spaces” mark a threshold between the known and unknown (Kneale 2005: 106).

Nonetheless, with place as the site of inquiry, those thresholds are becoming increasingly blurred.

### ***The Spectral Turn and Haunting of Place***

Stretching conceptions of place delves further into Thrift's (1999) chapter *Steps to an ecology of place*. He comments that places are 'passings that haunt us; and we haunt them' (1999: 310), and reiterates that emotions are one means of "haunting", emotions matter, and they have a message. Thrift (1999: 315) quotes a passage from Game and Metcalfe (1999: 3-4) which gives emotions a dark and poignant tone, yet also goes some way to demonstrate how emotions exceed accurate and bounded representations, while encompassing "paradoxical space":

Passion is the form of mortal desire. The relation that rends my heart is the source of my joy. It is death's whisper that gives my life scale and meaning, that tells me I'm alive. Passion is extreme not because of the extent or significance of our emotions, but because it deals with immeasurable, unmanageable, and final things (...) Passion's darker, wilder forms still prowl unacknowledged around the outskirts of our rationality.

Thrift (1999) argues for reinvigoration of the idea that life is 'bewildering, strange, and sometimes wonderful' (Probyn 1996: 19) in all its ambivalence, and scholars should reach for understandings that are relational rather than representational. He strives to promote theory that incorporates practical steps to describe the different possible ways in which people might relate themselves to their surroundings (Thrift 1999: 304). Place, then, becomes a vast archipelago of situated knowledges (see Haraway 1991: 195), connections, and reconnections. Thrift (1999) wants to move from a textualist imagination of the world in which representation is somehow a separate layer outside and above "the real". The ecology of place, he argues, is a 'rich and varied *spectral gathering*, an articulation of presence as 'the tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences' (Gordon 1997: 206 cited in Thrift 1999: 317 italics in original).

Thinking about place as a spectral gathering resonates with this project, as places are virtually "haunted" with emotional spectres of the past. But places are also contingent and always in the process of becoming. It could be argued that this way of thinking about place can seem to be an act of resistance against the rationalisation of the world, a way of seeing that is more space than place (Cresswell 2004: 11).

This “new” style of describing becoming, allows for a different, darker, and hopefully, a more open sense of place to come to the fore, admittedly weighted with wordplay, textual politics, and ‘geopoetic metaphors’ (Thrift 1999: 317). While, my project is directly situated within this “new” engagement with place, I am not comfortable with the binary that is created between rational physical place (traditional) and spectral (Other) space. Rather, I wish to envisage place as complex, contradictory, and layered, infused with mobility, and to borrow Thrift’s (1994: 212) phrase, as “stages of intensity”, but also keep in focus the materiality of places.

## ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have explored the theoretical underpinnings of this project by examining geographical literature which leads to nuanced analyses of space and place, as well as, to take emotions seriously. A socio-cultural geographic framework allows me to critically assess interactions between spaces, places, and grief while also remaining aware of the complex power relations that imbue social (human) research. Space and place as geographical terms do not exist in a vacuum, they are constantly mobile and contingent, and are theoretically related. As I have argued, one cannot easily separate space and place, they offer more as a conceptual pair. Thus, throughout this chapter I have linked the concepts of space and place to emotions, as they are mutually constitutive. Grief, although enacted personally, radiates out into the social sphere through bodies, representations, and shared interactions.

Consequently, the setting (context) in which grief is encountered becomes pivotal to how grief is experienced. However, as emotions, spaces, and places are complex and contradictory, I employed the metaphor of “paradoxical space” (Rose 1993) to illuminate something of the multidimensional geographies fundamental to my research. To experience grief, it seems, is akin to occupying several criss-crossing emotional spaces and places simultaneously.

Once deeper into my research I realised that nothing remains static, including feelings of grief and the spaces and places in which it is experienced. Thus, I required, and argued for, extended conceptualisations of space and place. Within the frameworks of ANT and NRT I was able to draw on key literature which allowed for a refined distinction of space and place. ANT and particularly NRT encourages a focus beyond binaries, beyond text, and beyond place as a

discrete ontological “thing”. These theories meld easily with perceptions of emotions and contain context as an important faculty intrinsic to research that involves people. Although there is an ongoing debate between the terms “emotion” and “affect”, I have chosen to bring in elements from both conceptualisations under the banners of emotion and feeling for my research. Furthermore, using Whatmore’s (1999) “topological imagination” incorporated into Thrift’s (1999) idea of an “ecology of place” I was able to propose a broad (elastic and compelling) theory of place.

## Chapter Three: Research “Tool-Box”

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### *A Note on Fieldwork*

When we enter a field we make footprints on the land and are likely to disturb the environment. When we leave we may have mud on our shoes, pollen on our clothes. If we leave the gate open this may have serious implications for farmers and their animals. Thus, when doing research (fieldwork) we need to be sensitive to respondents and to the relevance of our own presence in their lives and in the research process (Letherby 2003: 6).

In this chapter I discuss my use of a qualitative methodological framework. A qualitative approach is considered to be a vital aspect of adding to knowledge concerning the relationships between phenomena, people, and places. Qualitative methods have been, and continue to be, used to verify, analyse, interpret, and understand the complexities of human behaviours in a way that quantitative methods cannot. Numbers and statistical information often fails to express people’s lived realities especially with research relating to emotions, feelings, subjectivities, and the researcher’s position in the process of research. Therefore, my emphasis is on refining some qualitative methods to allow the voice of my informant to be heard and to focus on the politics of knowledge production (Clifford and Valentine 2003: 4).

I initiate this methods chapter by discussing a feminist methodological framework and explaining situated knowledge, embodiment, reflexivity, and my positionality in the research. I follow with a synopsis of Bondi’s (2005) work on psychotherapeutic methods and what they have to offer research that includes emotions. Then, I evaluate the “tools” I have chosen to analyse the empirical data. I consider the case-study approach, semi-structured interviews, research diaries, and visual methods (photographs, newspaper articles, digital storytelling, and videos).

Methodology is not just a matter of practicalities and techniques, it is also a matter of marrying up theory with practice (see McDowell 1997). Thus, thinking methodologically involves description and analysis of the chosen methods (tools) of research, as well as, awareness about how we find things out. That is, the relationship between the process and the production of data (Letherby 2003: 5).

Historically, research has been portrayed as a somewhat “hygienic” process, in that research is presented as orderly, coherent, and structured. Indeed, students are often asked to produce a “clean copy” of their work for marking. However, all research is ideological because no-one can detach themselves from the world or from their values and opinions. People’s opinions are formed from the books they read, from the people they have spoken to and listened to, from their backgrounds, and so on (Letherby 2003: 5). Therefore, the process and results of research cannot be separated from the people that have produced it. Feminist scholars not only acknowledge this personal relationship to research, they actively celebrate it (Letherby 2003: 6).

### ***Feminist Methodology***

Understanding difference and diversity has led feminist geographers toward identifying, and then learning from, specific subject positioning (Jackson 2000: 604). The focus on subject positioning creates micro-geographies where people’s subjective realities come to the foreground as valid producers of knowledge rather than as omnipresent narrators. Inspired by the work of Haraway (1991), ideas about situated knowledge have their roots in the feminist critiques of science, but now critically inform research across the humanities and social sciences (see also Blunt *et al.* 2003: 94).

I have used a feminist inspired methodological framework in order to promote a collaborative and non-exploitive relationship (McDowell 1992: 406) with my participant as much as is possible within the confines of research. Careful thought went into the construction of a framework that engages with in-depth, qualitative information (data) and one that gives critical attention to the power relationships and sensitivity of engaging in human research (see McDowell 1992; Rose 1993, 1997; Pile 1991; Shurmer-Smith 2002). The power relations in this research are complex and changing. In particular, Robyn is highlighted while I remain largely hidden. Thus, my(self) is barely discussed in the analytical chapters, yet, everything Robyn has said is scrutinised for meaning. Pile’s (1991: 467) astute comment is relevant because he argues that ‘the researcher constantly slips out of the analysis and is never rescued’. Suffice to say, I acknowledge the power relations inherent in research, and therefore, discuss reflexivity, positionality, and relational flows of emotions in this chapter.

Reflexivity has been an important component of my research framework and is also an important feature of a critical, feminist methodology. England (1994: 82) asserts reflexivity is 'self critical sympathetic introspection and self conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher'. Life is complex, messy, and constantly changing, and to engage with those feelings (emotions) in the context of my thesis is an important component of who I am (see Widdowfield 2000: 205). I find that my "clean copy" pages say little about the turmoil that is experienced when conducting social research. Nevertheless, all that "turmoil" has a strong bearing on every aspect of the investigation. Therefore, I feel that studies of the social world are uncertain, unstable, shifting, and above all contested (Rose 1993), so research should reflect and interact with that. However, as England (1994: 86 *italics added*) asserts 'reflexivity can make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, *but it cannot remove them*'.

Thinking about research involves figuring out ways the self can be known, how subjectivities emerge, and how identities form (Blunt *et al.* 2003: 123). Although this research is not about me, it is through me that I have conducted a multi-levelled interpretation of, not only the data, but also my emotions, body, and present(ness) in this project. Feminist scholars have called for recognition that knowledge is always and intimately embodied. Thus, when writing up a methods chapter such as this, it is important to insert some autobiography into it so that it reflects a sustained engagement with reflexivity and positionality.

Undertaking embodied research means acknowledging that we have bodies, that research participants have bodies, and that knowledge is not disembodied nor is it created through disembodied practice (Longhurst 1997). Further, the notion of embodied research challenges objective, sanitised, disembodied investigations. Longhurst (forthcoming) states that 'the discourses of geography in various and complex ways assert a division between the abstract Self and the embodied Other. In "reality", we all 'have bodies' (are bodies) (...)'. By accounting for emotions and bodies as an integral part of research processes, critical scholars aim for more inclusive geographies that advocate for a closer "lived" sense of the responsibility of creating knowledge (Longhurst: forthcoming). Acknowledging embodiment, then, is a step further towards holding your hand up and saying, "this is my research, and it has me all over it".



### ***A case of over-situatedness?***

Often I read articles concerning the pit-falls and prizes of engaging with emotions, subjectivities, and the politics of position within research projects. Sometimes the articles include a debate about “the crisis of representation” in qualitative investigations. Crang (2005a: 225) argues that there has ‘been a backlash against what are decreed as “excesses” of reflexivity’. He singles out anthropologist Bourdieu (2003) as most fretful about textual reflexivity. Bourdieu (2003) argues that the exceptional researcher is now set apart from “others”, not by clarity of knowledge, but rather by their level of introspection (Crang 2005a: 226). Bourdieu peevishly describes reflexivity as that:

(...) which consists in observing oneself observing, observing the observer in his [sic] work of observing or of transcribing his observations (...) and last but not least, on the narrative of all these experiences which lead, more often than not, to the rather disheartening conclusion that all is in the final analysis nothing but discourse, text, or, worse yet, pretext for text (2003: 282).

The so called “crisis of representation” is not a new argument. Indeed it is considered to be brought about by post-colonial and feminist critiques, which challenge the ethnocentrism and masculinism of meta-narratives, and theoretical traditions such as realism (see Duncan 2000: 703). However, I am sure I am not alone in thinking the voices of proponents have risen an octave or two since the proliferation of research that includes emotions as a major framework of analysis. Anderson and Smith (2001: 7) argue that thinking emotionally within the confines of research has been downplayed due to the notion that “good scholarship” requires ‘keeping one’s emotions under control and others’ under wraps’. Are protagonists afraid of geography becoming “hysterical”? It weighs on my mind that decades of critiquing the rational, masculinist stronghold of geographical knowledge production is being swept under the carpet by calls for a renewed objectivity, via “structural reflexivity” (Crang 2005a: 226) or by “stilted emotions”. That is, emotions which are less anxious, as Robinson (1999: 457) comments:

The space of emotional intensity, fear, uncertainty, and insecurity may be a part of our journey, but the academic world is a stage in this journey with quite specific practices, conventions, ambitions, and norms (...) emotional pain or personal confessions are not guarantors that we will learn something new (...) I do not think they are sufficient grounds for anything in academia.

### ***Positionality***

Emotions “saturate” research, not only as a framework with which to approach knowledge, but also as an integral part of a research project. Emotions are not always intended to be made explicit (they have their time and place) depending on the researcher and their chosen topic. However, I think it is a more wholly honest piece of work that admits to the emotional content of the processes of research. Thinking about emotions in the research context led me to reflect on the ways in which I might relate to Robyn Gordon and her grief. I am a mother, so I can comprehend the love for a child, but not deeply relate to the loss of a child. This, I hope, I never know. Robyn Gordon and I are both white New Zealand born women, both mothers, and have both lived in remote farming districts. However, we are different ages, are at different stages of our family life, and have different career pathways.

As I have conducted this research I have looked at photos of James. He stares back at me from the beginning of the album, a little blond kid, there are jerseys, bare feet, and fish held proudly. The photos embody back-country life in New Zealand. It always brings a lump to my throat as I scan the pages. James gets older and taller but he seems just as cheeky. Towards the middle of the album the family shots lessen as he grabs hold of his own life. There is a beer in his hand and a “goatee” beard. Then it stops abruptly, empty slots. A eulogy is stuffed between the empty pages. He is gone. When my little girl comes home, I hold her in my lap. She senses my mood and throws her tiny arms around my neck “Mum”. I can empathise, but I can’t quite relate to Robyn’s loss – not entirely.

Almost everyone has experienced some sort of grief in their life, and I have known grief too. Indeed, during this research I attended two funerals. Both were for young people, one a suicide, and the other, a battle lost to leukaemia. “Seeing” and feeling grief and the devastation of loss has kept me emotionally connected, albeit, at times, I wondered whether I could “cope” with this topic. However, it is through these emotions that I hoped to relate in some way to the information that has been given to me in the research process. Thus, I discuss the relevance of Bondi’s (2005) work, as she places emphasis on relational research connections through “empathetic” understanding. Bondi (2005) argues that paying attention to psychotherapeutic notions of empathy furthers

emotional rapport which can then be used as a valuable resource within geographic fieldwork situations.

### ***Psychotherapeutic Aspects of Geographical 'Work'***

Bondi (1999, 2003, and 2005) has worked with psychotherapeutic methods and explains how these can enrich research relationships, especially when engaging with emotions and research. In Bondi's (2005) view, taking note of aspects of psychotherapy furthers the dialogue between the researcher and "the researched". Valuable though contemporary feminist methodologies are, she argues that current methodologies are reaching the limits of their spectrum of influence. Bondi (2005: 445) feels it is imperative that geographical work avoids reflecting the wider cultural trends that treat emotions as 'individualised attributes available for commercial and political exploitation'. For a more radical edge to conceptual frameworks, Bondi (2005) argues for a relational, connective medium to be highlighted and utilised to expose the affective qualities of research relationships.

By relationality within research encounters, Bondi (2005) means that knowledge is more than situated, whereby one ticks off a list of attributes they feel filter their world-view and ultimately their research view. When investigating the emotions of "others" it is often the case that the researcher will talk about themselves and their experiences in a way that relates to the circumstances of "the researched". I agree with Bondi (2005) when she argues that knowledge is developed by relating and disseminating through the "self". Psychotherapy is but one way to theorize emotions relationally, a set of resources are then made available to the researcher to think through their research (Bondi 2005: 445). 'Put another way, psychotherapy's theory of practice suggests that a key means by which emotional geographies can be explored relationally is via what we experience as our own emotional life' (Bondi 2005: 442).

I feel it is important to highlight the "betweenness" of emotions as a flow of relational experience in social encounters. Robyn offered to share her experiences with me on the proviso that I relate in some way to her and her grief in order to articulate an aspect of that grieving process (by placing it in geography).

[An] individual's ability to think about, rather than avoid [and continuously repeat] emotionally important issues is affected by that

stance of someone else (...) One of the ways in which psychoanalysis works is by enabling someone to understand themselves better through expressing things in words (a form of symbol) and the ability to communicate with someone else who registers what you convey, may keep your heart from breaking (...) [or] keep your mind from disintegrating (Hobson 2004: 24-25 cited in Bondi 2005: 444).

Bondi (2003) discusses the fruitful, yet problematic, notion of empathetic relationships within the research process. One aims to create a research relationship where there is the capacity to understand the experiential frame of reference of another person without losing an awareness of its difference from one's own (Bondi 2003: 65). The researcher has to tread carefully between engaged empathetic attachments to their participant's life-world, but also to observe and (often) record the interaction for selective analysis. Bondi (2003) describes this situation as "empathy" which 'entails oscillating between participating in processes of (unconscious) identification, and remaining aware of – observing – some distinction (however fragile) between one's own and the other person's inner realities' (Bondi 2003: 74).

How I related and empathised with the content of Robyn's emotional engagement with the interview process was an important facet of first, taking emotions seriously, and second, being able to mediate between the emotions themselves and my accounts of emotion when I wrote up the thesis. What needs to be emphasised throughout my thesis is the blurring of boundaries between feelings and representations of feelings. Distinctions between affect and emotion (if these can be separated) are difficult, as these concepts are not clear-cut binary opposites but complicated threads that mirror the myriad complexities of research with human participants (Bondi 2005: 445).

### ***Choosing a Case Study Approach***

As grief is a sensitive topic, I needed to examine the issues of grief, space, and place in-depth. I felt it was important to state that I was uncomfortable approaching several people or respondents unknown to me. Confidentiality is usually an important ethical consideration within human research, however, as Robyn's experience of grief was covered in media accounts, she was comfortable with the use of her name throughout this research. Nevertheless, conducting research with someone I know had its own challenges. How close is too close? And one has to consider the concerns of changing a friendship through conducting research. To me, it felt slightly unusual to "formalise" the interview

process through introducing the research and signing consent forms (see Appendix 2 and 3), while at the same time talking informally about shared family news. Still, I put pressure on myself to do my best for both Robyn and James. My conscience has added weight to my shoulders from the ethics application through to submission of the thesis and beyond.

Initially it was difficult for me to “take charge” of the research and not hand over too much power (direction of content) to Robyn. I hold her in high regard and felt a deep sense of guilt that I was using her experience of losing a son for my research purposes. I had to be very up front and honest with, not only Robyn, but also myself. I had to decide what I wanted to say in this thesis and what I wanted to achieve. With choosing grief as a topic there was always going to be a sense of unease at using information from someone who has been through emotional upheaval for the purposes of research. For these reasons I chose the case-study approach.

The case study research strategy is all-encompassing, from the design of a project, to the data collection techniques, and analysis/interpretation (Yin 2003: 90). A case-study is a sample of one that is an intensive method of investigation containing detailed information in a “real-life” context. Furthermore, case-studies are a unique opportunity to learn about physical and human phenomena from the point of view of the informant (Rice 2003: 225). The aim is to connect information to the underpinning theoretical reasoning and to give an understanding of the complex life-worlds of human participants. The key word is “context”. A case study is an empirical inquiry that highlights the contextual conditions of human phenomena. I felt that the context of Robyn’s grief would lay a pathway to investigating how grief interacts with space and place, and vice-versa.

I began the case-study by critically reading through a dossier of newspaper articles on the unfolding “story” of the avalanche accident. I read emails and telex between the Gordon family in Japan to family and friends in New Zealand, and looked at photos of James. In this way I was able to build up a detailed account of the context of Robyn’s grief and mentally map out the places she interacted with *before* conducting the semi-structured interviews. Some of the advantages of the case study method include rich primary data and accounts in the words of the participant (informant focused). However, case-studies are not designed to be replicated or to infer generalisations from data. Instead, the

strategies employed are inclusive, pluralistic, and able to acknowledge the complexity of lived realities (Rice 2003; Yin 2003).

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

In order to generate detailed primary data it was important to me that the interview method was both qualitative and semi-structured. This method has enabled me to explore the topic at a deep level, and created a comfortable setting for information sharing in a non-judgemental round-table. The advantage of the semi-structured interview method is that previously unconsidered information often comes to light when exploring other people's opinions and the narratives unfold in the words of the participant. Further, allowing the discussion to develop in a conversational manner offers the participant the chance to explore issues they feel are important (Longhurst 2004: 121).

However, the tension to keep the interview informal and conversational but focused on the subject matter is where the skill of the researcher plays out. It was imperative for me to keep place "in place" throughout the interview but also be alert for unexpected information. One way I approached this tension was to construct an interview schedule with "prompts" to help keep the content of the interview focused loosely around my research objectives (Valentine 1997: 118). The page of tentative questions sat between us on the table and was referred to occasionally when the conversation slowed down (see Appendix 4).

It was helpful to view the interview process as a performance. The interviewer and interviewee are performing their subjectivities and identities in shifting, partial, and complex ways which are regulated by circumstance (and to a certain degree convention) and context. Butler's (1990) much utilised and quoted term "performativity" is relevant because performance is identified as a key means of conceptualising subjectivity and identity. I found it important to consider the physical context of the interviews. Would I conduct interviews at Robyn's place or mine? In this way, space is central to subjectivity because performances (including research performances) always occur somewhere (Ekinsmyth 2002: 178).

The space I chose to conduct the interviews was Robyn's house as I felt it would allow further insight into her life. When I walked in there is a big wall of family photos to the left, James is in the middle. We had tea around the family table just off the kitchen. Robyn's house was orderly, neat, homely, and focused on

family. A highchair stood ready in the corner for their new granddaughter. Shurmer-Smith (2002: 155) acknowledges that interviews are the chosen method when researchers are keen to hear the “stories” of individuals, especially when considering “sensitive” topics. Often it is explained that at all times the researcher must remain alert, sensitised, and skilled in the art of conversation, listening intently, and returning considered responses (Valentine 1997: 121). However, the aim was harder to achieve in “reality”. My first interview with Robyn reflected my inner tension at discussing a sensitive topic. I was perhaps more tired than alert, and only at times felt that I managed to draw attention back to place, to my geographical objectives.

For this thesis I conducted three semi-structured interviews, the first interview was one and a half hours in length, the second, two hours, and the third, just half an hour. All of the interviews were held at Robyn’s home. The first interview was carried out in September 2008, transcribed<sup>3</sup> and analysed before drawing up a second interview schedule of questions based on emerging themes. The second interview was then conducted in November 2008. Finally, the third interview was conducted shortly after Robyn finished her digital story in April 2009. What seems almost an anomaly, given the topic, is that our interviews were filled with laughter. Robyn and I developed an excellent rapport. She is direct in her comments and included me in all parts of her “story”.

### ***Researcher and Participant Diary***

The diary ‘permits the author to reflect further about the intersubjective nature of his/her work, as well as make clear to readers that her practice has been reflexive’ (Al-Hindi and Kawabata 2002: 109). While listening to Robyn during our interviews, I also observed her behaviour or “performance”. Further, I am sure Robyn was observing me, we were “reading” each other for clues on how to perform our subjectivities. Shurmer-Smith (2002: 159) states that intersubjectivity is ‘a sensuously relational experience whereby people consciously and unconsciously construct their own meaning, objectify “others”, recognise themselves in them, and play on their performances accordingly to

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<sup>3</sup> I have based my transcription codes on, Hay, I. (2000: 74) *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*. They are as follows: (...) indicates material which has been edited out; ... indicates a self initiated pause by a speaker; (long pause) indicates a significant pause when a speaker is considering something; *italics* indicates stressed discourse; [laughs] indicates non-verbal actions, gestures, and facial expressions; {hesitantly} indicates background information on intonation; [ ] indicates explanations to make the statement or sentence clear to the reader.

engage as best they can'. Thus, the research diary is a valuable resource for being able to record, as close after the event as possible, observations of intersubjectivity.

I kept a diary of my own, as well as providing a diary for Robyn to reflect on any issues, thoughts, or feelings as they came along, rather than waiting for an interview or arranged conversation. Furthermore, the strength of the research diary is that it captures a particular way of thinking about an issue "in the moment" as well as adding depth and richness to the research. Robyn's diary was not extensive. However, the entries she wrote were useful because they gave me further insight into her feelings that complemented the interview data.

Having the space to reflect on interviews in a diary can be a cathartic process. The actual time spent interviewing is a fleeting moment in the process of research, still, it contains a significant amount of research data. A diary keeps that information fresh and alive. Hence, I was able to review my feelings and write with immediacy. However, it must be noted that my diary did not yield as much information as I first thought. The drawback I found with using the diary method was that I consciously needed to set time aside to write in it. I found that I did not include many of my diary entries in the written record of this research. Rather, the diary allowed immediacy to my writing, my diary information is, therefore, implicit.

### ***Visual Methods***

Rose (2007: 2) comments that 'the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies'. There are many different forms of visual technologies and images that offer "views" of the world in which we live. Geographers have interacted with the politics and power relations inherent in representations (images) of the world, and the privileging of the visual as a form of "truth" (see Driver 2003; Foster 1998; Rose 2003; 2007). Rose (2007: 2) refers to "scopic regimes" in order to explain the way in which vision is culturally constructed (how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see). Her work is important in continuing to critically assess visual dynamics. The use of pictures, in montage and presenting material, raises the issue of how the visual and verbal relate to each other. As well as, whether they could speak to different ways of knowing, rather than just being treated as different kinds of evidence (Crang 2005a: 230; Rose 2003).



When I approached Robyn about the possibility of doing Masters research on her experiences of grief and place, she arrived on my doorstep soon after that conversation with a photo album and a dossier of four months of newspaper articles covering the avalanche “story”. First, sifting carefully through the newspaper articles (a level of deconstruction) I was able to find out more background information about the search and rescue, as well as glean a sense of the level of media attention paid to Robyn’s experience. Deconstructing texts as discourses is an important approach to the analysis of texts (see Fairclough 1992). Texts are deconstructed to reveal a “collage of meanings”, draw out silences (what is not said), and to challenge assumptions of the natural order of discourse (Hay 2000: 128).

Second, the photographs were a crucial resource for me, as they offered my first glimpse of James. Riches and Dawson (1998) explore the importance of photographs for bereaved parents as a way to actively produce memories. They argue that artefacts and representations of a lost child appear to play an important role in helping parents produce a physical record of their (parental) memory (see Radley 1990; Riches and Dawson 1998: 125). Therefore, remembering James, keeping him symbolically present, or “seeing” his face has been centrally important as an aspect of rapport. But also to keep myself emotionally connected to how and why Robyn is grieving. Watching videos of James was an emotional experience for me which enabled me to visually connect to Robyn’s grief.

### ***Unpredictability of Research Encounters***

When I began this research I had no idea I would end up watching a video of an avalanche engulfing three young men. Robyn invited me, on the anniversary of the ninth year of James’ death (which she calls “James Day”), to watch a video containing the young men’s last moments. The video also included footage of the resulting search and rescue operation, and the memorial service in Japan. As I drove to Robyn’s house I felt some trepidation, as I thought I might not be able to ‘keep my emotions in check’ (personal diary 19/02/09). Robyn had assured me that the video was less horrific for her now than at first, but more importantly, it contained her son’s image and voice, his “last space”. Even writing this now makes me “well-up”.

I found watching the video difficult. The film started with sunny skies, white snow, and the young men, full of excitement, beginning their snowboard “runs”.

Next we heard the howling winds on the mountain and the roar of the avalanche as it engulfed a boarder, the lens went white as it was dropped in the snow. After that image there was just Matt's [James' friend] jagged and stressed breathing. It was over in seconds. What I found worse still, was the agony from the families and friends at the mountain chapel, the young men still missing, presumed dead. All their hopes had been smashed. At that point in the video Robyn and I were both sitting on her lounge floor quietly tearful, but comfortable with each other's emotions. Robyn and Stuart shared part of their "James Day" with me and I do not take that for granted. We then watched a second video of James at Mount Aspiring College, New Zealand. Youthfulness, exuberance, and adventure filled the screen. I will be forever grateful, as I was able to know who James was a little more, and get a better sense of his character. Robyn and I hugged warmly when I left and I saved my need to "outpour" for the car. I felt shattered. I did not expect to see and have not explicitly "used" the videos as data for this research. Instead, the videos were a visual confirmation of James' story and an important way to facilitate my own understandings of Robyn's grief.

### ***Digital Storytelling***

The term "digital storytelling" has been used to describe a wide variety of new media production practices (see McClean 2007; Ohler 2008). A digital story is generated by using a software package to import digital photographs and images and add personal voice by way of narrating and recording a story (see Lambert 2006; Miller 2004). I used digital storytelling in my research to encourage thoughtful and emotional expression through Robyn's direct "voice", connected with images of her choice. Thus, the digital story adds yet another dimension to my research by putting Robyn in the "driving seat". Following Dyck's (2006) group interviews, my interest in the creation of a digital story was designed to provide an opportunity to pursue the interaction of grief, space, and place in Robyn's life and 'promote a more inclusive, story-telling mode of imparting everyday experiences' within research (Dyck 2006: 5).

Digital stories are an alternative way of "visualising" and enable the researcher (or in this case, Robyn) to push further into the felt, touched, and embodied constitution of knowledge from their own point of view. Further, personal stories are partial and subjective. Control over self-narrative is considered to be emancipating and crucial to a grieving person (see Giddens 1991; Riches and Dawson 1996: 360). Therefore, personal narrative carries the potential for self-

empowerment through the act of (re)creating personal stories. Self-narrative has a pragmatic “doing” component that conveys one’s own values, context, choice, and allows the assertion of self-definitions in a “performance of possibilities” (Lambert 2006; Langellier 2003: 441).

### ***Digital Story Process***

Once Robyn indicated that she wanted to create a digital story, we had two short “sessions” within the semi-structured interview time. Initially, I showed her my own digital story on my laptop and introduced the programme I had used (Microsoft Photo Story 3™) step by step. I asked Robyn to consider what she intended to say (storyboard) and then think about the accompanying images. I “prompted” Robyn to create a story relevant to this research topic by proposing that she make a story about a meaningful place (see Appendix 5 and 6). Immediately Robyn indicated that snow was a meaningful element in her grief experience. She decided that she would like to include a poem (see Appendix 7) and take pictures for the digital story while on a ski-holiday at Vail, a ski resort in Colorado.

I was worried about the time-frame because Robyn was not going to be back from her holiday until April 2009. Also, I wondered whether the digital story might take up too much of Robyn’s busy schedule, and was beginning to think that the idea was going to be put in the “too-hard basket”. However, once Robyn arrived back from holiday I sent her, via email, the free download for Microsoft Photo Story 3™ and a site where she could view other completed digital stories.

We then met at Robyn’s home to begin creating her story. Robyn had her photographs, the poem, and her narrative notes ready. While the Microsoft Photo Story 3™ programme was downloading in her office, we began to organise her photographs and type in the accompanying narrative on my laptop. I left Robyn’s home when the software had been fully installed onto her computer and her initial digital story was successfully transferred from my laptop. Robyn then continued on her own to narrate each section, add music of her choice, and complete transitions and timing. She brought the finished story to me the following day, and I have to admit feeling both relieved and excited to receive it.

A week after the completion of Robyn’s digital story, I conducted a short interview with her. In her experience, the digital story had more positives than

negatives. She found producing the story was a new challenge and making her first “film” an exciting accomplishment. Robyn also enjoyed creating a visual accompaniment to her narrative and using a camera to tell a story. On the down side, Robyn found that producing the story took time. Downloading Microsoft Photo Story 3™ on her computer was time-consuming, and some of the “voice-over” sound was uneven and of poor quality. Finding the music that Robyn wished to have proved too difficult within the programme and some of the transitions from one photo to another did not work as she expected, causing her to change them entirely. Robyn considered that having a practice-run first would have been useful to enable her to concentrate on making the story rather than worry about the technical side of the programme.

In general, however, Robyn found creating her story (and the research) to be a positive experience. Even though showing her story to a friend made her feel emotionally “vulnerable”, the overall experience of the digital story process was beneficial and therapeutic. Robyn explains:

I think I’ve gained a lot by being involved with the whole process but especially with the digital story in that (long pause) yeah ... I found it cathartic for myself ... that I was able to realise lots of things ... you know my relationship with the snow perhaps? You know ... how I have finally managed to learn to ski whereas it wasn’t on the list for so long. I feel perhaps I’ve used grief to good purpose and that’s all I’ve ever wanted that James’ life wasn’t wasted, that it wasn’t for nothing (...) And obviously it’s been in the thinking ... the fact that I was able to tie up all the parts of my life and get them all into one story ... it’s been like a (long pause) I was going to say a polishing of the whole concept [of grief] ... rounding it all off and making it smoother ... it doesn’t have those little [emotional] catches in it quite so much ... I think it’s been good.

### ***Research Analysis***

I began my research analysis immediately after the first semi-structured interview. Using the typed verbatim transcriptions I began to “sift” for emerging themes that related to my literature review. However “dialogue” between theory and analysis became obvious as Robyn’s spiritual connection to James compelled me to reconsider my approach to the concept of place. I used a form of “open coding” (see Crang 2005b) to note recurring themes on my transcription pages (see Appendix 8). Adding the open codes to my pages of notes, which considered dominant thoughts and ideas, I then drew up the second question sheet. In this manner, I built up the dominant themes (for

example, home, communities, media, commemoration, and spiritual aspects) in Robyn's experience of grief that related to space and place.

While I enjoyed "seeing" interesting themes emerge from the data, I also acknowledge that this form of analysis is subjective. I found it personally challenging to choose which data to include and which to leave out. In this way, I felt I wasted interview time pursuing questions that I have not used and, consequently, missed out on asking more about what are now central themes in this research. Further, I used the same approach for the digital story. I watched Robyn's story several times and typed verbatim her narrative. I noted the main themes that resonated with my semi-structured interview themes. The only difference was that I took into careful consideration the choice and content of Robyn's digital photographs. Finally, it was not until the final stages of this research that I was given the "green-light" to include the entire digital story (see pocket at the back), as Robyn was initially concerned about some of the photos which incorporated other family members in the frames. Thus, allowing Robyn to create her own story and include it in my research has been an emotional roller-coaster for me, as there were no "guide-lines" to follow. However, her story is a rich and wonderful asset.

## ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have explained how and why I have used a qualitative, feminist inspired methodological framework for my research. I have provided a critical and in-depth discussion of the tools of research, as well as their connection to theoretical approaches. Research that aims to convey something of emotions, and includes talking about sensitive issues in someone's personal life, benefits from an empathetic contextual approach. Bondi (2005) argues for aspects of psychotherapeutic methods, particularly relationality (empathy) to highlight the flows of emotions between the researcher and "the researched". In this way emotions are not "just available for exploitation" but are instead valued as the complicated threads that infuse research with human participants. Furthermore, my position and emotional connection to the research was pivotal in disseminating knowledge through "(my)self" in order to avoid disembodied (hollow) sentiments.

I utilised three key methods to explore the issues surrounding my research topic. First, the use of a single case-study and semi-structured interviews allowed an in-

depth, but focused discussion of Robyn's experience of grief. Second, by using the digital story, I added an audio-visual dimension to the research. Digital storytelling was found to be a beneficial method for Robyn to convey her own story. She was able to add her personal voice to the research and "direct" the visual accompaniment. Third, I also used photographs, newspaper articles, telex, and personal diaries to background the research encounter. These "tools" enabled me to stay present within the research and critically examine (reflect on) my own thoughts and choices surrounding the analysed data, however, that information is largely implicit.

In the following three chapters, I draw on the semi-structured interview data, Robyn's diary, newspaper articles, and the digital story to address my research questions. I discuss how Robyn's grief is fluid, changing, and mobile, and how grief interacts with space and place. I combine these findings with relevant literature to offer an in-depth analysis of Robyn's experience of grief.

## Chapter Four: Place: Home, Memorials, and Mountains

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Places are located, that is, they have fixed co-ordinates on the Earth's surface. Places have a "concrete" form, they are the material setting for social relations, as well as being discursive and ephemeral. Although I argue for an extended notion of place, an "ecology of place" based on Thrift (1999), places are inextricably linked to materiality. As people and others move from one location to another in the course of the day, they experience places as material, bounded localities (Teather 1999: 2). In this chapter I discuss the more conceptually "traditional" notion of place as material and located, while also keeping in mind the arguments made in chapter two, that places are discursive, contingent, becoming, and unfinished. I want to convey that places inherit many (elusive) articulations. Thus, place is difficult to explain. As Harvey (1996: 208) succinctly says 'place has to be one of the most multi-layered and multipurpose keywords in our language'.

One of the concepts that stands-out among the multiple discussions of place is "home". Perhaps the most common concept of home (like place) is that of home as 'a material and bounded place where our lives and those of the people closest to us overlap' (Teather 1999: 4). Hence, I begin my chapter with a discussion of home and the way in which notions of home were transgressed by Robyn's grief. Then, I explore the social dynamics of the community where Robyn and her family were located when the accident occurred. Through ideas of the paradoxical nature of emotions and the "knowing" community, I explain that community support is often (emotionally) more complicated in "reality".

Following from ideas about community, I continue with an investigation of how people and places are mutually constituted. The (ultra)materiality of mountain environs impacted on how Robyn felt, and still feels about the place of James' accident [Hakuba], as well as places within New Zealand. Emotional ambivalences appear within the data in this section. Resuming an examination of material places, I then consider memorialisation and commemoration as literally concrete forms of attaching emotions to places. By "sacralising" places, notions of public/private space are blurred. Finally, I acknowledge the politics of "the visual" in geography and reflect on how being at the (material) place of the

accident and seeing first hand James' "last space" have been integral to Robyn's experience of grief.

### ***Home: A Place Transformed by Grief***

Home and the roots that lie there are at the core of our personal identity, even if we are separated from them in time or space. In a sense such places become a part of us (Teather 1999: 5). Although home as an ideal place has been challenged by geographers through studies on homelessness, violence in the home, gender oppression, and so on (see Valentine 2001), the notion of home has strong claims on our emotions. When experiencing grief there can be new and unexpected feelings about home, whether home is a retreat from public interactions, a meeting place to share loss, or a place to be avoided, the "normal" family home is transformed in various ways.

Hallam and Hockey (2001) explore material culture surrounding death and memory including grave sites, writing, and personal artefacts. They take time to include mundane spaces, everyday social practices, and a profusion of spaces linked to the dead. They argue that these 'processes of ritualisation' come to form meaningful responses to death (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 185). Further, Hockey *et al.* (2005) investigate the impact of material objects positioned within the home space. Their study foregrounds material objects and their emotional significance, while leaving the actual home as a place largely out of the analysis. My emphasis on place has revealed a different configuring of emotions that surround death rituals and everyday events. Instead of embodied social practices engendering memories and fostering remembering (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 184), some ritual materials act as reminders of loss and sit in disjuncture with notions of home as place.

As part of Western socialised notions of sympathy, people feel compelled to personally take or send flowers to the bereaved family. The actual meaning attached to the flowers probably differs for individual people, yet they become part and parcel of Western cultural expressions of sympathy. However, for Robyn, the flowers became almost unbearable. She explains:

My lounge was so full of flowers that I wouldn't even go in there in the end it was just like ... overwhelming and just a place I didn't want to be (...) because it felt claustrophobic ... you know I just had to get rid of the flowers and I don't think I'd have flowers again!



Robyn mentioned the flowers in both of our interviews. Although they might at first seem an unusual source of anxiety, the flowers transformed and transgressed the private space of her family home. First, the flowers symbolised loss, they were a reminder that their lives had changed and this event was “huge”. To come across the symbolic reminders of James’ death in her home space disrupted notions of home as being a sanctuary, or a place to emotionally relax. Robyn said ‘I guess you just want to get it [home] back to normal to just stop that part and to stop the reminders or stop the (long pause) feeling’.

Second, the flowers also altered the usual configuration of the Gordon home into something unrecognisable. Robyn stated ‘I guess it transformed my house into something it wasn’t and it wouldn’t be as James remembered it and things like that ... so you sort of think “Well, this is not the way it’s supposed to be” (...) it was horrible because it was open living’. The privacy of Robyn’s grief had been displaced by the flowers which, in turn, changed her lounge space. The place of family was turned into a semi-public memorial room. As Davidson and Milligan (2004) argue, place must be felt to make sense and likewise emotions are understandable in the context of particular places. Nonetheless, what Robyn experienced was a significant disjuncture between her feelings and the place (home) she was usually comfortable with. In this way her emotions did not really make sense. Robyn said ‘I sort of recognised that it was a strange feeling [about the flowers] at the time but I didn’t know what the feeling was and it was just like ... you know ... horror’. For Robyn it was unsettling that her family place became almost culturally alien (open living). She was anxious that the house was a place that James would not be comfortable in, or be familiar with.

### ***Pongaroa as a Place for Robyn’s Grief***

The first time I approached Robyn about her experiences of grief and enquired if she might perhaps be interested in being part of my research project, she intimated the importance of her rural community in the grieving process. Robyn indicated that the amount of support she received from the local community was beneficial for coping with grief. But notions of community are more complicated than they first seemed. Robyn and I talked about Pongaroa, a farming community where James went to school. Pongaroa embodied the more “traditional” notions of community, as a bounded rural landscape of which the Gordon family’s life and home were a part. Geographers have studied the differing experiences of rural communities in relation to characteristics of, for

example, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ethnicity. Thus, scholars have questioned the idyllic assumptions attached to rural life and the construction of ideas about rural communities (see Cloke and Little 1997; Leipins 2000; Little 2002; Little and Austin 1996).

However, it is only recently that emotions have become a central framework of analysis when considering notions of community. Panelli *et al.* (2004) have investigated rural women's sense of safety and fear in order to disrupt the notion of rural places as idyllic settings for family life and as cohesive communities. They found that women negotiate personal feelings of safety and fear in their own areas in complex ways. Panelli *et al.* (2004) argue that, on the one hand, women were wary of "outsiders" and "transients", making notions of community narrow and exclusionist. On the other hand, the "knowing" community, where locals are aware of many parts of each others' lives, provided a significant degree of support and security in the face of fear (Panelli *et al.* 2004: 464). Robyn also indicated the "knowing community" as one of emotional support:

I was a leading figure in the community events in those days and that affected the community in a positive way and so what affected me impacted on them (...) I was in the right place at that time because working with the community through "Pongaroa the way to go"<sup>4</sup> (...) I had a really good team of people around me and the whole community was involved ... so when this [James' death] happened everyone felt included (...) you know that pulling-in that communities do when things go wrong.

Robyn perceives that the emotional support from her home community was a vital aspect of her grieving experience and said 'we were lucky that we lived in a close-knit rural district and had so much support'. Members of the community provided many levels of support. Initially, they came with food, flowers, and completed "odd-jobs" around the farm, feeding animals, and so on until Robyn and Stuart returned home from Japan. Furthermore, people in the community made sure that Robyn and Stuart were kept busy by inviting them to all sorts of outings (fishing, motorbike rides, days on the beach, etc.). However, adding to the complex paradoxical layering of emotions, she has mixed feelings about the community in Pongaroa. Robyn felt she had an emotional responsibility to everyone because so many people felt close to the family and what had happened. In the end she considered that the support from the community was

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<sup>4</sup> A community initiative "slogan" to clean up and promote Pongaroa to potential visitors.

intrusive and ‘overwhelming’. Robyn explained that the community needed to have a memorial service to release local people from their feelings of emotional responsibility to the Gordon family:

I guess the support was almost overwhelming (...) that was the hardest part ... I mean they just kept coming and you couldn't do anything or go anywhere because there were people coming and bringing you know? (...) ummm ... you know the funeral in Pongaroa wasn't the funeral we'd planned to have ... it was a funeral we were sort of forced to have just to free the people and you know it was a ... cold blooded decision to free the people to get them off our back so they would stop coming up the drive[way] because we had to have ... let them get on with their life so we could get on with ours sort of thing.

### ***People and Place Dialectic: Realms of Snow and Cold***

Feelings are spatially mediated through personal relations and interactions. Place is, therefore, intrinsically coupled to emotion and emotion to place as a continuing dialectic (see Davidson and Milligan 2004). People transform places through their emotions and interactions in and with them and they are also altered by the places themselves. I was interested to find out if there were any connections between grief and the landscapes in which these experiences took place. Robyn articulated on a number of occasions how she found the mountain environment unforgiving and hurtful. Feeling the cold in her bones and the emotional (ultra)materiality of snow impacted on the way she considered the snowy environment that James loved. Davidson *et al.* (2005: 6) note ‘emotions become integral to how places are imagined and portrayed’, and the way Robyn considered Japan and mountainous parts of New Zealand were directly linked to her emotional interactions within those spaces.

Humanistic geographers have explained the people/place dialectic by paying close attention to people's emotional attachments to place (see Cosgrove 1978 for an overview essay of Appleton 1975; Lowenthal and Bowden 1976; Relph 1976; and Tuan 1977). Building on humanistic work, cultural geographers (for example, Philo 1991; Duncan and Ley 1993; and Cook *et al.* 2000), explore people's “sense of place” in broader terms. Thus, the aim is to avoid universalising people's subjective experiences (Cresswell 2004). I focused on geographical literature that explores people's emotional connection to and with places. Urry (2005) has investigated the pleasures of place through visual

consumption and tourism, Jones (2005) focuses on memory, self, and landscape, and Smith (2005) studies emotion and environmental ethics. While others, such as, Gottlieb (2004), Johnson (2002), and Suzuki (1997) have centred on “wilderness spirituality” to explain the interrelationships between people and nature.

In both of our interviews Robyn indicated how people shape places and places are in turn shaped by the people that inhabit them. She talked about the lack of emotional support that the “Wanaka Family”<sup>5</sup> received compared to her own experiences of community support in Pongaroa. Robyn links these thoughts to the predominant media discourse about the avalanche “story” that ‘you get into trouble in the snow here [Japan] and its tough luck’ (Clarke 2000). She explains:

Robyn: And then the “Wanaka Family” ... they had left Taranaki to go to Wanaka to be with their boys and they both worked in the community down there, but the attitude down there was ... if you go into the mountains you die ... so they’re [some people that live in mountainous regions] quite ummm [thinks] matter of fact about death (...) you die in the mountains ... you know it’s cold, it’s unforgiving, you make a mistake, you die ... and if you want to live there so that’s the way it is sort of thing (...) and they found it very cold, very hard and I guess not very supportive ... yeah Wanaka’s just unforgiving ... I think that’s the term I’d use.

Me: Do you think that’s part of the landscape (...) it’s a bit like that as a place to look at?

Robyn: Yep, it’s a very unforgiving looking landscape ... the two have an influence on each other (...) and Queenstown too ... it’s a very hard community ... gold diggers settled Queenstown, they’re still gold-diggers down there to me [laughs] (...) the mountains have that harshness and mountaineers are driven [talks about Engels having to make a decision to walk past a person dying of altitude sickness on Everest in order to save his own life] and have such a different thinking “do or die” drivenism [sic] ... not that that is a real term but it explains it ... so survival I guess.

Interestingly, in the second interview Robyn had very similar feelings about the mountains in Japan. She describes the Japanese attitude to mountain rescue as ‘they [James, Craig, and Chris] went beyond the boundaries, they deserved to die’. Robyn felt that the Japanese attitude to death was different than in New

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<sup>5</sup> Robyn uses the term the “Wanaka Family” to describe Craig Mowat’s parents. As stated in the introduction, they are one of the three families involved in the tragedy.

Zealand and a bit “heartless”. Further her feelings about going into the mountain environment in Japan were strong. It was not a place she wanted to be in or that she wanted to leave James in. Robyn recounts ‘I thought “Right, being stuck in the snow mate, I hope you’re dead because this is too painful” ... you know because the cold just seeped in, it dragged the heat out of you and it just hurt’.

However, there are ambivalences in the interview material as Robyn also “stepped back” from the physical landscape and thought about the experience in broader terms. She describes the Japanese mountains as ‘a *beautiful* place, you know it was just the winter wonderland and I can appreciate all the beauty of it and just talk to him [James] about how beautiful it was’. The paradoxical space of emotions comes to the fore as feelings shift between awe and hate about a place. The (ultra)materiality of snow and ice physically hitting the body and senses overpowers the more reflective emotions about the Japanese mountains. In this way Robyn oscillates between two very different “sets” of emotions about a place. Therefore, geographers are able to convey paradoxical emotions through investigating the links between emotions, spaces, and places.

Furthermore, in her digital story, Robyn mentioned that snow is a place that James loved. The snowy environment is where James was most “at home”. This year Robyn went to Vail [Colorado] in an attempt to change her feelings about snow. Rather than hold “it” responsible for taking James’ life, she wanted to enjoy skiing. Again, Robyn had mixed feelings about a place, and as she skied at Vail a number of emotions ebbed and flowed. She liked mastering skiing, and came to enjoy the snow, yet at the same time she was wary, and told me she was not quite comfortable or “at-ease” on the *piste*. Robyn narrated in her story:

Stu and I enjoyed our time on the snow this year. In the past, I have not wanted to go out and be at one with the snow. I held it quietly responsible for taking James’ life. This year I was able to enjoy skiing as James would have wanted. And as I became proficient on the snow, I accepted snow for what it was, another element of nature; another dimension of my life. A place and a space which James loved, and I too can say I am enjoying it.



**Figure 2:" Bumpy Terrain of Grief"**  
Source: Robyn's digital story

Robyn took a number of photos of the snow for her digital story to “visually” explain her thoughts. Most of the photographs are in lovely weather with blue sky and include (super)white snow. There is a sense of gentleness, of enjoyment, and a “lightness” to the shots as Robyn skied around Vail. The photos concentrate on the landscape and include the natural terrain with trees to explain her relationship with the snow. Thus, in most of the photographs there are few people included within the frame (see Figures 2 and 3).



**Figure 3: "Shadows/Memories"**  
Source: Robyn's Digital Story

## ***Collective Memory***

Only consider how often a memory is either of a place itself or of an event or person in a place: and conversely, how unusual it is to remember a placeless person or an event not stationed in some specific locale (Casey 1987: 183).

Johnson (1995) has used Anderson's (1983) ideas of imagined communities as a guiding principle to argue for "reading" public monuments as articulations of nationalist political discourse. Johnson (1995: 62) includes place in her analysis, as the location of statuary 'reveals the ways in which monuments serve as the focal point for the expression of social action and a collectivist politics'. Further, geographers can elucidate how class, ethnicity, and gender differences are exposed and negotiated in public space through "reading" the iconography of statues. Emphasis is, then, placed on examining the relationships between memorialisation of the past and the spatialisation of public memory.

The very materiality of a place means that memory is not abandoned to the meanderings of mental processes and is, instead, inscribed on the landscape – as public memory (Cresswell 2004: 85). The scale of memory should be considered too because we all have individual memories, but, there is also collective remembering from groups and nations as they combine to remember significant past events; "least we forget" (Johnson 1995; 2004: 324). Geographers have engaged with the politics of collective memorialising and "deathscapes" to untangle the complex physical and social meanings inscribed on past events situated in the present (and which change over time). The importance of memory and heritage in the production of place has been a major focus, especially concerning the Holocaust, World War I and II sites, Civil Rights War sites, and heritage buildings to name a few (see Charlesworth 1994; Johnson 1995; Keil 2005; Till 2003; and Withers 1996). One of the primary ways in which memories are constituted is through the production of places.

Monuments, museums, the preservation of particular buildings (and not others), plaques, inscriptions, and the promotion of whole urban neighbourhoods as 'heritage zones' are all examples of placing memory (Cresswell 2004: 85). When people memorialise they also attach emotions to places, thus, collective remembering is an emotionally charged event. As memorials are a space specifically designed to impart certain elements of the past – and, by definition, to forget others – it is a site that can contain "raw" emotion for those (re)visiting it. As Jones (2005) succinctly states 'clearly remembering being-in-place and

perhaps remembering through place, through emotions of (remembered) place, are powerful elements of emotional geographies of the self' (Jones 2005: 213).

Hartig and Dunn (1998) explore the multiple meanings of roadside memorials in Newcastle, Australia. Their reading resonates with my work as roadside memorials are often created by families and friends for individuals rather than for national memory. However, Hartig and Dunn (1998: 16) found that roadside memorials generate interpretations and impacts well beyond an intended private expression of grief. Like other memorials, they argue, their meanings vary, and may be contradictory (Hartig and Dunn 1998: 5). A split-second disaster has a devastating and long-term effect on the lives of those involved and for bereaved families. The abrupt end of a partly-lived life, and the fact that they did not get to say "good-bye", can generate profound grief for relatives. For some bereaved, this grief finds expression in the physical landscape. There is sometimes solace in the erection and maintenance of a memorial at the, or near the site of the death(s) (Hartig and Dunn 1998: 16).

Through the ascription of meaning in a physical place, people expand their appropriation of memorial space. This "personalising of space" is an important facet of locating and sanctifying emotion in secular spaces. As Hartig and Dunn (1998: 10) state, roadside memorials are sacred 'because they commemorate death and command a certain reverence. Unsanctioned behaviour in or around such a landscape is considered sacrilegious'. Furthermore, Keil (2005: 479) asserts that visits to "traumatic" sites 'also reflects the growth of secular forms of spiritual experience, in which the pursuit of revelation is personal rather than hierophantic'.

Commemoration is marked by a spirit of deliberate construction, yet the outcomes of commemoration cannot be set in stone (after Hoelscher and Alderman 2004: 352).

The nature of James' accident, the fact that the avalanche took place in Japan, and that it was extensively documented through media, meant the incident transcended public/private and national/international boundaries. Thus, multiple geographies "collide". James, Chris, and Craig's memorial is a plaque set into a rock at the bottom of a slope on Happo-One, Japan. In a newspaper article, Chris Coster's father explains 'the plaque has two purposes, first to act as a memorial, and second, to act as a warning to other mountain users' (see Mager 2000).



On the one hand, the memorial becomes a concrete symbol of loss and there is often motivation for those involved to actively remember the dead by inscribing their passing on the landscape. Yet, Robyn wrote in her diary 'on seeing the first photos Matt sent [of the plaque] I remember shuddering – a very real reminder that my son is dead. As we have not placed James' ashes yet – we do not have this symbol of his death here in New Zealand.' On the other hand, the plaque may exist (or be read as) a warning to those attending the slopes at a later date. One might reflect on the memorial and heed the caution written in stone that life is fragile. Like Mayo's (1988 67-70) reading of war memorials, they are there to remember, valorise, and celebrate the braveness of the soldier's acts but also to warn of the human cost of conflict.

Robyn's experience, however, is more complicated than to anchor memories of her son in Japan because of the intense emotions attached to the tragedy and her spiritual connection to James. She explains:

It was something the boys up there [in Japan] had decided to do ... it was their friends in Japan who wanted to put something up and I think it was their way of (long pause) remembering (...) no, it's got nothing to do with [not wanting to see the plaque] James isn't there, he's here ... you know he died over there, but he's back here with us.

In some ways Robyn feels that Japan is important as a site to remember James, although, she understands that this is more important to other members of the family and James' friends, rather than to her. She said about visiting the plaque 'it's not on my list of things to do'. For Robyn, the site of the accident is more of a "marker" of what happened and where it happened. She reiterated:

So there are people who are still ... you know ... going there for James' sake but ummm (...) yeah it's a record ... but I guess in the future if people like my nephews want to just ... go and find out because they're too young to know ummm so they can find out exactly where it was so it will be a marker of ... here is where they are talking about.

### ***Look, See, Experience: Geography is Visual***

Many of my friends assume that, as a geographer, I work with cartographic images, create and study photographic slides, and embark on fieldtrips. Thus, geography is lauded as a visual discipline and the idea that this is so has a long history (see Driver 2003). There is no denying that geographical knowledges are often conveyed visually. However, critical scholars have recently highlighted that

there are different ways of “seeing”. These “visualities”, it is argued, are never neutral (Rose 1993, 2003). The politics of visual images includes the methods in which geographers, their images, and audiences intersect in myriad ways that produce hierarchies and differences (Rose 2003). With these critiques in mind, I cannot downplay “the visual” in my thesis.

I take Crang’s (2003: 500) lead when he states that cultural geographers almost ‘turn away from the visual to avoid accusations of “academic tourism” or objectification’. His remarks are linked to Rose’s (2000) argument that highlights the uncovering of power dynamics of specific “scopic regimes” of knowledge. By “scopic regimes”, Rose (2000) is indicating that a geographer’s “gaze”, what is seen and how it is seen, is culturally constructed (Rose 2007: 2). Further, by interrogating “scopic regimes” in geography there is a risk, Crang (2003: 501) contends, of dismissing alternative modes of visualising (as well as knowing, such as, through aural, touch, and olfactory). As mentioned in chapter three, one of the first times I met Robyn, she handed me a photograph album containing snapshots of James’ life. The visual, for me, is emotionally important.

Nairn (1998: 148) explores two interconnected themes, “seeing for yourself” and “going out into the “real” world”, when considering geography fieldtrips. I have explored the former of the two themes, as I found that “seeing for yourself” is strongly enmeshed with grief experiences. Nairn (1998: 151) argues that both Scott (1992) and Lefebvre (1991) are ‘deeply suspicious of an over-reliance on the visual as an epistemological guarantee’. Nairn (1998) is careful to note that seeing and experiencing are interchangeable and quotes Scott (1992: 25):

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the [researcher] who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of the experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured – about how language (or discourse) and history [and geography] – are left aside.

What became important to Robyn was exactly that, seeing and experiencing. As grief is a heightened emotional experience, going, seeing, and “being there” stands out in relief. Each detail of Robyn’s experience in Japan became important as a means to answer the “why” questions surrounding losing a son. The visual component of “seeing for yourself” (for all its politics) is considered by

Robyn to be an added dimension to coming to terms with her loss. Robyn explains:

All the things that happened in Japan that are just so out of your space that ... you know ... you had to be there to understand ... because it's so ... different! And so ... unexpected! ... And so ... yeah ... out there! (...) I mean the (long pause) nightly meetings to get permission to look for your son ... the no search and rescue ... the ... the ... foreigners gathering together to try and search and being stopped by the police (...) but for other people to understand that and to know what happened ... I mean you can't talk about it ... it was just so far out there.

When it comes to discussing deeply felt emotions, the need to experience and “see for yourself” can become vital. Robyn would not have wanted, nor felt comfortable with, someone else's explanation of what happened in Japan. There is an emotional component implicit in “experience”. That is, the frustrations, highs, and lows of the trip needed to be played out in order to work through confusion and shock. In this way Robyn subverted the role of “detached observer” and was able to place her emotions in context.

Robyn recounted a story of visiting one of the other parents involved in the avalanche tragedy who had *not* gone to Japan and found words and descriptions impossible to allay the confusion and deep sense of shock “[mother] “But I don't understand tell me again!” (...) [Robyn] I had to tell everything that had happened [in Japan] ten times, I mean I just about went mad ... I was thinking I don't want to tell this again’. In Japan Robyn was able to emotionally connect with James again, to place him somewhere, and to be closer to the still fresh residue of his life. She explains ‘he hadn't been there very long but he'd told us a few of the things that had happened, so I was able to find those places, and just look at all those things, and just *know* what he was talking about’.

## ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have examined the more conventional notions of place as “material” or as a “concrete” location. By examining Robyn's feelings about her family home, I discovered how grief had disrupted notions of home as an emotionally peaceful place into a quasi-public area to express loss and sympathy. Robyn's home became culturally alien (open living) and unrecognisable causing her some anxiety as her home became a place James would not know. Further, experiencing grief in a close-knit community also changed her interactions with

the place she lived in. On the one hand, the community pulled together to support Robyn (and family) in any way they could, coming into their home, onto the farm, and “keeping them busy” with activities. On the other hand, the level of intrusion became “overwhelming” and ultimately an emotional responsibility. People coming up the driveway became a constant reminder that their lives had changed irreversibly. The paradoxical feelings that Robyn articulated about her community were also articulated about the snowy environs in New Zealand and Japan. Robyn both liked and hated snowy places, showing that emotions are complex and shifting, oscillating one to the other.

I have argued that emotions are both individual and social. Thus, I have discussed collective memorialising, statuary, and “deathscapes” in order to explain how emotions are tied to concrete places in the social landscape. However, these sites have multiple meanings that change over time. By creating a memorial for James, a personal space that sacralised a public (secular) place, multiple geographies “collide”. Robyn expressed ambivalence about James’ memorial because she feels he is with her spiritually rather than located in Japan. Nevertheless, Japan was an important place for Robyn to contextualise her loss. Going, seeing, and being in Japan to interact with James’ “last space” was vital to Robyn’s grief experience. Finally, critical scholars are wary of visual politics, but “the visual” is emotionally important to my research. What comes strongly to the foreground throughout this chapter is the paradoxical, fluid, and shifting nature of both emotions and “concrete” places within Robyn’s experience of grief.

## Chapter Five: Space: Representations of Grief, Snow, and Communities

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Space embodies notions of social interaction, meaning, and representation and is built up from social discourses. At the same time, space includes context and location. It also involves people, practices, languages, and representations. In this chapter I focus on space, which is profoundly connected to individual human and social processes, producing emotional connections with specific locations (both positive and negative). Massey's (1991) idea of places as 'moments' in a continuing networked process of social relations that stretch across space (see also Cosgrove 2000: 732) deftly explains how spaces are always subject to change, are implicated in the ongoing formulation of social life, and are imbued with power relations (see also Schein 1997: 662).

Discourses link to representations of space, as a set of practices by which meanings are constituted and communicated. Shared meanings are based on representations of the world which are, in turn, positioned within social worlds (Duncan 2000: 703). Such representational practices (discourses) produce and circulate meanings among members of social groups and are attached to specific spaces (public and private). Both discourse and representation are active and constitutive practices, and thus, can never be neutral or devoid of power relations. Some of the power relations in this project are that Robyn's thoughts, and emotions are scrutinised, analysed, and represented by me, while my "spaces" mostly are not present (see also page 30). Constructions of space, as deployed within everyday discourse, are used to accomplish discursive actions including the justification of certain kinds of person-in-place relations (Dixon and Durrheim 2000: 28).

In this chapter I explore how discourses on grief are built up within the public and private spheres. Taking particular note of Cresswell (1996) I work through notions of the grieving body and the associated physical manifestations as a disruption to "normal" space. Then, I consider the lack of communicative resources people have to articulate intense emotions, such as, grief. Next, I reflect on Robyn's digital story and explain how it became an important representational space to explain grief using a poem, metaphor, and photographs. In the third section, I consider the concept of community from the

close-in (emotions) through to virtual communities. Finally, I explore the idea of a national community created through media representations of the avalanche “story”.

### ***I Want to Tell You About My Grief, Will You Hear Me?***

In sociology it is argued that there are “cultural scripts” (see Seale 1998) which are employed as a way to comprehend the contemporary situation of grief in a Western cultural framework. The mourners, and those who surround them, draw on normative conceptions of grief to delimit, make sense of, and perform the personal experience of losing someone close (Reimers 2003: 326). Theories on bereavement, depictions of people in mourning, articles in newspapers, participation at funerals, and personal experiences of death, constitute resources for individuals and groups that are exposed to loss (Seale 1998). Further, representations of grief are conspicuously visible in media, and are likely to be drawn on as fundamental resources for expressing and understanding grief. In this way public discourses on grief are built up. Like Reimers (2003: 326) I prefer to use the notion of cultural discourses which seem open and negotiable rather than cultural scripts, which seem more static. The discourses surrounding grief set boundaries for how long and how intensively a “normal” mourner should be grieving, and furthermore, “police” grieving behaviour in public space.

There are popular criteria for how long people “should” grieve, and how expressive or contained their grief “should” be. Every culture polices grief and every culture has norms as to what is acceptable mourning behaviour. However, I discuss grief in a Western cultural context. In practice, clinical physicians’ notion of abnormal grief is grief that goes on too long or never begins, and grief that is either too much or too little expressed. These are precisely the criteria by which popular Anglo-American culture judges grief (Walter 1999: 165). Since the 1960s death and grief have no longer been taboo topics in England and America, but if grief may be openly discussed, it does not mean that it may be openly shown (Smart 1993).

Active grieving is considered a *private* act, properly conducted in seclusion, the bereaved are expected to control (modify) their emotions. Many families preside over visitations at the funeral home, at the receiving lines following the church funeral, and home (or public) receptions following the graveside service. ‘Discreet tears may be shed. However, displays of grief that much exceed this

level will at best be considered inappropriate and at worst will result in the bereaved being ushered from public view' (Jorgenson-Earp and Lanzilotti 1998: 156).

One significant feature of emotional geographies is the social prescription, distribution, location, and situating of human emotions. In other words, what society considers appropriate for individuals to feel in specific situations and locations (Cresswell 1996: 10). A fundamental assumption is that emotions are interactive. The meaning and the quality of individual subjective emotional experiences is derived from processes of interaction between the individual and their surroundings (Hepworth 2005: 178). In terms of individual experience, the expression of emotions may involve a tension between awareness of personal feeling and awareness of the expectations of others which, in turn, are responsive to situation and place (Hepworth 2005: 178). Hubbard (2000) has attempted to tease out some of the complexities of the moral(ising) geographies that underpin scholars' reluctance to engage with issues of desire and disgust in other areas of the discipline. He suggests that moral panics arise in response to behaviours (themselves expressions of feelings) that are considered somehow abnormal or wrong (see also Davidson *et al.* 2005: 7).

### ***Grieving Bodies Out of Place?***

I want to extend Hubbard's (2000) thoughts to include notions of the grieving body as cause for concern to "normal" society. So often it is said that we do not know what to say or how to act when someone close to us is suffering through grief. This begs the question, why do we feel such levels of discomfort? Parents who have lost a child gain a stigmatised status, often becoming an object of pity, embarrassment, and/or a person to avoid. After all, parental loss is not acceptable dinner-party conversation (Riches and Dawson 1996b: 144). The social space for parents (who have suffered losing a child) to express themselves emotionally and physically is limited. The firm boundaries of social etiquette become a form of "policing" behaviour situating the grieving body as Other (Riches and Dawson 1996b).

Davidson *et al.* state 'in different ways, both "disordered" and more ordinary emotional experiences highlight the permeability and fluidity of bodily boundaries (2005: 7). Emotional experiences can also help to construct, maintain, as well as sometimes disrupt the very distinction between bodily

interiors and exteriors (Davidson *et al.* 2005: 7). Thus, crying, wailing, breathlessness, muscular weakness, stomach cramps, fatigue, morbidity, listlessness, and so on can inhabit the grieving body (after Littlewood 1992: 41). The physical sensations associated with grief are often experienced as frightening, with bereaved individuals referring to feeling wounded, torn, ripped, raw, hollow, and/or broken. As the metaphors suggest, the bodily sensations are akin to physical injury (Littlewood 1992: 41).

Confiding and expressing bodily sensations in such an overtly physical manner can be cause for immediate concern for grieving individuals, but also for friends and family. Longhurst (2001a: 30) asserts that, ‘fluids are “enduring”; they are “necessary” but often “embarrassing” within Western cultures - they are frequently considered to be undignified ‘daily attributes of existence’ that we all must, although in different ways, live with and reconcile ourselves to (see also Grosz 1994: 194). These sensations and their manifestations are intimately linked to spaces both public and private. Robyn explains that:

Most of the time when I first started speaking<sup>6</sup> ... I would speak crying the whole time but I didn’t care because I said it hurts and I’m a mum and that was my basis for being there (...) but I wasn’t embarrassed by my crying because it showed them [audience] the message I wanted them to get anyway.

Robyn recounts what it was like to start her speaking tour of New Zealand. At that time James’ body was not yet recovered from under the snow. Her grief and feelings were still “raw”. Robyn is a strong willed person who “went into overdrive” (kept herself extremely busy) when she received the terrible news. Still, she qualifies her crying (grief) in public as something *not* to be embarrassed about, nor does she care about what people think. Her quote, however, underpins the notion that crying or overtly expressing emotion in public in the context of grief is cause for shame and sometimes deemed inappropriate. Why should Robyn feel embarrassed by her crying and why should she care? What I found to be an interesting paradox is that, rather than remove her emotions from the “public eye”, Robyn placed her grief in front of hundreds of strangers on her speaking tour.

In spite of the public nature of Robyn’s tours, amongst friends there was an reluctance to engage with Robyn’s grief. Hockey *et al.* (2001: 180) discuss the

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<sup>6</sup> Robyn is referring to her speaking tour of New Zealand as “The Avalanche Lady”.



difficulty of living in a society where people are afraid to confront and talk to a parent about the death of their child. Robyn found that when meeting friends on the street, conversations became awkward. She illuminated in her diary how these conversations felt:

Many times you closed off a thought as not suitable – so when you did find someone to share with, you cried as well – a release and a relief that you could talk about him – but then the recipient felt bad/sad and would not want to be responsible for making you cry – so avoided that topic in the future.

Robyn also said in our interview:

You know they'd [friends] say "How are you?" sort of thing and it brought tears, so [they said] "I won't ask how she is" (...) and so that was a reaction to how people couldn't cope and didn't know what to say ummm and I guess that happened enough that people did stop asking which is why doing the tours allowed me to talk about James and to cry.

### ***Grief: Emotions That Are Beyond Conversation***

In this section I highlight the indefinable qualities of emotions that go beyond conversation and texts (Bondi 2005: 437-438). Robyn expressed how heightened emotional situations can sometimes be complicated in our first interview. She explained that the feelings which surround encounters of death and grief are often beyond words and perhaps language is not always an appropriate way to share grief. When contemplating theories of grief, Small (2001: 41) asserts the importance of language in the interface between social and internal worlds. Yet, he fails to account for the intense and often embodied nature of emotional expressions that are experienced well beyond words. Robyn talked about her own experience and her experiences through Victim Support, of having to create rapport with "victims" of trauma:

Sometimes words perhaps ... words are not the best conveyor of what we're feeling and thinking and maybe the hug is much more meaningful and often (long pause) I guess this comes through Victim Support ... the things people say are quite *trite* because they don't know what to say (...) I think that when people are saying things just to fill the space ... that's all it is, they don't know what to say so they say something and sitting and saying nothing would be so much better.

Thus, while I have argued that there is often emphasis on thinking of emotions as relational (see Bondi 2003) there are sometimes difficulties in establishing

“emotional rapport” in actuality. Robyn told me a personal experience ‘I said the wrong thing and that was it, she [woman suffering grief] was gone ... I had no rapport with her after that at all, she just turned away from me (...) even though I’ve experienced a trauma of my own you know it doesn’t mean to say I am any better at helping people with theirs’. Maybe some of the discomfort people feel is due to their reliance on language as *the* medium to communicate with others, especially when they do not know people well. Robyn states ‘I guess you can’t know the guilt and the grief and the reaction of people ... yeah (long pause) it’s the ability to stand there and say nothing that’s the hardest’.

It is generally agreed that not everything about an emotional performance can be encapsulated in language. After all, actions, like bursting into tears, often speak louder than words. However, Smith *et al.* (2009: 12) argue that ‘the fact that words cannot completely represent emotions is not necessarily a problem for representation; it is as Lacan might argue, of the nature of representation’. Perhaps people do feel uncomfortable when someone they love is in tears. Perhaps too, it is the case that people struggle for the right thing to say or do.

However, because people and emotions are often complex and contradictory, there is no single “formula” that will ensure an emotional connection through empathy with each individual (especially in emotionally heightened situations). Within a family unit each individual can feel grief differently and require different support. Even though close family members have shared a grief experience their emotional needs are often different (see Riches and Dawson 1996b). By equating her grief to skiing in Vail (see Figure 4), Robyn explained in her digital story:

Some pathways through grief are more difficult than others, some face the cliff and cannot go on, some take the steep path and go directly down, while others travel through the trees and take a longer time. There is no right way, and each of our family members has taken a different path. I guess I took the straight path, faced it, and made what I could out of the ride.



Figure 4: "Path Through Grief"

Source: Robyn's digital story

### ***Metaphor and Meaning***

Grief can lead to feeling "out of place" in everyday spaces (see Cresswell 1996). Within clinical grief models emphasis tends to be placed on overcoming grief and "getting back to normal". To experience a continuing bond with the deceased in the present is sometimes thought of as symptomatic of psychological problems and called "unresolved grief". The main aim for bereaved individuals is to reintegrate back into "normal" routines as soon as possible after the funeral ritual (Klass *et al.* 1996: 4). The literature on grief is replete with spatial metaphors, for example, 'letting go', 'moving forward', 'depth of grief', and 'getting back to normal' (from where?). Like Hockey *et al.* (2001: 137) I comment on these metaphors because they imply that a grieving person is in an unwanted and unwelcomed state and needs to be bought 'back' to cohere with the conventions of social acceptability. Robyn rationalises her feelings:

So we had that time of an abnormal/normal I guess and that we were still doing "living" things ... I mean people would invite us out (...) they kept us busy (...) and in that way we were trying to be normal but everyone was in with us (...) ummm and I'd been touring so that was a part of the abnormal/normal [thinking] (long pause) yeah ... there were so many roller-coasters going on.

Geographers have been interested in metaphor since the 1960s when spatial scientists first discussed the linkages between models and metaphors. For example, Tuan (1978) used metaphor to illustrate something of the human

imagination and creativity. More recently, critical geographers have paid attention to the “power politics” of assumed metaphors in epistemological issues (Barnes 2000: 500). Metaphor, it is argued, carries intellectual freight that needs to be scrutinised for historical and material origins in order to explore the consistencies and compatibilities with other things that one might want to say (Barnes 2000: 499-501).

Like Barnes (2000: 500) I found that ‘the importance of metaphor is not its meaning, but its use, which is changing beliefs through the jolt, or frisson, that a novel metaphor can produce’. Metaphors, because they are blatantly false, cause people to stop and think, sometimes leading them to conjecture in different ways. At the beginning of Robyn’s digital story she reads out a poem, and the rest of her story is mostly conveyed through metaphor. For example, Robyn used a photo of “Snow-Cats” to convey how empathetic people came to her and Stuart to help smooth out their “rough terrain”, and help to ease their pain (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5: “Snow-Cat Counsellors”**  
Source: Robyn’s digital story

Robyn substitutes snow for grief and vice-versa. For her, the metaphors weave in and out of literal meanings. The snowy world is a material space and place within which her thoughts of James coalesce. James was killed in the snow, his “last space” was snow and ice. Robyn was forced to enter this environment to look for her son and she blamed the snow for taking James. In this way the snow

literally caused Robyn's grief. In spite of this, within her story, snow *represents* her grief, Robyn said 'usually snow falls in layers, and it also melts in layers, our grief came in one dump of snow, but like the snow it melted layer by layer' (see Figure 5). Furthermore, Robyn wrote in her diary that her white car felt like an avalanche bearing down upon small creatures ready to engulf them, and it took two or three years for her to stop feeling that.



Figure 6: "Layers of Snow/Grief"  
Source: Robyn's digital story

Giving Robyn's feelings a metaphorical or representational space (snow/white car) has enabled her to explain more closely how her grief feels. Like Cresswell (1997), I found that metaphor can be 'understood as a mode of thought and action that is implicated in everyday life'. He argues that 'this extends metaphor beyond rhetoric or theoretical understanding and into the realm of practice and experience' (Cresswell 1997: 333). Using metaphor in the digital story gave Robyn a representational space for presenting her grief to an "outside" audience.

When I approached Robyn about making the digital story, I initially asked her to write about a place (location), maybe Japan, and her feelings. Immediately she asked me if we could change Japan to snow, as snow was a *meaningful space* for her in relation to grief (see also page 42). Robyn felt the need to "make peace" with the snowy environment, as a hurdle toward "mastering" her grief. It was a brave thing to do, in that, rather than be overpowered by her emotions, she was

able to “conquer” snow (and skiing) and the “rawness” of her grief little by little. Toward the end of the digital story Robyn explained that there had to be something more to grief than just pure emotional pain, by listening to the “voice in her heart” Robyn came to realise the meaning of her grief. Robyn narrates in her story:

Any loss brings an indescribable pain; a bewilderment. It makes us appreciate those that live on and helps us to help others, to be there as someone finds their way through the darkness, to be there to help melt their layers of ice. The experience of grief gives us skills, gives us a light to shine on others. To use this experience to gain understanding gives us meaning for having experienced grief. Now, we still have our grief but it doesn't surround us, we have moved forward, we can now even ski upon it, use the experience.

Although I have argued that grief models which advocate for “letting go” to “move forward” are in some ways unhelpful (see page 5), there is a notion of achievement in Robyn's digital story from “moving on” past the “raw” beginnings of her grief. Robyn's story indicates that feelings are constantly in flux rather than static and bounded. Where Robyn's account and clinical models differ is that the models imply that grief is a journey with a start and end point. As stated in the introduction, the downside of linear models is the expectation of an end to grief, and importantly, the assertion that cutting emotional ties with the deceased is necessary for life to move on (Irving 2005: 173-4; Walter 1999: 154). Robyn emphasised, on a number of occasions, that one never “gets over” grief, but learns to live with it on a day to day basis.

It is also important to note that grief is an individual experience but, as I have argued, grief (emotions) also radiate outward into the social sphere. It was not until Robyn felt that she could help other people with their feelings that her grief had meaning. Avalanche awareness was Robyn's own way of coping with the loss of a son, it was what she felt “driven” to do. Time has changed how Robyn's grief felt and continues to feel, however, time does not follow a straight forward conceptual model. The advantage of researching grief empirically is that Robyn is able to convey something of the twists and turns of her emotional experience. She said to me that every time she hears of another avalanche, her heart skips, and she is “taken straight back”. She discussed time and her grief:

Robyn: I guess I rebelled against time ... I just decided that time was a man-made [sic] measure and when you do that ... I mean sometimes

things seem to have happened just yesterday and they were years ago and sometimes things happen years ago and it was just yesterday (...) and I think time is just something we need in our lives to get to appointments on time [laughs].

Me: Yeah you're right, it's an organising principle on the one hand yet on the other it's totally bendable.

Robyn: Yeah ... and in that way (long pause) how long he's [James'] been dead or [sighs] how long since I saw his face sort of thing can change ... you know sometimes it's not long ago and sometimes it's ages ago and things like that ... it changes quite often.

Me: Time does ebb and flow, I remember you told me a while ago that when an avalanche happens it's horrible, it's like it happened just yesterday (...)

Robyn: [she shows me a newspaper picture of an avalanche on Treble-Cone ski field in Wanaka] \_\_\_\_\_ [daughter] was working down there, that's how they form the lines with the probes and \_\_\_\_\_'s [daughter] actually in one of those lines on a probe ... she'd gone skiing that day up there ... and I was flying back that day and Stu rang me to say ummm ... "There's been an avalanche, she was on the field but she's OK" [Robyn pretends she has a phone to her ear] I was like ... "WHAT!" (...) so yeah ... that was a heart-stop moment too.

### ***Emotional and Virtual Communities***

The term "community" has wide and varying descriptions which are not fixed and stable. Over time geographers have employed different notions of community and the usefulness of the term has been critiqued (see Young 1990). Nevertheless, the term is still very much in use, politically as well as socially. Valentine (2001: 105) states 'since the late 1980s the notion of community has been retheorised as a structure of meaning or imagining' (see Anderson 1983). The importance of this later work is that it recognises that imagined communities are fluid and contested, but are still important to their "members". I argue that there is an added dimension to communities when considering emotions.

Communities of feeling (see Riches and Dawson 1996b) are akin to or found in mutual self-help groups, whereby people with similar emotional experiences meet, talk, and give each other support. The positive meanings associated with community such as comradeship, solidarity, and mutual support (Valentine 2001: 105) are extended to incorporate empathy and a deeper emotional support that includes (in this case) sharing grief. Still, I think there is an additional aspect to

communities of feeling or “emotional communities” where people can make an emotional connection that unites them across other modes of differentiation (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.). These emotional communities involve all the people that surround a grieving individual or family. In Robyn’s case, the “emotional community” that was built around her was translocational and temporary as well as longer term. Thus, the notion of community has blurred boundaries and is “stretched-out” over physical space to include an international dimension, as well as virtual space through email, telephone, newspapers, and telex.

I have found there is a gap in the geographical literature concerning the “emotional communities” that people form. That is, the shared emotional connections that take place during a time of heightened emotional engagement, such as grief. People tend to relate to grief and loss on various levels, for example, understanding grief as a parent, husband, sibling, mother and so on. People, then mobilise these feelings to create an “emotional community”. These communities are fragile and contain differing spatial and temporal dimensions. Robyn wrote in her diary:

Communities through common emotional experiences? Yes, we formed bonds with the other parents, our girls with the other siblings – a shared experience. Internationally, as “Avalanche Lady” I have gained sponsorship and made contact with people who allowed me to use their material on my website. Most of them have experienced avalanche deaths.

### ***Virtual Communities***

Valentine (2001) explores the notion of virtual communities as an example of new forms of social relations created by innovative technologies that are free from the limitations of place as locale. Information and communication technologies, enthusiasts argue, enable users to meet those who share their ideas and interests regardless of the geographical barriers of distance and time zones (Valentine 2001: 118). I explored the sharing of emotional experiences of grief and the Internet as a zone of informal and individualised mutual help groups (MHG). MHG are thought of as communities that share experiences in a formalised semi-public setting rather than as self-directed groups, as often there may be a group “facilitator” present (see Walter 1999: 187-189). Recently, the phenomenon of “blogging” has provided significant cyberspace to share personal thoughts and stories. The term blog is the contraction of the term “Web log” and is a web site usually maintained by an individual. However, blogs have the



capacity for readers to leave comments. This interactive format is an important part of many blogs (see Wikipedia, Blog 2009).

When considering grief and loss through computer websites, there is a vast array of ways to: interact, read, buy consumer products or services, make donations, see photo galleries, hear music, poems, view archived media representations, and share ideas, eulogies, stories, and information. It is clear that the Internet is an increasingly important space of emotional outpouring and support on a significant number of levels, and for every type of grief (for examples see [www.selfhelp.co.nz](http://www.selfhelp.co.nz); [grieflossrecovery.com](http://grieflossrecovery.com); [thegriefblog.com](http://thegriefblog.com); [grief-loss-info.blogspot.com](http://grief-loss-info.blogspot.com); [www.familyresource.com](http://www.familyresource.com)). Robyn did not use the Internet as a place for direct emotional support, but rather, as a tool to promote mountain safety and as a centre for avalanche information.

### ***Media Space: Imagined Communities?***

Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities is salient to my project, as there are aspects of community within Robyn's grief at national and international levels. Anderson (1983) claimed that national communities are 'imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each they carry the image of their communion' (1983: 15). Further, as Valentine (2001: 124) argues, national communities are also imagined 'because people within a nation often have a deep sense of comradeship or identity with others even though, in reality, there may be exploitation and inequality between fellow citizens'.

Ideas of national identity underpinned many of the newspaper articles produced on the avalanche accident. As the story of the avalanche played out on an international stage through mass media, ideas of nationhood were mobilised to, first, create a national community of support. And second, as an "us-and-them" division due to the supposed conflict surrounding differences in search and rescue techniques. The media added to the creation of a "national" [read: stretched out] community of feeling, and created a vested interest in the plight of "Kiwis [New Zealanders] in trouble" overseas. Most of the initial titles of newspaper articles highlighted that the missing men were Kiwis/New Zealanders to make their story relevant to the national community. Some examples include: "Pongaroa youth among NZers missing in Japan"; "Kiwi trio remain buried in

avalanche”; “Hunt continues for Kiwi snowboarders”; “Avalanches stop hunt for missing Kiwis”; “Search for NZ trio thwarted” (see New Zealand Press Association, February 2000).

The New Zealand “community” was continually updated via newspapers and television, and donations created an immediacy of interest in how the situation would play out for everyone. People from all over New Zealand, whom Robyn and Stuart did not know personally, sent the family cards and donations for their cause. Robyn noted that the ‘support from New Zealand has been amazing’. Some of the public of New Zealand felt a strong emotional attachment to the situation and were “powerfully affected” by what happened without previously knowing the men or families involved, pledging donations of up to \$500 dollars at a time (Mold 2000; Nash 2000).

However, throughout the “ordeal” there were overarching notions of Japan and the Japanese rescue operation in the media as Other. Robyn and Stuart stressed that they bore no ill feelings toward the Japanese people involved in the search and rescue. In my opinion, the newspapers made a strong effort to create an “us-and-them” division. Robyn wrote in her diary ‘the separation of the nations was very real, the Japanese were aware they would lose face regarding their lack of search and rescue skills’. The articles used concepts of national identity to criticise the search efforts and create “drama on the slopes”. For example, some articles stated ‘we went there with Kiwi expectations – in Japan they don’t even search for their own (...) the Japanese operation was different from New Zealand – our concept of search and rescue is that everybody hits that mountain as soon as possible and starts looking’ (Nash 2000). Robyn tried to explain the media tangle in relation to her own feelings about what happened in Japan:

That was what they [Japanese media] were telling their people, that they [James and his friends] went beyond the boundaries, they deserved to die ... and they [Japanese search and rescue] don’t search for their people over there they wait until the snow melts and they come out in the spring thaw (long pause) they live within boxes over there ... whereas New Zealander’s don’t, New Zealander’s push all the boundaries ... so their whole attitude to death is different ... you know “they’re gone why worry”? (...) But the shop keepers [in Hakuba] would be very sad you know very tearful ...[saying] “We’re so sorry” you know which was almost against the cultural expectations of “You die too bad” so yeah ... so there were sort of conflicting things happening (...) I think ... if you think of that community in itself ... I mean the owner of the hotel put us up for a

week without charging us ... and all the “gaijin” <sup>7</sup> were there to support us ... I mean it was a community ... the people were there for us.

Leipins (1996) explores the role of media accounts in constructing hegemonic discourses of masculinity in New Zealand agriculture. She argues that media ‘involves a number of sites and processes’ through which meaning is constructed and which ‘must be negotiated if discursive change is to occur’ (Leipins 1996: 3). Focusing on an international conference for women in agriculture, Leipins (1996) contends that relations with the media were crucial to the success of the conference and the wider agenda for the movement. Media, she continues, is a dynamic web of relations and practices that (in this case) ‘became a field of opportunities where meanings and power could be questioned’ (Leipins 1996: 6). Robyn’s accounts of the media, however, are more complex. Robyn felt she used the media to highlight their case and put pressure on Japanese officials, but “facts” concerning the search and rescue were not accurately represented in international media accounts. She explains:

We’d been told that we *had* to include the media and we *had* to make as big of a thing out of this as possible to make the Japanese [search and rescue teams] do things ... we had to force them using the media ... so that’s what we did ...’cause Japan was saying “No, you know ... that we have the teams and we’re doing everything” ... they never, they didn’t have the teams and they didn’t have the expertise and they didn’t go searching but they made it look like they did ... you know the things on TV were such rubbish and you sit there thinking “bloody hell!”

Further, within the spotlight of the media, Robyn felt that some embassy staff members were ever-mindful of the trade relations between New Zealand and Japan. Robyn notes that she tried to make “waves” but everything was smoothed over by the embassy and wrote:

Foreign Minister at the time, Phil Goff, was caught between loyal supporters, government policies, and Japan-New Zealand economic relationships. The New Zealand embassy were always there minding out for us, but more so – minding out for the New Zealand/Japan relationship – grieving parents will go home but the future commercial benefits for New Zealand must not be damaged.

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<sup>7</sup> Japanese word to denote foreigners.

## ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have focused on space and representations of grief to elucidate that the social sphere is an important space for situating emotional behaviour. Cultural discourses are built up through media and are important as resources for expressing and understanding grief. However, the expression of strong sentiments in public space is often considered to be problematic. People can become uncomfortable when faced with a (seemingly) over-emotional person. The effect of the spatial location on emotions is to make the grieving person feel “out of place” (Cresswell 1996) and in an unwanted emotional state. Robyn discussed the difficulty of representing grief through language. Sometimes emotions cannot be accurately communicated in face to face conversation. Nevertheless, Robyn was able to express how her grief felt by using her digital story as a representational space. Photographs and poetry combined with metaphorical narrative allowed Robyn to articulate her loss. These aspects of expression gave meaning (and a meaningful space) to her grief.

In the latter half of the chapter, I explored extended notions of community, emotional, virtual, and national, to explain how grief interrelates with social spaces. Emotional communities form through sharing empathetic feelings and are mobilised to give grieving people support and encouragement. Emotional, virtual, and international communities incorporated a myriad of people in different places that for a time united to support Robyn and her family. Thus, local people in Hakuba, and foreigners formed a “community” to support the three families involved in the tragedy. The media was also a space of emotional and financial support, linking the New Zealand public to events in Japan. In spite of that, the media was considered by Robyn to be problematic, in that, international media did not always accurately describe what was happening on the mountains in relation to search and rescue efforts. Furthermore, political trade relationships between New Zealand and Japan underpinned their experience.

## Chapter Six: Spiritual Space and Place: Realm of the Other?

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Death is nothing at all; I have just slipped away into the next room. I am I and you are you. Whatever we were to each other, that we are still. Call me by my old familiar name; Speak to me in the easy way you always used. Put no difference into your tone; Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed, at the little jokes we enjoyed together. Play, smile, think of me. Let my name be the household word it always was. Let it be spoken without an effort, without a ghost of a shadow on it. Life means all that it ever meant; It was the same as it ever was; There is absolutely unbroken continuity. Why should I be out of mind, because I am out of sight? I am but waiting for you, for an interval; Somewhere very near, just around the corner. All is well (Canon Henry Scott Holland 1847-1918, Canon of St. Pauls Cathedral).

Geographies of religion and spirituality are increasingly becoming a space of examination within geographical paradigms. Indeed in March this year (2009) there was a conference concerning queer spiritualities and spaces at the University of Sussex (see Sussex Centre for Cultural Study 2009). The organisers called for scholars of religion and spirituality to ‘contribute to newly emerging trends in social and cultural geography’ (Holloway and Valins 2002: 7). Similarly, Holloway states ‘the affectual relations and forms of embodiment that produce and are produced in religious-spiritual space must be given greater attention if we are to develop more complex and nuanced analyses of space’ (2006: 186). Additionally, Kong (2001a) illuminates that there are significant gaps in the developing literature around religious spatialities. She recognises that researchers need to expand their analysis beyond “officially sacred” spaces and incorporate historical and space-specific examples at various scales (see also Brace *et al.* 2006: 30). Furthermore, Brace *et al.* (2006: 29) state:

Indeed, most geographers would acknowledge that aspects of religion – of faith, sacredness, and spirituality – intersect with geography at every turn: from understanding the construction of identity or the meaning of bodily practices at a personal level, to unpicking the complex relationships and politics of institutional space and place at a regional or national level.

Holloway and Valins (2002) utilise geographies of religion and spirituality in order to theorise spatial practice, performance, bodies, and habitual landscapes (but leave place off their list). Geographies of religion seem to refer to what is considered “traditional” (mainstream) religions, religious sites, and spaces. While spiritualism seems to incorporate *both* official religions and religious practice, as well as Other notions of spiritual connection (for example New Age, African spirit possession, *Espiritismo* etc.). Within this chapter, I examine the implications of a binary distinction between religion and spirituality, whereby “spirituality” is not only Othered, but mysticism or mystical themes are particularly marginalised.

I begin with an overview of funeral rituals, and explore how Robyn’s feelings about places changed through grief. Next, I explain how particular places have become secondary to the spiritual connection Robyn has with James. “Non-place” and ideas of mobility infuse her bonds with James’ spirit. Initially I did not anticipate this spiritual aspect of Robyn’s grief, so I adjusted my thinking about space and place accordingly as the research process unfolded. Thus, I incorporated Thrift’s (1999) idea of “ecology of place” into this chapter. I argue for both known and unknown qualities of emotional connections between “here” and “beyond” to be included into research and into a Western cultural framework. To finish, I reflect on private remembering and illustrate how the places within which this remembering occurs are an important aspect of Robyn’s experience of grief.

### ***Funeral Rituals***

Without culturally prescribed and shared rites of passage, people cannot move smoothly from one role to another, but linger in a state of liminality (after Victor Turner 1969).

Van Gennep’s seminal work (1909 translated 1960) has salience for my project because he showed that place is an integral part of rites of passage. Van Gennep (1960) was interested in examining the threshold areas of human existence and their associated rites of passage. To van Gennep (1960: 192), the funeral ritual involves a separation into a sacred world (a place) and those involved enter a liminal state (from Latin *limen*, meaning threshold) before incorporation back into the profane world. However, it is argued below, that the separation between sacred and profane space is not as clear-cut as van Gennep’s (1960) analyses imply. Nonetheless, place *is* an integral part of most rites ‘the passage

from one social position to another is identified with territorial passage, such as the entrance into a village or house (...)’ (van Gennep 1960: 192) and a ritual crossing of a threshold, such as, the body into earth or fire. Teather (1999: 13) states that ‘clearly, a “passage” associated with various life crises is still very much a part of human experience’.

Funeral rites bring people together to provide support for the bereaved, enable them acknowledge the loss, and share thoughts and memories of the deceased. As Gamino *et al.* (2000) state ‘funeral rituals appeared to enhance mourners’ comfort at the time of death, both by facilitating social support and by connecting the griever(s) with deeper levels of meaning with which to understand and frame their loss’ (cited in Mallon 2008: 83). However, the feelings that surround funeral rituals become complicated when there is more than one and when there is a significant time-lapse between the loss of a loved one and the time when the body has been recovered. In Robyn’s case it took four months to find the bodies of the young men. In that time people needed some sense of closure in order to continue on with their lives. It is important to note that two of the memorials were facilitated without the body as Robyn felt responsible for whole communities of people in a “liminal state”. The third memorial, a “proper” funeral at Katikati was a farewell and completion of waiting for four months. Robyn describes the three rites:

#### **Pongaroa**

I said to Stuart ... we have to have a funeral, we have to have a ... (long pause) ... a remembrance or something to tell these people that they can get on with their own lives again ... because with no closure and no funeral ... they didn’t know what to do.

#### **Japan**

It’s like ... we had the service over there, for all those people over there, for the community over there ... the morning of the service ... you couldn’t get to the church ... I mean it was five feet deep in snow! [laughs] The church was full ... they were all involved in trying to search and there to support ... you know ... the “gaijin” [foreign] community ... it was so important to have that church service.

#### **Katikati**

It was the most central place to have it and James had gone to Katikati College and had been at the beach [close-by] so it was a meaningful place for him as well as that he’d sort of ... come home as such (long pause) and so the bach was another home. We had a

body, we had seen that he was dead – this was for real. At Katikati it was final. This funeral was more formal, in a church, with undertakers, organ music, and we had bagpipes to bring him in and take him out.

The family bach at Athenree (near Katikati) was talked about by Robyn as a *meaningful place* for James and also a place where her memories of him coalesce ‘the bach is a special place for James there’s so many stories of James at the bach sort of thing (...) there’s a tree for James there, so we’d never leave that place’. However, [as yet] Athenree is not where James’ ashes are. Instead, they are with Robyn and Stuart in their present home, and, as she said ‘we haven’t found a *place* for James yet’. Thus the bach represents a paradoxical space of emotions, as memories are both precious and painful reminders. Robyn wrote ‘after James’ funeral number three, there was no pull to go to the bach’. Nevertheless, they had to stay there after the farm sold in Pongaroa. She continued ‘this enforced occupation [at the bach] meant we had to get over those other memories’. Robyn’s mixed feelings about the bach underscores that places have the power to evoke both “good” and “bad” memories. Although Robyn remembers many fond stories of James and their holiday times at that location, staying at the bach accentuated his absence which took time to come to terms with.

### ***Spiritualism without Religiosity?***

We say your departed certainly return, they often stand at your side as in former days, though not being clairvoyant you fail to see them. They speak to you, but not being clairvoyant you do not hear them. They try to impress you with an awareness of their presence, though you deem that sudden thought of them just a fancy of your own and nothing more (Thomas 1928: 194-5).

Belief in magic, spirits, and/or supernatural entities has long been associated with the non-Western Other. This has a long documentation throughout classical anthropological writings, such as Evans–Pritchard’s ethnographic writings on the Azande (1937) and Lévi Strauss’ (1963) assessment of the magical powers of a Kwakiutl Indian shaman (see also Walter 1999: 60). The uses of magic and fantasy have often been ascribed to the Other, the Stranger, who is consequently characterised as primitive, barbaric, and even inhuman (Warner 1996: 13, cited in Hallam *et al.* 1999: 185). Contemporary writers focus on Haitian Vodou (Brown 1991, 1995), African spirit possession (Stoller 1995), and Puerto Rican *Espiritismo* (Prorok 1997, 2000; Torres 1995). Despite the



dominance of theories of secularisation and rationalisation in Western societies, there are continuities in magical belief and connections to what are considered “paranormal” experiences. Has secularisation pushed people into exploring a “last space” where they might converse with, and connect with, the dead in some meaningful way?

When reading emerging literature around religion and spirituality in geography, there is a significant gap in work that concentrates on spirits and people’s interactions with the ethereal, through mediums, clairvoyants, or psychics. However, there is a persistent concern with the spiritual and uncontrollable aspects of self and society (Bradbury 1999: 179; Hallam *et al.* 1999: 184). In academia there has been a reluctance to engage with the place of spirits within a Western cultural context, and even less of an incentive to work with the places of spirits in the everyday lives of people. Indeed, the semi-structured interviews in this research shed light on Robyn’s spiritual connection to James’ which was a previously unconsidered aspect of her grief. This “unique information” required me to expand my reading and thinking to include notions of spirits in a geographical context.

Holloway (2006) approaches enchanted spaces through the séance<sup>8</sup> as performance, and touches on the “reality” of spirits. Nonetheless, he is reluctant to broaden out from embodied performance and affect to explore the relationships between people and non-traditional religious spirits. Pile (2005) includes “phantasmagorias” (ghosts, vampires, and magic) in his analyses of city life. His examples highlight that some cities, such as New Orleans, have been strongly linked with “the occult” and Voodoo. Further, many aspects of magic and “the occult” have been commodified, such as, Halloween, horror genres, dream catchers, and crystals, which crowd “normative” space (Pile 2005: 74-87). Pile (2005) draws on Freud and Simmel to explain that urban phantasms are, like dreams, elusive and unexpected, also partially concealed, yet they lurk near the surface. Phantasms disrupt normative space and time. They have an economy and enter the politics of a city by keeping historicity at the surface (see Edensor 2006; Pile 2005).

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<sup>8</sup>Séance in French means: “seat”, “session” or “sitting”: *une séance de cinéma*. In English, the word Séance refers to a meeting of people who are gathered specifically to receive messages from spirits, relay messages from spirits, or to listen to a spirit medium discourse (contemporarily, participants do not need be seated)(see Wikipedia, séance 2009).

While Pile (2005) concentrates on cities, Prorok (2000) explores *Espiritismo* within a Puerto Rican community in New York. Her feminist examination of a medium, María, takes in transgressions of sacred and profane space. María ritually crosses boundaries through spirit possession. Thus, 'María articulates a spatially feminised way of knowing' using her body as a site (medium) of resistance that contravenes socially constructed spaces (Prorok 2000: 76). However, these examples overwhelmingly accord spiritual interconnectedness with the Other (Haitian/African/Puerto Rican). Accordingly, I argue that "those" which remain outside "traditional religions" are marginalised by not having a legitimate place in people's lives, especially when considering a Western cultural framework. To consider the emotional place that a range of individuals and groups accede to spirits will, surely, develop complex and nuanced analyses of space and place in geography. Living with, and taking into account, the spiritual presence of the dead requires scholars to examine the correlations between heaven and earth, past, present, and future, which may dissolve temporal, as well as spatial boundaries.

Hallam *et al.* (1999: 184) challenge the assumed fixity spatial boundaries which delineate the tangible or 'empirically observable' domains of the living and the "invisible" and, therefore, 'marginalised spheres of the departed'. Following their lead, I underscore that the lived spiritual geographies of Robyn required me to work through her (lack of) feelings for concrete place and highlight "non-place" (based on Thrift 1999) as a part of her grief. In a spiritual sense Robyn explained to me that James is with her a lot. She hears him, feels his physical presence, and he helps her with tasks in her life much as an angel is considered to do. In fact, Robyn spoke about her angels 'I talk to him [James] and ask him for his help (...) I know he is around, I know he is looking out for me – he is one of my team of angels'.

Interestingly, within this emotional framework, the relationship between mother and son has been reconfigured through death. The notion of James as an angel spirit who can "arrange" to help Robyn has disrupted the roles of mother and son respectively. James has become the protector and Robyn the protected. An underlying perception of being a parent, and particularly a mother, is to help and protect your child as much as is humanly possible throughout their lives. Within an ethereal space and place James is able to be a comfort to Robyn in times of

stress. He is able to “communicate” enough to give Robyn solace from his absence. The way Robyn connects to James has an impact on her feelings about places. Because James is near and connects with her, in Japan, in Pongaroa, on her New Zealand tour to speak about avalanches, at their present home, and back, Robyn does not need to go to any particular place to (re)connect. She states ‘I don’t do anything special in that he’s always here ... he’s a part of everyday’. However, as Robyn conceptualised James as being somewhere (not here) there is still a notion of geography in her interactions with James ‘I ask him to help people *from his side*’ (italics added). Within this research it was important that I respected Robyn’s spiritual feelings and give them a legitimate place in geography. Human research is often “messy” and unique, thus, you cannot count on what you may find.

Robyn’s digital story underscores the ephemeral nature of place which reiterates Thrift’s (1999) ideas of an “ecology of place” perspective. Robyn did not feel she had to return to the Japanese mountains in order to share the snowy environment with James. Robyn explained that James is with her “in spirit” wherever she goes. In the digital story Robyn has a photograph of herself with family at a picnic on a mountain [at Vail]. There is a “space” in the grouping as if James were standing there with them. She wrote in her story ‘James comes with us when we travel, he is our silent guide, he shares our ski runs and our family time, we always mention his name and we always talk about him being present.’ Parts of a Buddhist prayer that Robyn read-out in her digital story further convey how she feels about James’ existence:

The Buddhists repeat in word and in writings that loved ones who have passed (out of their bodies) still have a voice. Hearing from your heart, knowing his love, will give you peace which is required to trust that he *does exist now in wave versus form* (italics added).

### ***Telephone Calls to James***

It could be argued that the place for mediums, clairvoyants, or psychics in grief discourses is underutilised and/or under researched. Within literature based on loss, there is silence on exploring the interactions between grieving individuals and spirits of the departed. Walter (1999: 59) briefly considers this gap in grief studies ‘spiritual care has for some time been an accepted part of palliative care of the dying, yet has been markedly absent from bereavement care, the use bereaved individuals make of mediums is even less researched’. Seeing and

hearing the deceased has been described in the past as “hallucinations” (see Rees 1971; 1997). Thus, grieving individuals, who continued to see, hear, and/or talk to the deceased were considered to have a pathological grief pattern (Bradbury 1999: 177; Klass *et al.* 1996; Walter 1999). Perhaps the stigma of clinicians’ analyses means that sharing personal experiences with spirits is deemed too private, too dangerous, and/or too Other?

Riches and Dawson (2002: 219) comment that their respondents would only broach “mystical” themes when assured that a trusting, non-judgemental relationship had been fully established. Walter (1999: 60) elaborates on some of the underlying problem and explains that ‘understanding the spiritual meaning of bereavement (...) has to take seriously the afterlife, relationships with the dead, the supernatural, and both official and folk religious traditions’. Certainly, I found that Robyn was very open and discussed her “other-worldly” connection to James’ spirit without prompting or hesitation. I consider that, as a researcher, I have been fortunate to gain this level of insight into Robyn’s lived grief experience.

Ritualised encounters within spiritual practitioners’ consultations can be crucial in the reconstitution of self and identity at points of crisis such as death. A medium, in this case, is a person who carries an embodiment of the spirit “in contact”. They become the living body through which the dead are recovered and interpreted as active social agents (see Hallam *et al.* 1999: 185). The focus within these interactions is on narrative (dialogue) between the spirit, the medium, and an individual “in contact”. I am not describing spirit possession whereby a practitioner’s body becomes the site of communication. Robyn explained to me that she receives “information” from James through a medium. Further, she envisages James’ spirit as a subtler form of physical existence, in that, she did not describe how he looked or “seeing” his face, but rather, heard his voice and realised his presence in a room, car, or other places around her. Robyn said:

So has reconnection been an important part of my grief? Yeah ... you know going to mediums has just been essential ... [smiles] they are my telephone calls to James (...) it’s a bit like cuddling a baby really ... you know it’s just ... there ... it’s sort of warm I suppose ... and I guess a long time ago Princess Di’s mother said you know I still have three children just one of them is in another world and that made sense ...

they're here it's just that we can't see them and the fact that ... you know some people can see them and hear them is just wonderful.

### ***Private Remembering***

Death is a life crisis, a conjuncture of changes and transformations of the physical body, social relations, and cultural configurations. Hallam and Hockey (2001) have dedicated a book to exploring the relationships between death, memory, and material culture while paying close attention to embodiment (see also page 47). Throughout their study they examine the ways in which memory comes into play as an important aspect of the process of dying, mourning, and grief. Although there are many intersections with my work, in that Hallam and Hockey (2001) include the spaces of death and memory, their focus is more attuned to studying the material culture surrounding death, rather than the interactions between space, place, and grief.

Memories and the physical mementoes that people keep to remember someone are imbued with strong emotions that sometimes people feel the need to resolve (see Hockey *et al.* 2005; Hallam and Hockey 2001). Objects embody memories, they contain stories, and are important in order to memorialise. One's relationship to these "residues" or belongings is often considered to be private and can create intense emotions. To transgress this relationship could be considered problematic, as these objects take a place in people's lives and homes. For some, the location where private memorialising occurs is an important aspect of maintaining a relationship with the dead. Robyn recounted what she feels was one of the worst things that happened after James' accident. Her daughter and sister were trying to emotionally "save" Robyn from having to deal with James' belongings when they moved from Pongaroa. She explains:

I didn't realise they were doing it and I went down and they were in *his room* and I thought "Oh Jeez! (...)" and they'd decided that they could throw out those things, they would keep those things and they'd just pack those things [explains piles of stuff with her hands on the table] and the throw out pile *was all the things I was keepin!* (...) and I said "Nope, nope, nope" and they said "well what are you keeping that for?" and I said "well this is James', this *is* James" and everything had a story ... and they said "Oh darn we're in the wrong place" and I said "well you sure are!" [laughs] and it created a really bad feeling and it's taken possibly two or three years to undo that feeling.

Not only was James embodied in the belongings, but Robyn felt that her private space and private memories had been violated and said:

Robyn: That she [sister] would have the audacity to come into my home and my life and tell me what I could keep and what I wouldn't sort of thing (...) I didn't realise how much that would be such a no-no.

Me: Was it because she was transgressing a deeply private connection?

Robyn: Yeah ... it was just ... I mean they could have gone to my medicine cabinet and sorted that out you know? [laughs]

Geographers have argued that emotions can be attached to places (sense of place), but emotions are also shifted onto objects which are in turn spatialised. Just as Hockey *et al.* (2005: 144) found that material objects which survive the dead person can 'take on agency and provide a powerful form of emotional mediation which orchestrates the affective life remaining to their bereaved partner', I also established that certain items belonging to James contain formidable emotional significance for Robyn. For example, she wears a silver toe-ring<sup>9</sup> on a chain around her neck that was found with James, and in this way, he is constantly in (skin)contact with Robyn. The ring, then, became "sacralised", blurring the boundaries of sacred and profane space (see also Radley 1990).

The idea of a false separation of sacred and profane is not new, indeed Holloway (2003a) and Kong (2001, 2002) also consider that 'we should seek out the extraordinary as practiced and sustained in the ordinary' (Holloway 2003a: 1961). Holloway (2003a) goes on to discuss the (re)enchantment of "routine" spaces through focusing on embodied spiritual practices in the "everyday". He uses empirical examples from New Age spiritual seekers to convincingly challenge the duality of sacred and profane space. Holloway's (2003a: 1962) analysis reaffirm my own challenge to the division of sacred and profane spaces. Certain forms of spirituality have the potential to take all that counts as ordinary and everyday as being a possible source of enchantment. Bennett (2001) contends that our lives, perhaps, are not so disenchanting and secular, and that is how I feel about Robyn's accounts. She explained to me that her "everyday" life has room for enchantment, room for spiritual connection to James, and room for her team of angels.

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<sup>9</sup> A toe-ring is a piece of jewellery, usually made from silver or gold that tends to be worn on the second toe.

### ***“James Days”***

Remembering a loved one that has died is an important part of most grieving processes. It is often found to be psychologically unhelpful to “let go” as a resolution to grief. Many parents have no intention of “letting go” of their children but rather have worked to find a place for their child within their everyday lives and find ways to maintain a connection (see Klass *et al.* 1996). There is also a difficulty of living in a society that is afraid to speak to a parent about a dead child, or which believes that “time will heal” and “you will get over it” (Hockey *et al.* 2001: 180; see also page 64). When I began this project Robyn mentioned to me that she observes the important days and dates for James, particularly the anniversary of his death on 19 February 2000 (which she refers to as a “James Day”). As mentioned in chapter three, I spent the morning of a “James Day” with Robyn at her home.

Initially, I thought that the places Robyn goes on “James Days” would be particular and significant. Instead, Robyn and Stuart go to different places that James would have liked, and more importantly, they spend time together:

Robyn: So yeah ... a “James Day” ... I try to make sure that we (long pause) that Stu and I spend time together on a James Day and we have a day especially for him (...) and so one year we went to the Gannet Colony because we were down in Hastings ... I said “Right, we’re doing something, we’re doing that [Gannet Colony] because we’ve never done it before ... last year \_\_\_\_\_ [daughter] met us at the sculpture park at Waitakaruru there (...) we just had two or three hours there.

Me: So, it’s more a “head-space” that you set aside for him rather than a particular place?

Robyn: Yeah ... just a day ... well he’s part of *every* day but just a day for remembering ... yeah this is the day [that James died].

Thus, it is the time that is ritualised and the “head space” to remember James is then sacralised. In this way, Robyn disrupts the spatialities of death sanctification. Rather than visit a grave site, she shares a more intangible notion of remembrance with Stuart and sometimes other family members. Robyn remembers James in spaces and places (for example, the night sky) which are ethereal and spiritual (see Thrift 1999). Thus, the place of spirituality in Robyn’s grief is ubiquitous and pervasive.

## ***Conclusion***

In order to develop complex analyses of space and place, I have examined the spiritual aspects of Robyn's relationship with James. By echoing Thrift (1999) the places of Robyn's grief are (re)made through numerous interactions between a whole plethora of emotions, spiritual connections, and personal objects. I began by outlining funeral rituals and the places in which these occurred. Funeral rituals are place oriented, they are conducted somewhere, but also embody a transition from one space to another in the life cycle. However, rather than separating sacred from profane space (van Gennep 1960), I found that Robyn's spiritual connection to James blurs the two concepts. Robyn encounters James' spirit in the "everyday" and incorporates her own rituals into that space and place. Furthermore, some of James' belongings take on extraordinary emotional significance for Robyn that also blurs sacred and profane space. Thus, "everyday" things, such as James' toe-ring become sacred and precious.

Some geographers, such as, Pile (2005) and Holloway (2006) have begun to regard spirits and "phantasmagoria" in their analyses. However, within a Western cultural framework these aspects are yet to be fully explored. Taking spirits seriously is problematic, in that scholars have to honestly consider the afterlife as a meaningful place. Furthermore, in the past, discussing relationships with the deceased has been considered to be attached to a pathological grief pattern. Therefore, supernatural themes require a special relationship of trust and openness to be established in a research context. For Robyn, the meaning of physical (material) place pales in comparison to the spiritual bond she has with James. Instead James is omnipresent and "over there", rather than specifically located.



## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

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At the beginning of this thesis I explained the background of Robyn's experience of loss and reiterate that for a grieving person the context of their encounter is vital to understanding how and what they are feeling. Rather than upsetting, talking and explaining grief can be a vitally important way to explore a painful experience and allow the grieving person to maintain control over their own narrative. Therefore, preserving the parental relationship with a deceased child, keeping that bond "intact", is considered to be important. Thus, talking about that child is part of sustaining a continuing bond. In the past the predominant grief models, put forward by clinical physicians, suggested that grieving individuals went through stages and phases, swiftly adopted, these phases have become a pervasive ideology within society. In this way, strong sentiments like grief are considered superfluous in everyday life. One is thought to need to "let go" in order to join or (re)enter "normal" society.

In this thesis I have discussed the importance of space and place as geographic concepts, and as such they continue to be worked into contemporary geographic analyses. Furthermore, emotional geographies are evolving as an important field of scholarship. Connecting and paying particular attention to space, place, and emotions adds to these disciplinary areas. Throughout this research I have used a distinctive methodology which has reflected my desire to bring a "fresh" perspective to the geographic discipline. In doing so, I have argued for the importance of extending analyses of space and place together as a conceptual pair, rather than as separate terms. By discussing the spiritual or ephemeral aspects of space and place, a unique dimension of Robyn's grief experience has been exposed. Socio-cultural geographers are well positioned to interact with this exceptional opportunity by including embodied and spiritual accounts in their research.

Semi-structured interviews combined with a digital story have provided much of the data for this research. Learning about Robyn's grief experience first-hand, I have been able to consider the ways in which space, place, and grief interact. As an explanatory device, the digital story has been invaluable, adding depth and an audio-visual component of Robyn's experience into the research. The end production of the digital story belies the hours spent thinking, gathering

information, and photographs, writing the “story board”, editing, choosing music, and putting it all together. The digital story method adds to my consideration of self empowerment through (re)creating one’s own story. Emotions are not entirely expressed through verbal articulation, but rather incorporate a whole plethora of “expressive possibilities”. The semi-structured interviews contained rich insights in a research-focused context. The interviews provided the overall structure of chapters four, five and six, supported by the newspaper dossier, research diaries, and digital story.

These methods have been integral to addressing my foremost research question: *in what ways do space and place interrelate with the grieving process?* The answer to this question is discussed in chapters four, five and six. Overall, space and place interrelate on many levels with Robyn’s grieving process, from private to public spaces, from personal places to the social sphere, and from specific to ethereal places.

My investigations began with discussing how “concrete” places, such as Robyn’s home and local community, were integral to the way in which Robyn experienced her grief. Even though she had mixed feelings, being in Pongaroa was the “right place” as the family was fully supported by local people. Japan was important because Robyn was able to contextualise her grief. Being there and seeing the search and rescue unfold helped Robyn answer the “why” questions that surrounded James’ accident. Further, it was in Japan that Robyn was able to share James’ “last space” and in this way she could interconnect space and place with her grief.

Robyn intimated that people and places (re)make each other in a dialectical relationship. Mountainous areas, she explained, are visually formidable and the people that inhabit them can sometimes have a cold-hearted (formidable) attitude to deaths that occur in them. The (ultra)materiality of the snow and ice on the mountains in Japan and the storms that hampered rescue efforts lead Robyn to feel that Japan was a cold and harsh place and that some Japanese people’s attitude to death was the same.

Public spaces intersected with the grieving process by allowing Robyn’s grief to drift into the social realm. I argued that emotions are not just individual staying with one person but ripple outwards to social environments. Public space is considered to impinge on grief behaviours, with emotional outbursts posing a

threat to “normal” space. Different spaces require different “sets” of emotional reactions, and consequently, the social sphere is an important space for situating grief (emotional) responses. Even though “emotional communities” can be formed to support a grieving person, expressing grief in public spaces was considered by Robyn to be awkward. Meeting on the street, Robyn’s friends avoided talking about James in order not to upset her. At the same time they closed off an avenue for Robyn to express her emotions. On the contrary, being able to tour New Zealand to talk about avalanche safety and James, allowed Robyn to express her grief and tears in a public space in a way that she felt was constructive. Throughout chapters four, five and six, it can be seen that contradictions underlie my descriptions of Robyn’s grief.

Within the processes of commemoration, multiple geographies and interpretations of meaning “collide”. Private expressions of grief are displayed publicly. Memorials incorporate ideas of sanctification and personalise space, they can be warnings or symbols of death. The plaque at the bottom of the slope at Happo-One is a memorial that acts as a reminder and warning to others. Collective memorialising, especially public monuments and cemeteries, attach emotions to locations and create a forum for grief. However, Robyn’s spiritual relationship with James disrupts this argument, as the memorial plaque in Japan became, for her, just a “marker” for the incident.

As a public site of financial and emotional support, the media linked to Robyn’s grief. The avalanche “story”, as reported in the media, mobilised a national community motivated by empathy. Some of the New Zealand public were “touched” by Robyn’s grief and sent cards, donations, and messages of encouragement. Then again, the media accounts for Robyn were problematic as a site of meaning. There were differences in the versions of the search and rescue operation and the stories were underpinned by a political agenda. The paradoxical nature of emotions comes to the surface in Robyn’s accounts of public and private spaces and places.

Finally, spiritual spaces and places, such as the night sky, are vital in reconnecting Robyn with James. Robyn’s feelings about “concrete” places weaken under this analysis. Contrary to what I first considered would be an important place for Robyn to remember and connect to James, Japan held little emotional meaning for her. However, ethereal space and place does have meaning for Robyn. She associated spiritual space with reconnection. Dialogues with mediums and

James' ability to "communicate" with Robyn are incredibly important to her grieving process. Furthermore, James' belongings are intermeshed with Robyn's private remembering processes. Which mementoes are kept and where they are located are intensely personal and important to her. "Everyday" belongings, such as a toe-ring, become "sacralised" and interrupt notions of sacred and profane space.

Although Robyn does not go to specific locations to allay her grief, the "head-space" that she regularly sets aside for remembering James is equally valid as a way to place James in her life. In this way sacred spaces and places are encountered in the "everyday" and secular lives have room for enchantment. Robyn was very open to discussing supernatural themes, and I took seriously her interpretations of the "afterlife" as a valid geographical space.

Change is an underlying principle of human experience. Places and emotions are not static but change and develop over time. Therefore, my second question was: *how do space and place change through experiencing grief?* One of the places that changed as a direct result of Robyn's grief was her own home. Her lounge became almost unrecognisable as a semi-public memorial room, rather than a site of intimate familial relationships. Local people felt compelled to enter her home, share food, bring flowers, and keep Robyn busy, radically refiguring her home space. Furthermore, the family beach bach also changed from a place of fond family "get-togethers" to a place that felt lonely in James' absence. It took Robyn some time to feel comfortable there again.

The snowy environment was a space and place that James loved, but he was also killed there. Snow, for Robyn, was a space that radically changed. At first, she held snow responsible for taking James' life. Robyn considered the mountains in Japan to be a cold, unforgiving place. As time went on, she described in her digital story that snow changed. Going skiing in Vail this year, allowed Robyn to "make peace" and master her feelings about snow while mastering skiing. Now snow is a place she can enjoy, as James would have wanted. As a representational space, the digital story was also important as a way to contemplate her feelings about snow and grief. I argued that feelings about places ebb and flow and Robyn's account underscored the fluid, mobile, and contradictory nature of these concepts (grief, space, and place).

Last, and not surprisingly, the most radical change for Robyn was the place James has in her life. He has gone from being physically present to now being just spiritually present. In this way, James' relationship with Robyn has been completely reordered. James is now conceptualised in a "protector" capacity rather than as a son to be protected. Nonetheless, the spaces and places they share are vital to maintaining a sense of connection as she continues to grieve. The spaces to remember James privately are cherished by Robyn, her "James Days" are as important now as in the beginning (although her emotive expressions are changing). What comes through strongly in the data is that locational places are not important to Robyn because of the omnipresent qualities of James' spirit.

### ***Implications and Future Research***

This research suggests that space, place, and emotions interrelate in complex and contradictory ways. The interconnection between key concepts deserves more academic attention, particularly in regard to empirical accounts of the emotional life-worlds and experiences of a range of people. Therefore, the implications of this research are approached on a number of levels. First, I explain the possibility to develop research that centres on the place of spirits and "phantasmagoria" (Pile 2005) both in Western and non-Western cultural contexts in the geographic discipline. Then, I consider the place of technological spaces in people's lives. The Internet could be an area for examining fundamental human values through discussions and shared experiences of death, grief, and loss. Third, I reflect on the digital story component of my research and consider the potential for digital storytelling as a social science method.

As I have argued, the space and place for spirits in a Western cultural context are underutilised in a research context. Investigating the notions of space and place from a medium/clairvoyant/spiritual healer's perspective would offer an original insight into an area that geographers have yet to fully explore. This area could underscore the importance of the immediacy of experience, but also, of life beyond the immediately visible or tangible. Pile (2005: 3) uses the term "phantasmagoria" to encapsulate the secretive, unknown, and ambivalent aspects of emotional life, which he explains are 'far from well understood'. Like Pile (2005) I wish to open up a field of analysis that is capable of taking seriously the imaginative, fantastic ("phantasmagoric"), and emotional aspects of human

experience, in order to convey the full spectrum of human life-worlds. Furthermore, there is also potential to research a range of cultural expressions of “phantasmagoria” and differing standpoints on the place of spirits in people’s lived realities. For example, New Zealand Mā ori and Pākehā [non-Mā ori] approaches to the interrelationship between place and spirits in a cross-cultural context, could explore possible contrasts and collaborations within these two perspectives.

Research that considers the virtual spaces of grief and loss in-depth is likely to open up this integral place of human interaction. Technological spaces, such as “blogging” and the Internet, are rapidly expanding and becoming an increasingly important forum for exchanging emotional experiences. On the Internet, “death” and dying is becoming a shared experience and a space for learning about fundamental human values. Some people have begun to document their “last space” to try and distil what life has come to mean for them and they impart this information in a quasi-public manner (through blogs). Thus, this area of human interaction through technological spaces presents a possible topic for geographical research.

The digital story aspect of this research has potential for expansion. Critical analysis from the researcher’s point of view could be an area of methodological interest. Based on Rose (2007) an in-depth discussion of the visual politics from an “audience” perspective may well add to methodological discussions in social sciences. Digital storytelling could possibly be developed as an innovative research method. Latham (2003: 1994) claims we simply do not have the methodological resources and skills to undertake research that takes the sensuous, embodied, creativeness of social practice seriously. He reasons that methods used by cultural geographers are ‘not keeping pace with the cutting edge theoretical perspectives they interact with’ (Latham 2003: 2012). In short, I believe the digital story method gave me a rich and unique perspective into Robyn’s grief and has the scope to be further investigated within a research context. That Robyn was able to utilise the digital story to explain her grief and to gain meaning, which she considered to be beneficial, holds enormous potential for researchers and “participants” alike.

Finally, during the last three months of completing this research, Smith *et al.* (2009), have published *Emotion, place and culture*. This book underscores that scholars working within the framework of emotional geographies have also

considered place as an important feature of people's emotional lives. Smith *et al.* (2009) have five sections in their book which cross-sect with elements of my thesis, they are, remembering, understanding, mourning, belonging, and enchanting. Furthermore, they utilise different perspectives to underpin their analyses of place, emotions, and culture. These include: feminist methodologies, psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic approaches, and non-representational theory. It was heartening to realise the similarities between this book and my own interpretations of grief, spaces, and places. However, the book's contributors concentrate on historicising emotions and engage extensively with creative writing and artwork, including novels, science fiction, and poetry. Whereas this research offers a "fresh perspective" on space and place, and incorporates unique empirical and methodological components. Thus, I look forward to conducting and reading future theoretical and empirical works that focus on space, place, and emotions.

## Appendices

### Appendix One: Examples of Newspaper Articles on Avalanche "Story"

2 WAIKATO TIMES, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2000

# Cash for search claim to be eyed

Japan has rejected claims financial concerns delayed a search for three missing New Zealand snowboarders but Foreign Affairs Minister Phil Goff says the claims will be investigated.

Mr Goff said Japanese police had assured him they were doing everything possible to find Craig Mowat, 25, of Wanaka, James Gordon, 18, of Pongaroa in the northern Wairarapa, and Chris Coster, 23, of Auckland, missing since an avalanche hit while they were snowboarding on a mountain in Hakuba, 179km northwest of Tokyo, on Saturday.

The minister said it was a fact that money did change hands when police had to call in outside experts in a search and rescue operation.

"The basic search and rescue resources were available apparently on a non-cost recovery basis and if you wanted something over and above that then that had to be paid for.

"We want to examine whether that is an appropriate way to go or whether we would regard that in New Zealand terms as being unacceptable."

It would be "out of line" to insist families gave financial support to a search. However, Mr Goff said he understood two of the men's families had made a financial contribution as had the hotel at which one of the men had worked.

Family members of two of the three missing New Zealanders are at the scene. A rash of avalanches in the area where the New Zealanders were believed to be buried have thwarted Japanese searchers in their attempt to find the men. It is considered almost impossible that the men have survived.

Blizzard conditions at the top of the mountain where the initial avalanche occurred meant a helicopter was not used yesterday, but it was on standby if conditions improved.

"About four avalanches occurred right in front of them in that valley area alone," said Masaichi Ito, chief of the nearby Oomachi police station.

"I ordered the rescue team to evacuate to a safe place," Mr Ito said. "They could not launch any kind of rescue operation because it could be extremely dangerous."

— NZPA

Source: Adapted with permission from *Waikato Times* 2000: Cash for search claim to be eyed. February 23.

2 WAIKATO TIMES, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2000

# Missing men's families angered by search conflict

Conflict between police and friends of three New Zealand snowboarders almost certainly killed in a Japan avalanche has angered the families.

Robyn Gordon, mother of missing man James Gordon, said Japanese searchers had to be persuaded each evening to continue looking for James, 18, of northern Wairarapa, and his companions, Craig Mowat, 25, of Wanaka, and Chris Coster, 23, of Auckland.

The trio were swept under an avalanche on Saturday at Hakuba, about 180km northwest of Tokyo. No trace of them has been found. They were out-of-bounds of the skifield.

"Our concept of a search and rescue is that everybody hits that mountain as soon as possible and starts looking," Ma Gordon said.

"What the volunteers were expecting were professional people... But the police gave those boys 15 minutes and they were looking for dead bodies."

She said the Japanese operation was different from New Zealand searches where helicopters were used to blow snow away from the search area, and dogs were put into the area as soon as possible. Japanese officials have said blizzard conditions prevented helicopters being used.

Ma Gordon said there was a conflict between police and friends of the trio who believed they could have survived for five days in a snow cave. When Ma Gordon, her husband and Mr Coster's family arrived in Hakuba they met Japanese authorities.

"We were met by police and taken to lunch and basically it was a debriefing because they had decided to not do any more searching," she said.

"And I just said, 'Sorry, we've come here to look for our boys. I said it was the parents' wish and we're going to search on that mountain.' She was frustrated one morning when Japanese searchers spent five hours in a meeting before going up the mountain.

"As parents our hopes were so high and then they said they hadn't even stepped on to the avalanche site... there were police searching around the bottom but they've searched around there three times before," she said.

— NZPA

Source: Adapted with permission from *Waikato Times* 2000: Missing men's families angered by search conflict. February 26.



# 'Mum on a mission' spreads avalanche safety message

■ A Pongaroa mother's grief over her son's death in Japan has turned into a one-woman campaign.

Two years ago on February 19 three young New Zealanders lost their lives in an avalanche during a snowboarding holiday in Hakuba, Japan.

For one of the mothers, the death of her son triggered a personal crusade; a nationwide campaign in pursuit of mountain-safety awareness.

Meet Robyn Gordon, Pongaroa, a "mum with a mission".

With Robyn, what you see is what you get. She's tall and lithe, outgoing, matter-of-fact, with a firm handshake, humorous face, and a touch of whimsy.

Lurking not too far beneath the breezy exterior, one suspects, is a deep sense of hurt.

In February 2000 Robyn and her husband Stuart were planning a few days break away from their farm. But the break turned into a nightmare when they found themselves in midwinter Japan trying to set up a search team for the bodies of their son James and his friends.

Robyn remembers their reactions when the news came.

"I went into overdrive and Stuart went into shock."

**today's people**

by Hilary Pedersen

with the media until the recognition that in Japan it was the men who did the talking.

"You'll have to take over mate," she told her husband after the initial interview.

Despite their best efforts to arrange a search, the Gordons returned home empty-handed.

James' body was found exactly four months later, on June 19.

At 18, snow was James Gordon's passion. He had finished school at Mt Aspiring College, and was working in Queenstown as a kitchenhand to be close to the slopes.

"James touched many lives but you can't turn back the clock," his mother says.

Robyn's typically energetic response to the tragedy has been to set up the James Gordon Avalanche Education Trust, and with the official blessing of the Mountain Safety Council she has become

paigner.

Describing herself as a "mum with a mission" Robyn goes walkabout in the winter, booking speaking engagements with any school, or organisation, that will have her.

She says schools and ski field personnel should be more active in preaching the avalanche-risk message.

for help and you can't dig the snow with your hands."

If speaking tours are one aspect of the trust, avalanche kits and courses are the other.

Twenty backpacks, each equipped with a shovel, probe, and transceiver, are available for \$10 hire per kit to any school planning a snow experience.

The packs, funded with \$35,000

for public hire.

The kits are at selected outlets in both islands, available for a \$30 daily rental for those who want to be prepared for emergencies but without the large outlay.

Among her "clients" were the *Lord of the Rings* cast who used them during their three-week filming session in Queenstown's mountains.

Her awareness campaign, her crusade, is tiring but ongoing.

The next task is to complete a mountain safety module for school syllabus and a website. This will pull all snow-related sites together — events, equipment, and education.

Robyn also has her own educational website: [www.avalancheurthinking.com](http://www.avalancheurthinking.com).

And with winter approaching she'll be taking to the road again.

To help travelling expenses she has organised a bike and quad day on May 5 — an exploration of the Puketoi Range and the Horowaka district at a cost of \$20.

All this from a mum who admits to not being a skier and doesn't even like the snow.

"All I ever knew was that it was

In an avalanche you can be dead in five minutes. You haven't time to phone for help and you can't dig the snow with your hands.

**Robyn Gordon  
avalanche safety campaigner**

"Kids don't think about them, but it's the same warning as a rip at the beach."

The messages are basic: "Your safety is your responsibility; look after yourself and your mates," and — the bottom line — "In an avalanche you can be dead in five

from pub charities, are kept at home and couriered to safety-conscious schools.

There is also a sponsorship scheme to aid those attending avalanche-awareness courses.

In addition, as a separate business enterprise, Robyn has 20 Ava-

Source: *New Zealand Press Association* 2000: Mum on a mission spreads avalanche safety message. 15 June.

## Outdoor safety campaign to spread

By LINDSEY BIRNIE

ROBYN Gordon is to take her safety campaign to educate outdoor enthusiasts around the North Island.

Just returned to Pongaroa from a successful trip to Queenstown, Wanaka, Dunedin and Christchurch, Mrs Gordon said she would be staying home for a while.

"I might work from home and do the local area and Palmerston North, and the schools that are going to Mount Ruapehu.

"I'll probably hit Auckland because all those guys go to Ruapehu, but the North Island hasn't got the amount of skifields the South Island has."

Mrs Gordon began her campaign to urge outdoor enthusiasts to use emergency locator beacons after her son, 18-year-old James, was lost in an avalanche in the Japanese ski resort of Hakuba in February.

The bodies of Aucklanders Chris Coster (29) and Craig Mowat (25), of Wanaka were found recently. James Gordon has yet to be found.

Mrs Gordon and her husband Stuart will return to Japan to collect James within the next few weeks.

The family will return James to New Zealand, planning cremation and a service at the family bach in Kaitiaki.

Two Australian snowboarders who run a mountain guiding business in Hakuba were searching for James.

Picture: CHRISTCHURCH PRESS

Robyn Gordon displays the equipment she wants outdoor enthusiasts to carry in the mountains

Source: Adapted with permission from *The Dominion* 2000: Outdoor safety campaign to spread. 17 June.

## ***Appendix Two- Information Sheet***

### **The Space and Place of Grief in Geography: The “Avalanche Lady”**

I am a graduate student at the University of Waikato. As a part of my Masters thesis I am undertaking research on space, place, and grief in geography by focusing on a case-study. The aim of my research is to focus on your personal narratives (Robyn Gordon). I am interested in examining the spaces and places of grief, because grief is a powerful emotion that can profoundly affect people's interactions in and with places. There are aspects of the grieving process that connect to geography. Grief is located somewhere; both nestled in landscapes of emotion and the physical landscapes of remembrance. From the geography of the incident causing loss, to the geographies of the present, there are important links to exploring the spaces and places of people's lived realities.

#### **Interviews**

For this research I hope to conduct up to three in-depth interviews that will be semi-structured in approach, and approximately one to one and a half hours in length. Your opinions, thoughts, and insights are vital and you are welcome to bring up any issues which you view as important to my research.

I would like to invite you to participate in up to three semi-structured interviews. I would like to audio record the interviews so that I have an accurate account of your views and opinions.

#### **Digital Story**

I intend to use digital storytelling in my research to encourage thoughtful and emotional expression through your (Robyn's) direct “voice”, connected with images of your choice. Although you may be discussing place(s) and grief, the digital story will add a unique dimension to the research by putting you in the “driving seat”, as editing decisions and visual material selection (photographs) will be yours.

#### **What are your rights as a participant?**

If you choose to participate in my research, you have the right to:

- ❖ Refuse to answer any particular question(s)
- ❖ Withdraw the digital story up to two weeks after it is completed

- ❖ Withdraw from the research up to two weeks after the last interview
- ❖ Decline to be audio recorded and request that recording be turned off at any time
- ❖ Request that any material be erased
- ❖ Ask any questions about the research at any time during your participation

### **Confidentiality**

I will ensure that all written notes, transcripts, scrapbooks, and photos will be kept in my personal care and stored in a private office at my home. Any information stored on a computer will only be accessible through a regularly changed password. Only I will have access to the transcripts, photos, notebooks, scrapbooks and electronic information. All records held by Gail Hutcheson for the purpose of this Masters thesis will be destroyed after five years.

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz), postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

### **The results**

The results of my research will be used as part of my Masters thesis. As such, four copies of my thesis will be produced, three hard copies and one accessible online. The findings may also be used in presentations, conferences and journal publications.

### **What next?**

If you would like to take part in my research, I will contact you in the next week so we can organise a time to meet. If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor.

**(For reasons of privacy contact information has been deleted).**

## ***Appendix Three: First Semi-Structured Interview Schedule***

### **Main Question: How do space and place interrelate with the grieving process?**

Overall this is the question I want to address in the thesis. I want to explain, through the case-study, the different interactions of space and place with grief as I think this has yet to be a focus from geographers.

- ❖ Are space and place important to the grieving process and if so, in what ways?
- ❖ How are places changed through experiencing grief?

### **Landscapes of remembrance**

- ❖ Can you describe the ways you reconnect with James?
- ❖ What do you do when you reconnect? For example, do you go to particular places?
- ❖ Has reconnection been important as a part of your experience of grief?
- ❖ Can you describe some of the spaces that you now share with/for James?
- ❖ What do you feel about the place where his memorial is in Japan?

### **Community**

- ❖ Was Pongaroa as a place important to your experience of grief; if so, how?
- ❖ What is your interaction with Pongaroa now? Do you go back there; and if you do, how do you feel?
- ❖ In what ways are community spaces related to the grieving process?
- ❖ Do you think Pongaroa as a rural place has a bearing on how people reacted to your situation?

### **Speaking Tour of New Zealand**

- ❖ Can you describe how it felt to be moving from place to place giving your message?
- ❖ Which places “stand out” in your memory and why?
- ❖ Did you speak in rural and urban places?
- ❖ Did you have space for yourself (notebooks/diaries/email)?
- ❖ How did it feel to be placed in front of an audience?
- ❖ Was talking to the media important, if so can you describe in what ways?
- ❖ How did it feel being in public spaces/places and talking about James?
- ❖ How did you feel when you got home?

## Appendix Four – Consent Form

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

**Description of project:** This research aims to examine the spaces and places of grief, because grief is a powerful emotion that profoundly affects people's interactions in and with places. I will be focusing on the personal narratives of Robyn Gordon.

I have read the information sheet and understand that I can:

- ❖ Refuse to answer any particular question(s)
- ❖ Withdraw from the research up to two weeks after the last interview
- ❖ Decline to be audio recorded and request that recording be turned off at any time
- ❖ Request that any material be erased
- ❖ Ask any questions about the research at any time during participation
- ❖ All information collected will remain secure in a private office or on a computer accessible by password only and will be destroyed after five years.
- ❖ Information will be analysed and used for a Masters thesis, presentations, conferences and journal articles

I consent to our conversation being audio-recorded

YES / NO

(please circle)

I (your name) \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this research and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_(to be signed and dated by participant)

I agree to abide by the conditions set out in the information sheet and I ensure no harm will be done to participant due to this research.

\_\_\_\_\_(to be signed and dated by Gail Hutcheson)

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz), postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

#### **Contact Information**

**(For reasons of privacy contact information has been deleted).**

## ***Appendix Five: Digital Story Framework and Approach***

A digital story is a unique opportunity to further explore the meanings of place within your experience of grief by using visual materials (digital photographs) and personal narrative (narrating and recording each section). Maybe we can replace the word place(s) with Japan or somewhere else.

- ❖ What does place(s) mean to you?
- ❖ How did place(s) change from before/after James' death?
- ❖ How is place(s) important to your grieving process?
- ❖ Can you describe what affect place(s) have on your experience of grief?

### **Approaching the Digital Story**

- ❖ We can start right now if you want. The first thing to do is to write a "storyboard" or perhaps you would rather send it to me via email? Whatever suits you. I thought that perhaps writing a postcard or letter would be a good way into thinking about your storyboard.
- ❖ The most important elements of the digital story are your choice of words, your (recorded) voice, and the story. The images are secondary.
- ❖ Once we have the story you can think about images: They can be metaphorical; they don't need to reflect the words exactly. You can use your own digital photographs, download images or use symbols etc.
- ❖ Not too many images, there can be as little as one or two.
- ❖ Important questions to think about: Why are you writing this story? Why now? What does your grief mean to you? Why have you chosen your images?

### **Questions we can go over later**

- ❖ Access to images – consent form
- ❖ Download software – Microsoft Photo Story 3™
- ❖ We can work together on parts or the whole story – up to you
- ❖ Once we have narrative and images you want to use the digital story will only take a couple of sessions to put together
- ❖ I will give you a copy of the "how to" sheet (if you want to do the digital story alone)

## Appendix Six: Digital Story Consent Form

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

### Digital Story Consent Form

**Description of project:** This research aims to examine the spaces and places of grief, because grief is a powerful emotion that profoundly affects people's interactions in and with places. I will be by focusing on the personal narratives of Robyn Gordon.

I have read the information sheet and understand that I can:

- ❖ Refuse to answer any particular question(s)
- ❖ Withdraw the digital story up to two weeks after it is completed
- ❖ Request that any material be erased
- ❖ Ask any questions about the research at any time during participation
- ❖ All information collected will remain secure in a private office or on a computer accessible by password only and will be destroyed after five years.
- ❖ Part(s) or the whole digital story may be submitted as an aspect of a Masters thesis (accessible on the internet), presentations, conferences and journal articles
- ❖ The rights of ownership of the digital story are to be shared between yourself and Gail Hutcheson.

I consent to using my own photographs/narrative for the digital story  
YES / NO

(please circle)

I (your name) \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this research and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet.



\_\_\_\_\_(to be signed and dated by participant)

I agree to abide by the conditions set out in the information sheet and I ensure no harm will be done to participant due to this research.

\_\_\_\_\_(to be signed and dated by Gail Hutcheson)

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email [fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz), postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

#### **Contact Information**

**(For reasons of privacy contact information has been deleted).**

## ***Appendix Seven: Poem***

This poem of about the time of the Civil War (1861-1865) in America is the personal testimony of a fallen girl who got right with God just before her tragic passing. Celebrated American poet Walt Whitman found the anonymous poem work and passed it on to others more than a hundred years ago.

The poem that follows has been adapted by Robyn with two verses removed and insertion of snowboarders in the text to make the poem relevant. Robyn was looking for something to read out at James' funeral and went to the library where she happened upon a book she had not seen before. Picking up the book, the pages fell open on this poem. Upon reading it, Robyn was struck by the correlations to her experience. She also read it out for her digital story.

### ***Oh! The snow the beautiful snow***

Oh! The snow the beautiful snow,  
Filling the sky and the earth below,  
Over the housetops, over the street,  
Over the heads of people you meet.  
Dancing, flirting, skimming along,  
Beautiful snow! It can do no wrong;  
Flying to kiss a fair lady's cheek,  
Clinging to lips in frolic-some freak;  
Beautiful snow from heaven above,  
Pure as an angel, gentle as love!

Oh, the snow, the beautiful snow,  
How the flakes gather and laugh as they go  
Whirling about in maddening fun:  
Chasing, laughing, hurrying by,  
It lights on the face and it sparkles the eye;  
And the dogs with a bark and a bound  
Snap at the crystals as they eddy around;  
The town is alive, and its heart is aglow,  
To welcome the coming of beautiful snow!

How wild the crowd goes swaying along,  
Hailing each other with humour and song;  
How the gay [snowboards] like meteors flash by,  
Bright for a moment, then lost to the eye:  
Ringing, swinging, dashing they go,  
Over the crest of the beautiful snow;  
Snow so pure as it falls from the sky,  
As to make one regret to see it lie,  
To be trampled and tracked by thousands of feet  
Till it blends with the filth in the horrible street.

Once I was fair as the beautiful snow,  
With an eye like a crystal, a heart like its glow;  
Once I was loved for my innocent grace--  
Flattered and sought for the charms of my face!  
Fathers, Mothers, Sisters--all,  
God and myself I have lost by my fall:  
The [snowboarders] that go shivering by,  
Will make a wide sweep lest I wander too night,  
For all that is on or above me I know,  
There is nothing so pure as the beautiful snow.

How strange it should be that this beautiful snow  
Should fall on a sinner with nowhere to go!  
How strange it should be when the night comes again  
If the snow and the ice struck my desperate brain!  
Fainting, freezing, dying, alone,  
Too wicked for prayer, too weak for a moan  
To be heard in the streets of the crazy town,  
Gone mad in the joy of snow coming down:  
To be and to die in my terrible woe,  
With a bed and a shroud of the beautiful snow.

Retrieved 3 June 2009 from: <http://www.geocities.com>.

## Appendix Eight: Example of Open Coding For Analysis

Rural vs. Urban? [experience of grief support]

Robyn: Because we had the three families you know and the family from Auckland...they couldn't understand the support we were getting. You know they had a church group and that was the only group that was there for them in the whole of Auckland sort of thing... and they couldn't work out how we had a whole community you know... behind us. And then when James was found and we had the funeral at Katikati there were so many at the funeral there...our idea was to have a small funeral but it didn't work that way...ummm [...]that was I guess a family funeral at Katikati whereas it was a community memorial at Pongaroa, but just the numbers thing blew the Auckland family away.

Me: ummmm

Robyn: And then the Wanaka family...they had left Taranaki to go to Wanaka to be with their boys who then went overseas [laughs] and [...] they both worked in the community down there. But the attitude down there was...if you go into the mountains you die... so they're quite ummm [...]thinks] ummm

Me: matter of fact?

Robyn: Yea, matter of fact about death... you die in the mountains...you know it's cold, it's unforgiving, you make a mistake, you die and if you want to live there so that's the way it is sort of thing... and they found it very cold, very hard and I guess not very supportive

Me: ummm, yea...

Robyn: yea... [...] and you know the other problem with.... that family was that Dad had come to Japan with us but Mum hadn't

Me: Right

Robyn: So...Dad had absorbed and taken on board all the things that happened in Japan that are just so out of our space that...you know... you had to be there to understand...and Mum had no way to understand that...so they didn't actually have a relating grief...one couldn't understand where the other one was...so when I went to visit there...the first time...I had to tell everything that happened [thinks] 10 times? I mean I just about went mad, I was thinking I don't want to tell this again...(mother...but I don't understand, tell me again...) and I said no, you don't understand because it's so... different! and so...unexpected! and so...yea...out there [hands gesturing, searching for words] ...and so I'd have to tell it again and her husband just sat there behind the newspaper [enacts someone hiding behind a newspaper, head down] I was thinking help me out Barry! and he was giving the signal...oh I'm not going there

Me: Oh no....

Robyn: I guess that he'd been through it so often himself...she just couldn't grasp, I mean the [...]the nightly meetings to get permission to look for your son you know...the no search and rescue ... the ... the ... foreigners gathering together to try and search and then being stopped by the police....you know...the police stopped our train and took us off so we wouldn't get there...so that boys couldn't talk to us... the whole...

Me: Really?

*located places*

*Community*

*Wanaka*

*lack of support*

*Cold people → cold place*

*The importance of being "in place" in the final stages of the story - embodied experience*

*place vital to understanding what happened*

*Context to grief*

*So important to be there, "seeing"*

*Unreality*

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