

To *Decompose*

To *Recompose*

To *Relive*

fostering (un)interrupted bonds through creative practice

Confronting our own mortality and that of those close to us is an uncomfortable, if not distressing, process. Talk around death is still taboo and the adoption of euphemisms remains necessary, if not inevitable. Exemplary is the tendency to soften the term *dead* with the more digestible yet ambiguous *passed away*. Therefore, when someone we know *passes away* the sudden entrance of death feels so abrupt, almost despotic. An uninvited guest, it stands as an unpleasant reminder of inevitability.

In May 2022 my mother passed away. A premature, unexpected farewell. The immediacy of the event did not allow for a proper preparation, emotional or psychological. Despite an initial impression of relatively healthy grief processing, considerations of my own mortality crept in. Slowly, subtly. Whispering to my already anxious self a countdown of how much time is left.

This obsession with death, with the morbid, sparked a fascination for what clearly bears the signs of passing. The agents of decay: mould and fungi. Far from shyly, fungi make their way into what has reached its *due date*. Marching from within, they gradually process the flesh, blossoming shortly after into an almost flamboyant display: dotted patterns of multi-coloured spores, seemingly imitating a field of bizarre wildflowers. Once past the initial reaction of disgust – the instinct to dispose of what is decomposed, corrupted – what remains is the admission of a certain kind of beauty. Toxic but nonetheless bewitching. And it is so that this decomposition, inevitably, assumes the role of recomposition. A metamorphosis capable of turning that which has ceased to be into a subject that is once more ‘alive’.

The absence of my mother led me to search for her elsewhere. Looking at photographs of her early life became an act of solace, assuming the role of an almost daily ritual. I became especially drawn to images of her childhood, an age where considerations of our own mortality have not – perhaps – yet appeared and where the focus is very much placed in the immediate. Retracing her early life, of which I knew sporadic anecdotes, consolidated and re-grounded her being. The release from the constrained portrait as *Mom* – inevitable product of the naïve selfishness as daughter – revealed a resonance which before had only been partly noticed. In a bittersweet twist I deeply connected with my mother once she was gone.