

Benjamin Skinner.
Investigative Practice.
M-582.

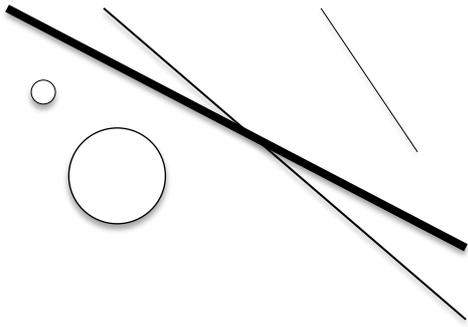


Figure 1: *Ceramic Cloth*, Independent Dance. **Note:** Copyright 2016.

Introduction.

Prior to embarking on the Investigative Practice module I came across an article in the Guardian regarding Austrian philosopher Glenn Albrecht's definition of the Anthropocene epoch as a new definition of geological time (Macfarlane, 2016). Such is humanity's present malpractice that the detrimental effect of human activity is now visible within the Permian strata of the Earth. The prevalence for excavating vast quantities of minerals whilst simultaneously re-forming the Earth's geological archive has meant that we have well and truly imprinted evidence of our relatively short period of evolutionary history on to this planet. The written records of human history date back 5000 years and yet at our most advanced we are consciously aiding the acceleration of our own species extinction.

To interrupt this destructive pattern we can draw on the cellular consciousness of the body and consider the implications of the self on the landscape and ecosystems of our own form. By contemplating our relationship to space and the complexity of a shared archive we might somehow digress from the inevitability of our own extinction.

...live another way.

The Reservoir.

There is a definitive moment when I engage with creative practice that I feel full to capacity and my pathway through a self-imposed landscape of experience becomes somewhat hazy and difficult to navigate. This can be attributed to the attention I put on my visual field to retain a sense of the physical landscape that I am maneuvering my body through on a daily basis. However, this saturation point also means that I look towards other methodologies for gaining information regarding my sense of self in relation to the surrounding world.

What has evolved out of this investigation is a curiosity in the tension surrounding the felt absence of non-directed space influenced by the external environment. Is it possible to sense something so intangible yet, for me, inherently present within the composition of my self-environmental co-dependency in a performative ecology?

What does it mean to preserve performance? Its disappearance is in its nature and the experience itself leaves those watching to consider what is left behind. A performance in a particular time and space will leave those experiencing it with a trace. 'The belief that perception can be made endlessly new is one of the fundamental drives of all visual arts' (Phelan, 1993:16).

Process.

Part of my desire to leave the building during the lunch hour is down to a need to consider a recollection or find that trace of something I have experienced prior to that moment. This has been my one constant practice of the day whilst based at the Siobhan Davies Studios. It feels as if it is some thing of an orbit, an ark that culminates at the point of origin, starting back at the beginning again, but with a different perspective.

Reset.

Maybe it is not essential that you comprehend everything that has now been folded into the archive of Ben but I would make something of myself known even if it is a suggestion of something remembered. What is of worth and what is worth sharing? For French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, thought and expression in Art stemmed from the phenomenological experience and the ability to perceive an embodied concept that enabled artists to re-shape their creative world. The body can manifest non-empirical knowledge that cannot be judged as purely rational but it is deemed a beneficial experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

The body is the primary site of making in this context and gives an allowance for a sense of play within this six week process and encouraging a sense of encountering the familiar in different ways, sculpting the body into something new whilst simultaneously stripping back the layers that encase my own idea of self in a performance space.

What is my responsibility to those witnessing my doing?

Audience.

'Each process should access, and be accessed by, not just the doer but by those at the periphery of the exploration taking place and therefore allowing an alterative perspective from the common assumption of the detached viewing of Art. For those absorbed by the task in hand the connection between the unconscious mind and the body generates a sense of playfulness revealing something other within the artists work. This investigation has alluded to the border between boundaries, a no man's land of experience that is alive with potential intention' (Skinner, 2015:4).

Embarking on the difficult task of demonstrating a live -working -space encouraged me to invest in the ability of my unconscious to meet my body and to recall why something feels unlikely to be achievable within my perceptive field. The impact of consistently not knowing or necessarily having a definitive answer was definitely encountered during this six week period of investigation but by adhering to an empathetic philosophical view of my own work and blurring the lines between 'the thing', my story and letting go of an all encompassing conclusion to my investigation I encountered a palpable release of expectation.

The intention to communicate could be enough without necessarily labeling the happening further but this needs to be balanced by space to allow an audience an opportunity to make assumptions or to get a taste of the intent of my question. Charlie Morrissey's discussions regarding coming forward to meet the question

asked of an intention and the slippage between thought and action within this meeting is a proposition that has challenged me. The origins of this unease can be brought back to this notion of worth and what is of interest to others. I experienced a paralysis when trying to negotiate this whilst simultaneously being observed, watched and witnessed within the studio.

The substance of this self and world co-dependency is difficult to contextualise and I am unsure how it manifests itself. The reality of being the body-thinker within this practice means that questioning the authenticity of thinking, whilst doing, establishes another tension between applying the appropriate awareness to the task in hand and a sense of play-acting (Skinner, 2015).



Visual Arts Archive.

'In the texture and particularities of the materials we choose, we are drawn out of ourselves- through this making we embody experience in material form'(Tufnell & Crickmay, 2004:69).

Whilst compiling this journal it is not the written element that causes anxiety but the fact that I will feel the need to make sense of my charcoal and ink illustrations whilst also adhering to a genuine desire to move beyond them. It is in the *doing* of the drawing that I find satisfaction aided by the assumption that something is occurring. Applying this practice to the space entails a correlation between methodologies of seeing and attention to the detail of what remains after the drawing or mark-making has been accomplished. Can these remnants be gathered and thrown into the body to settle and reform? Charlie Morrissey's concept of reimagining the evolving body suggested a distillation of the movers physicality into something tangible that enables the viewer to recognize something of themselves in the artists vocabulary. Whilst focusing on this re-imagining Rosemary Butcher's (2015) making methodology became extremely potent as I experimented with creating miniature paperscapes out of the charcoal imagery. In an effort to create a bridge for myself these paper monuments became artifacts in themselves enabling me use them as a spring board into movement. Incorporating strategies of returning, crystalizing, deconstructing and tracing the paper gave me the impetus to move towards the internal architecture of the thinking hand and how this could be translated throughout the rest of the body, unfolding into a web of experience in movement.

These visual aids carry a physical weight and their evolution as a practice in themselves is worth investigating but as a means to move past the paper into the space. If the charcoal dust could hang in the space free from a gravitational pull what would that feel like against the skin to move through? The horizon that I have been transmitting onto paper would become three dimensional and responsive to my movement. The act of drawing itself encourages the doer to consider the object in front of him and gives an insight into a particular viewpoint. A drawing does not reproduce the tree as it manifests itself in the objective reality: the drawing records the way the tree is seen or experienced (Berger, 1972).



Figure 3: Wandering Sketch. Independent Dance. Note: Copyright 2016.

Bones .

It is in the continuous aging and dilution of the physical properties of each charcoal sketch or small sculpture that they become entrenched in the environment they are kept in. A sculpture that sits in my Leeds studio is comprised of newspaper, wool and a willow branch that has shed its bark. Placed in full sunlight the individual components have galvanized together as the materials break down- the wool sticks to the willow and the paper becomes ever more fragile in the heat of the sun. Yet the piece is still alive and potent within the space of my studio; in its stillness and delicacy it seems to absorb attention from the observer. What can be determined from the continuous loop of information from agent to evolving object? This thought process has led me to consider the immediacy of what I create with my hands and how I store or archive physical objects. Sue Davies and Matthias Sperling suggested a format for pursuing this dialogue on materiality but by using the bodies methodologies to encounter friction and resilience within the presence and absence of active and inactive space within my practice as a mover. Entering the final week of this research period I've increasingly encountered a two directional pull of attention that's suggested a sense of unraveling challenging my own personal definition of habitual movement patterning whilst investing in a concept. This ultimately manifested in a state of paralysis as I held on tightly to the core of my concern regarding investigating internal space within the body. This tension was eventually alleviated by recalling phrases Matthias put into the space during our first week of practice. His adherence to the work of Deborah Hay suggested that I too could contain the capacity to give myself up to something. Her words resonated strongly, 'Imagine every cell in my body hears, performs and surrenders the dance simultaneously' (Hay, 2000:104). The potential for expansion both externally and internally now gives me the capacity to thread something of my practice

together with the realization that specificity does not necessarily have to entail complete understanding of all that I am portraying.



Figure 4 & 5: *Clay & Ceramic Pathways*.
Independent Dance. Note: Copyright 2016.

The Use of Materials.

My sense of progression as a designer and maker revolves around the decisions that are made with my hands and how the materials at my disposal respond or form themselves. It is an experience that manifests itself through an organic process of trial and error, which has led to the reinforcement of an overarching trajectory within my practice. I feel I have purpose. It is almost as if the finished form exists and it is simply a case of unearthing it. Michael Klein's (Klein, 2016) methodology of excavation and investigating the archaeological

site of practice gives the allowance of time for aspects to manifest themselves and for work to build in shape. I can equate this with my haptic process whereby a trail is easier to follow back to a finished artifact but when it comes to uncovering the remnants of a physical articulation I am often blocked by the very processes that allow me to, for example, to translate a felt sense to charcoal. Why do I always have feet of clay anchoring me down?

If I equate this to movement, do I give myself a preconceived idea of what is about to be constructed or can I allow a sense of becoming to take place?

I am aiming to accentuate the process of the investigating and not the final product but in the making something should be visible of my intention that allows the viewer to be a part of it either through witnessing or actively engaging in what I am trying to physicalize.

Improvisational pathways, in this sense, may not seem to be connected but the idea is that they are not manipulated to conform but to carry out their meandering pathways of investigation. It is the consistency of the investigation that interests me as a practitioner and not the success to which ideas may be conjoined. Within my own creative field it is enough that I, as doer, am the one absorbing the impact of engaging with each field of interest over these weeks.



Figure 6: *Enfolding Landscape*. Independent Dance. Note: Copyright 2016.

Terra-Forming.

Writing Stream-

Terra-forming, form, curve and the earth that comes together, sets, contracts-expands and everything in-between. Terra, red earth, soil, compost, life, water and a sense of being solid. Grain and forming a fossil. Fossilized and concrete, crystalized into form and set for eons in the strata. Compressed, molded and pushed up again- excavated and archaeologically of interest. Reformed into a memory and archived away.

During the movement the landscape unfolded through paths that were both familiar and unfamiliar. It was indeed my body but it also encompassed a foreign element of risk and a proposition to move differently. However, the journey between two points of interest- the origin and the ultimate destination- provided an insight into how my movement is formed or unfolded along a particular pathway. The web of movement between the two involves a live negotiation within the movers body as traces are connected and then left to drift again. Skelton (2002) adheres to the muscular effort needed to hold on to a point instead of letting awareness expand in all directions. 'I am acutely aware of a sense of *axis* that passes from space vertically through the centre of skull and torso and that counterbalances the peripheral emphasis of multi-directionality by opening a sense of three dimensional space inside the body' (Skelton, 2002:n.k).

'The artist is an itinerant (travelling from place to place) and his work is consubstantial with the trajectory of his or her own life' (Ingold, 2008:17). This journeying within the internal spaces of the body whilst maintaining an awareness of the directionality and external dimensions has encouraged me to develop a silting technique to allow me to let investigative concepts settle and be absorbed unconsciously into my memory of experience.

Thoughts.

One of the major themes became sensing a formation of strata or enabling myself to be stratified by asking particular questions of the landscape of my consciousness. Could this lead to an unearthing of memory and the evidence of particular modes of thinking within my body? The

narrative of my investigation could remain the same but the language would be different. My own verbal dialogue was in fact coming to the foreground of my process as the internal conversations progressed.

The question of how do I fit in to the equation became how can the equation fit into me?

This enabled a shift of perspective and brought focus to the circumstances in which attention was often drifting organically towards a process of unpicking the web of information present within the environment of the studio space. I created my own undulating landscapes, establishing horizons that shifted as I retraced my steps and discovered different movement pathways. 'Lives are lived through, around, from place to place with no necessary focal point; we are not fundamentally bound but unfolding along paths' (Ingold, 2011). The architecture of the environment I constructed through utilizing ink, clay or my imagination enabled me to set my own pace and negotiate how capable I felt to pursue an enquire in that moment. I was left with a sense of the monumental potentiality for this line of enquiry.

I am the sum of all my traces and tracks.

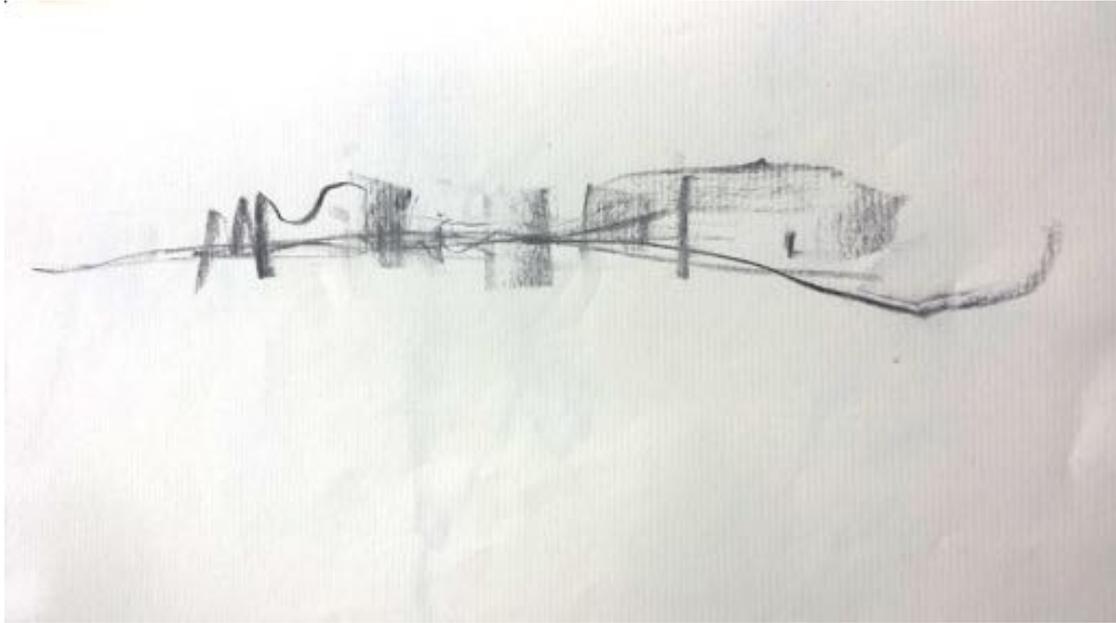


Figure 7: *Spine Track*. Independent Dance. Note Copyright 2016.

Environmental Skin.

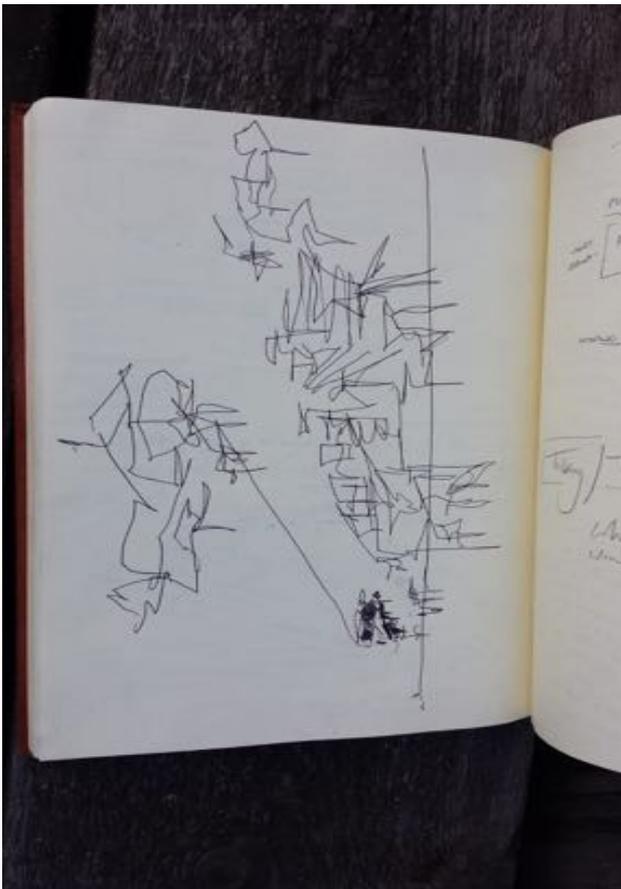


Figure 8: *25th April-Self*. Independent Dance. Note: Copyright 2016.

I became very conscious of my skin as a tool to reach out and absorb information from the performance ecology I found myself in during periods of shared work.

Self and environment

How did I maintain a sense of self in an environment?

What endures?

If my skin is my boundary-what then? How do I feel past it or should I just presume that such an event is occurring?

What is my lens through which I observe the space of the studio?

[The skin is] 'our first medium of communication, and our oldest efficient protector...even the transparent cornea of the eye is overlain by a layer of modified skin' (Montagu, 1987:25). Its sensitivity is quite profound and enables my body to absorb the haptic experience of both moving and making and generates links to memory, emotion and imagination. Cognitively I can appreciate the skin's conceptual identity as a boundary between world and self. However, to have this brought to my attention by either observing some sense of clarity in another's touch or my own moments of enlightenment during partner or group investigations with Charlie Morrissey meant I could appreciate its continuous refinement of what it is to feel, or be felt, in relation to my personal archive of experience.

Out of this experience comes a need to communicate something as significant for that moment in time. Susan Langer (1970) states that languaging originates from a need to emotionally express, encompassing the object of feeling as opposed to transferring it from one medium to another. If this embodied experience is transferred what does it allow others to discover within a performance setting? Through my own practice as one interested in the relationship between the body, making and methodologies of language there seems to be a great emphasis on the presumption of knowing from the inside of the experience. This connected with tutorial discussions regarding the assumption of an event occurring and sticking with the difficulty of transferring something that feels incredibly weighted. Occasionally this drew elements of frustration within my studio practice and I found myself standing by the windows with their insight

into the world passing the studio space by. Why? I'm not too sure, but I think it can be connected to this recurring sense of paralysis within the body and needing to witness a sense of flow to alleviate it.

Gill Clarke: A View from a Bridge.

Presence and absence. Active and inactive space around her hands.

The scaffolding around her presence.

What did the unbound space around Gill feel like? Could she sense the fluidity, the flowing river, clouds & sky, the runners approach.

From delving into the Siobhan Davies Replay archive I was struck by Gill Clarke moving on the Millennium Bridge whilst the Thames glided by and pedestrians meandered around her, I considered the authenticity of my experience as a watcher (Davies, 2002). Yes I am sensing, feeling and pushing my consciousness into unfamiliar territory but is it a landscape that needs my input? This feels like someone else's story. Why am I doing what I am doing in this moment in time? From watching footage of Marcus Coates' *Journey to the Lower World* (2014) I realized that there is a certainty in what he is laying bare that asks something of the audience. My personal interpretation of hesitation that I feel in embarking on my own interpretative movement is not visible in his performance work- he seems so sure of himself. Where does this presumption come from? By observing the onlookers and their reactions to his shamanistic pursuits I cannot help but wonder how he maintains his focus whilst completely including the audience in the work.

Negotiating with my own practice highlights a recurring preoccupation in my transition into a solid immobile artifact that people keep their distance from. There is a recognition of self in a connection with the physical mass of the other, the materiality of another body encourages a

curiosity to come to the forefront of my attention giving me a re-imagined boundary to address or push against.

Rigour.

Enduring.

Failure.

It is possible to acknowledge an allowance for failure but quite something else to apply it to ones own practice. Sue Davies emphasized the concept of rigour and our mentors keep on reiterating it. I perceived (naively) that it would be easy to grasp or at least recognizable in its application as to when it was needed. Schneider (2011) speaks of performance as memory and draws attention to the archive of the bones as remnants after the flesh has decomposed. 'Every archive is therefore also a mausoleum, a tomb that guards the remaining pieces' (Schneider, 2011:101). When does a movement die? What is the smallest movement you can do?

Death and the end of all movement.

Threads tearing.



Figure 9: Trace of Sue Davies- Charcoal. Independent Dance. Note: Copyright 2016.

Body Archive.

What does my own archive entail?

Questions have arisen regarding the value I put on my own embodied experience- although I have queries regarding a non-embodied experience and the immersive quality of my visual art making. Within this module the dissemination of experience has taken the form of writing, drawing and sculpting but these methodologies feel both temporal and untrustworthy. Sitting with a charcoal study completed the week before gives a sense of grasping at a fading memory in an effort to understand an abstracted piece of information. These three-dimensional artifacts pale in comparison to a concept or idea that has been *felt* through the body and this is one of the main reasons I find the combination of visual arts and movement investigation so frustrating. It is the very act of *doing* that contains the archive and the physical remains are the shadows that suggest what has occurred within a given space and time. Yet, refining a movement vocabulary based on a particular concept can be full of surprises dependent on the degree to which one consciously or unconsciously agrees to commit to a new form of excavation. But how does one reach this state of excavation? Too much attention and the

potential seems to evaporate, too little and the mind seems to wander off. Andrea Buckley suggested a methodology of story telling in an effort to maintain an undercurrent of momentum behind the improvisation task. This narration of both the physical form and then, as the process progressed, that of an imagined landscape initiated the same dialogue by using the dexterity of the mind to articulate the immediacy of the body. My capacity to articulate became obsolete as a different use of language took hold and my physicality was not bound by trying to maintain a consciousness of intent- hopefully visible to those watching as a body thought process. The voice acts as a collaborative tool as something is teased out or pulled through the movement vocabulary revealing something 'other'.

Example- Movement Memory.

The memory of movement allowed me to restore the fabric of a landscape I have not encountered with such clarity since the age of eight. The body of a child consciously coexisted with that of a man that involved a realignment of my dimensions and a journey back to a specific time and location. The physical location that this event occurred is a place I traverse every time I return to the house I grew up in, namely a picnic bench that I have since sat on innumerable times, yet there was a substance state of change.

What if I presume this relationship exists? That it is more than a reflection of what once existed by a reawakening of something tangible. Could observers perceive it or is the presumption that it is enough? I think I can create it so therefore on some level the landscape exists.

I would like to draw attention to the wading, the light breeze of attention towards the outer perimeter of my boundary whilst simultaneously zoning in but not subtracting or avoiding all the

attention all other parts of my body are demanding.

'I am a ticking body of micro movements adjusting the skeleton through demarked time..

the float at the center,
there is nothing in my body marking time in that way.

I have a monotone'. (Paxton, 2013)

Precision of thought within a performance seems to counterbalance the dialogue of my often vague, all-encompassing creative imagery within improvisation. I have more practice encountering this by using my hand to manipulate charcoal. The haptic connection between the mind and the representation on paper is '..moulded in the same flesh of physical materiality' that the doer embodies (Pallasmaa, 2009:96).



Figure 10: Charcoal Imprint. Independent Dance. Note Copyright 2016.

Recap-Relationships.

Considering others, or those witnessing what is unfolding in a shared space has encouraged me to recognize how I view work, not only other people's investigative states but also that of my own experimentation as a living body.

Occasionally the monumental weight of watchers holding the space is enough to drive breath from my lungs and a perpetual freeze takes over as my body lays something bare in the negotiation of that moment in time. But, as Sue Davies pointed out, it is in these dark and dirty moments between the audience and the performer that can reveal the true craftsman at work as '...the gazing spectator try's to take everything in' (Phelan, 1993:3).

The scaffolding around my presence or sense of self supports but also in a sense restricts the inner sanctum of experience from being affected by the elements. By offering stability and maintaining the façade the inner space can be completely gutted, stripped bare of feeling. Remolding from the inside and ultimately deconstructing the scaffolding allows something to be unmade and therefore space it made available for the following test site of experience.

This correlates with the 'oh fuck!' sensation of being on show, the fundamental proposition of whatever this is simply consisting of another horizon for learning, and simply *being*. Theoretically there should be an allowance in seeing yourself fail at something that you agreed to attempt. The boundary between self and world should be permeable but some times it feels like a concrete mass that will not shift. How do I attempt to diffuse my 100 trillion cells into a concrete pillar? (a nod to Deborah Hay) . What does it consist of? Repeating, discovering and pushing something forward and up until something has been formed. Can this correlate to

choreographic practice and what can this potentially entail?

Archive.



Figure 11: *Archive.* Independent Dance. Note: Copyright 2016.

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Figure 1.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Ceramic Cloth*. [Sculpture] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 2.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Charcoal*. [Drawing] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 3.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Wandering*. [Drawing] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 4 & 5.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Clay & Ceramic Pathways*. [Sculpture] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 6.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Enfolding Landscape*. [Charcoal] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 7.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Spine Track*. [Charcoal] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 8.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. 25th April-Self*. [Drawing] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 9.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Trace of Sue Davies* [Charcoal] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 10.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Charcoal Imprint.* [Charcoal Drawing] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.

Figure 11.

Skinner, B. (2016) *Independent Dance. Archive.* [photograph] Unpublished personal photography. London: Independent Dance.