

The Graduate School of Education
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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 1 | 2013

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Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin
Anita Sinner

Editor

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner

THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

Abstracting Children: Rendering Pedagogy in a Digital Art/Research/Text

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ABSTRACT

A/r/tographers explore art practice and teaching through the intersecting roles of artist, researcher, and teacher. In this paper I explore how this intersection plays out when the artistic goal is to create an artwork that is pedagogically attuned. In this inquiry I interpret my interactive digital work that was created to capture an artistic/research encounter with children. I apply Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological strategy of asking of the research text: 'Can you find the child?' (Van Manen, 1990, p.139) and explore the process of rendering a work for the purpose of connecting to the 'lifeworld of living with children'. Through a reflective process that occurred during the acts of creating and interpreting the various components of the work, I come to a deeper understanding of my lived experience of making art and researching with children.

The complete interactive digital work can be viewed at: http://www.sfod73.net/Galleria_sfod/sfod_worlds.swf (4.3MB)

KEYWORDS

A/r/tography, digital art, child art, artist-in-residence, practitioner-led research, reconstructing childhood

ARTIST/TEACHER/RESEARCHER: DISSONANCE AND EMERGENCE

The multiple and conflicting identities of researchers who are both artists and teachers give rise to a particle dissonant condition. This state emerges as artist-teacher researchers find themselves negotiating research methodologies that are domain specific to either the arts or education. Identifying as artists, researchers might be drawn to adopt practitioner-led research approaches (see Sullivan, 2005, 2006). Here, visual arts research outcomes would need to stem from inquiry within visual arts. From this position, educational outcomes may need to be marginalised to make the art outcomes credible in the artworld. Teacher-artists adopting arts-based educational methodologies (see Barone, 1995; Eisner, 2004) would focus their research orientations in pedagogical practices. Being educationally centred might inevitably lead to using visual arts in an instrumental way to merely serve educational goals rather than to locate research in art practice (as suggested by Sullivan and discussed in the paper below). In this dialectical condition, how does an artist and teacher create an art-research-text which stems both from inquiry within visual arts, while also incorporating educational practices? This is the conflict that I experience and try to understand and negotiate in my practice as artist/researcher/teacher, which I believe is central and particular to a/r/tographical practice.

The distinctiveness of a/r/tography as an artist/teacher methodology is that it specifically deals with the dissonant condition of being distributed amongst the roles of artist, teacher and researcher. Unlike other arts-based methodologies which position one disciplinary state over the other - a/r/tographers maintain that the three roles are intertwined in such a way that no one role has leverage over the other. Researching in a/r/tography is conceptualised as 'living inquiry of what it means to know and to search as artists, as researchers, and as teachers' (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p.900-901)

In this condition of feeling pulled in different epistemological directions, a/r/tographical research provides a means of harmonising the discord. This living inquiry is shifting, slipping, and always in tension, and further this inquiry is personal, contingent and always in movement. This state calls me to investigate how these roles interplay and interconnect in my lived experience. I am particularly

interested in the idea that even though the identities of artist, teacher and researcher are in continual tension and negotiation, ultimately the outcome of the research text is dependent on a particular research orientation.

Positing the living inquiry from either the pedagogic or the artistic locus renders a different kind of work. The key evocation is: What would it mean for my research text if I approached its creation from the pedagogic locus of action? What would pedagogically attuned research mean in the context of creating an artwork as research text?

RENDERING A PEDAGOGICALLY ATTUNED RESEARCH TEXT – LIVING INQUIRY

A/r/tographers use the term renderings as the 'methodological concepts' of a/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 900). Renderings help the a/r/tographer to make meaning and offer possibilities of engagement. Irwin and Springgay (2008, p. xxviii) state that 'renderings are concepts that help a/r/tographers portray the conditions of their work for others'. There are six renderings of a/r/tography: contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations, and excess. These renderings emerge in my practice as I engage in the living inquiry of art making and writing in the creation of an a/r/tographical text.

The rendering of living inquiry is the 'ongoing living practice of being an artist, teacher and researcher' (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p.xxix). It is a constant, reflexive meaning making of practice, resulting in textual and visual 'understandings and experiences' rather than representations (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p. 902). Living inquiry takes place with the dialectical movement between the roles of artist, teacher and researcher. What is central to a/r/tographical research is the recognition that these identities are in constant flux and conflict which are experienced in the creation of a research art text.

I wanted to understand what it means to create a pedagogically attuned artwork. The artistic strategy was to investigate the possibility of transmuting Van Manen's (1990) educational phenomenology approach to artwork creation. Van Manen's contribution to educational methodology is the notion of 'lived experience' which deals with 'the immediacy of an educational practitioner's personal experience' (Barnacle, 2004, p.60). In this 'lived experience approach', the subjective and practical experiences of the educational practitioner are a privileged site of knowledge production. Van Manen's approach goes beyond the philosophical as he is concerned with the everyday direct experiences of individuals rather than abstract reflection (Barnacle, 2004).

In pedagogically attuned research, the researcher needs to orient to the lifeworld of children as an educator. The intention of pedagogical research is to connect to 'the lifeworld of living with children' (Van Manen, 1990, p.135). Van Manen criticises educational research that, instead of bringing the lives of children closer to our interest as teachers, attempts to abstract pedagogical knowledge and in so doing distances us from the very lifeworlds in which we are interested. In this context, pedagogy is defined as 'the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children, that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations' (Van Manen, 1990, p.2). Furthermore, to orient our pedagogical relationship with children 'the educational theorist, as pedagogue, symbolically leaves the child – in reflective thought – to be with the child in a real way, to know what is appropriate for this child or these children, here and now' (Van Manen, 1990, p.150).

As artist/researcher/teacher I endeavoured to create an artwork that communicates the significance that children have in my art practice. I ask of the research text: does it elucidate what children mean to me in the work and reveal the relation I have with children? Does the art practice connect with the lifeworlds of children and elucidate their lived experiences? Does it teach us to live our lives with children more fully and 'force us to reflect on how we should talk and act with them and how we should live by their side' (Van Manen, 1990, p.139)?

SPEAKING WITH A PEDAGOGIC OR ARTISTIC VOICE – A/R/TOGRAPHICAL CONTIGUITY

The rendering of contiguity conceives a/r/tographical ideas as being ‘adjacent to one another, touch[ing] another, or exist[ing] in the presence of one another’ (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p.xxviii). Artist/researcher/teacher identities exist ‘simultaneously, and alongside one another’ (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p.xxviii). ‘To live the life of an a/r/tographer is to live a contiguous life sensitive to each of these relationships and particularly to the spaces in-between’ (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p.xxviii). In contiguity, art is both a product and process, and also the textual and visual experiences of the three orientations (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p.xxviii). How can each of these orientations be rendered in the art research text? My sensitivity to these relationships means exploring what implication a particular orientation has for generating particular research outcomes in an art/text. The contiguity between artist and teacher prompts me to ask: what does it mean to orient oneself to the lifeworlds of children as both an educator and artist? I orient myself pedagogically to children, but also, I orient myself artistically to them. How do I describe, interpret and render a child’s experience from both of these vantage points?

Van Manen (1990) clarifies what the implication of a particular research orientation has on the nature of the research text. In his phenomenological approach, a lived experience description (he uses the example of a child skipping) could be written in a variety of ways according to the writer’s orientation. It could be about: the cultural experience of skipping; the physiological quality of skipping where we may try to understand how the body feels while skipping; or, the social significance of other’s skipping. As an ethnographer, I might ask the child to tell me about skipping. A historian may be interested in how aspects of skipping relate to other children’s games. An educator might base their description on their pedagogic orientation. The teacher sees the child in a school context and knows the child in terms of their learning and their relationships with their peers. Van Manen (1990) further elaborates what a pedagogic voice might sound like and suggests that it involves the child in a learning context and home background as it relates to their academic and social development in the classroom. Finally, as an artist, I might ask what is the lived experience of the child skipping? As I operate from multiple role perspectives, if I were to write a description of a child skipping, would it reveal a pedagogic voice or an artistic voice? The resultant answer to this question would reveal my orientation.

I suggest that an artistic description would poetise skipping through the description of sensations, or the imaginings of the child’s thoughts as they skip, or from the perspective of somebody observing the skipping. The artistic description of the experience of skipping would not need to rest on a human account; it could be from the perspective of an insect on the child’s shoulder, or the experience of the skipping rope itself, or even from the ground being hit by the rope. The artistic description would also not limit itself simply to describing the skipping instance but would move outside the skipping into other imaginings and interpretations of the skipping event - even providing an imaginative story of what happened at the end of the skipping. Also, it wouldn’t necessarily have to be about skipping itself; the skipping could be used as a metaphor for some other event, or the explorations of the multiple meanings of ‘skipping’. The lived experience description of a child skipping would

need to be transformed by the artist if it was to be considered a description from an artistic orientation.

An a/r/tographical rendering of this skipping research art/text, would need to bring together the teacher and artistic orientations. Unlike a phenomenological lived experience description, meaning would not be revealed or uncovered, but would be 'complicated as relational, rhizomatic, and singular (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p.xxi). Ultimately, the lived experience description would need to reveal the tension between the artist and teacher orientations.

ORIENTATIONS: MAKING EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT MEANINGS

What does it mean to practice and render an a/r/tographical text? For me, it always returns to the implications of connecting teacher and artist orientations. In this section, I pull apart the methodological conceptions of an artist-researchers and teacher-researchers to understand where the tension lies in negotiating these two positions. To uncover how an artistic or educational research orientation results in a qualitatively different kind of research text (which creates the methodological dissonance for the a/r/tographer), I outline arts-based and practitioner-led research in the sections below.

In contrast to social science research, which intends to reduce uncertainty, arts-based research intends to increase uncertainty (Barone, 2005). Projects of social science generally seek a literal truth where knowledge is gained by way of 'explanation, prediction and control' (Barone, 1995, p.170). Although educational research is often considered social science research, some educational researchers are opposed to securing truth-claims. They playfully express alternative, even conflicting interpretations of the phenomena under study. They generate questions that have been left unasked and they refuse closure so that the questioning can be open for further interpretation. Such researchers display, what Barone (2001, p.24) describes as 'a proclivity to endow features of our experience with more than a single meaning'.

According to Barone (1995), the purpose of art is 'to promote doubt about the desirability of the values and interests associated with knowledge in a particular paradigm, framework, or world view' (p.172), therefore educational projects (capable of promoting uncertainty) should not be referred to as social science but art. Beyond providing research information to a research community, the research text's function (as in a narrative text), lies in drawing the reader into an alternative reality, an 'as if' world. Participating in this imaginary world, the reader experiences the events portrayed in the text in 'strange ways'. This simulates reflection about educational issues and aims to challenge the reader's potentially unquestioned views of the world.

To explain how arts-based research is an artistic form of educational research, Barone (2001) outlines the aesthetic design that such research employs. The written text uses literary language that is everyday and contextualised rather than abstract, technical or propositional. It uses metaphor 'in order to recreate experiences indirectly... [and has the] presence of a heightened degree of ambiguity' (Barone, 2001, p.25). To further elucidate the connection and definition of art, Barone also outlines the features that are present in artworks: there is an affinity with ambiguity; a playful consideration of alternatives; a generation of viewpoints alternative to the current regime of truth; a quest to disturb and interrogate personal and cultural assumptions that have been taken for granted; and, the use of design elements to recast experience into a form with the potential for challenging deeply held beliefs and values. Barone suggests that if all of the above features are achieved by arts-based research then it can rightly attain the status of art. If it only achieves some of these features then it becomes 'arts-based research rather than full-fledged art' (Barone, 2001, p.25). For arts-based research to reach the level of 'pure art', the narratives presented would need to be 'metaphor-laden' and the analysis would need to connote/express meaning rather than denote/state meaning.

However, in light of the above propositions about art in educational research, it is important to highlight that there is a key difference between art and phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) states that phenomenology is not to 'be confused with poetry, story, or art' (Van Manen, 1990, p.19) or that these endeavours should be seen as forms of phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) claims that phenomenological research intends to make things explicit: 'One difference is that phenomenology aims at making explicit and seeking universal meaning where poetry and literature remain implicit and particular'. The difference between phenomenological descriptions and artistic narrative is that 'they aspire to different epistemological ends' (Van Manen, 1990, p.19). Narrative focuses on plot, leaving the themes implicit; phenomenology on the other hand, explicates the themes through the narrative and attempts to remain true to the nature of the experience being presented. In these ways, Van Manen refers to phenomenology as 'human science'. Using the example of the child skipping referred to earlier, the phenomenological description of the child makes explicit the meaning of the experience of skipping; however, an artist description of the same event, would make meaning that is implicit, nebulous, ambiguous. The phenomenological description of the child skipping would seek to elucidate a universal meaning about what it is like for the child to be skipping whereas an artistic description would suggest a contextual meaning based on their personal proclivity to the event.

THE ARTIST-THEORIST AS PRACTITIONER

A research problem arises as a result of Van Manen's (1990) removal of the possibility of a phenomenological investigation being achieved, except through a writing process. This sole emphasis on writing suggests that pure visual arts research outcomes cannot adequately reveal a complete understanding of lived experiences. What would it involve for an artist to speak with a pedagogic voice given that a phenomenological description needs to make explicit the meaning of the particular experience but an artist's descriptions of this experience are rendered as creative imaginings?

In addition to the phenomenological dilemmas already noted, orienting oneself both as an educator and artist provides further complication in terms of generating visual art research outcomes. Sullivan (2004, 2005, 2006) has criticised arts-based educational research for using art in an instrumental way, to serve educational aims. He contends that, even though arts-based educational researchers claim that the arts provide a special way of coming to know, 'the arts continue to be seen as agencies of human knowing that are drafted into service according to educational practices already in place' (Sullivan, 2005, p.xvii) rather than as a means of knowing in their own right. Sullivan (2006, p.25) also claims that some arts-based methodologies are restricted 'by conditions and protocols framed by the social sciences', and that they tend to reinforce modernist traditions by aligning qualitative research methods with formalist aesthetics to generate an 'elemental' approach to research. In this way, the claims made about artistic experience and insights that are brought to culture, carry a 'structuralist and essentialist stamp' (Sullivan, 2005, p.xvii). In this way:

essentialist concepts are reified rather than contested, and perspectives remain passive rather than critical. For some, the quest to embrace more artistic forms of representation results in decorative research rather than critical inquiry. (Sullivan, 2006, p.24)

Whilst visual arts research needs to be credible as a field of research; it also requires credibility in the art world and thus it cannot be constrained by research frameworks from the social sciences. For Sullivan (2004, 2005, 2006), the arts in research are not merely means for the research; they are the research. Therefore, he suggests that 'practitioner-led research' is better positioned to address the issues surrounding the production of the artwork as part of the research process, than is arts-based research. In practitioner-led research, art making is a 'site for knowledge construction and meaning making itself' (Sullivan, 2005, p.81). Its distinction lies in the claim that the position taken is not arts-based but arts-centred. It is 'a study of visual arts practice as research, not an inquiry in visual arts practice as research' (Sullivan, 2005, p.131). Practitioner-led research requires that:

informing theories and practices are found in the art studio, and the image of the artist-theorist as practitioner is taken as the locus of action rather than the arts teacher. Therefore visual arts research has to be grounded in practices that come from art itself, especially inquiry that is studio based. In addition, an axiom of research needs to be followed which accepts that different paths can be used to get to the same place. (Sullivan, 2005, p.xvii)

For visual arts research outcomes to be credible, the locus of action needs to stem from the position of artist, not pedagogue. However, if I want to express particular

notions of pedagogy through art practice, does this still create the same problem of instrumentally? I don't believe so, as the inquiry stems from the art practice itself, 'the artist-theorist as practitioner is taken as the locus of action rather than the arts teacher' (Sullivan, 2005, p.xvii). As an artist, I inquire whether an artwork can be created that intends to 'find the child' in the text. This aligns with Van Manen's (1990) notion of pedagogically attuned research but without making a claim that this is achieved through a phenomenological approach to explicitly reveal lived experience understandings.

The methodological explanations discussed above reveal the context of a/r/tographical work. A/r/tography is distinguished by its unsettled state. It is forever shifting between the three orientations and residing in the condition of 'in-betweenness' and 'dis/comfort' (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p.902). The a/r/tographical position seeks to understand the epistemological implications of what each of these roles involve. In order to better understand how the theoretical discourse presented thus far enacts itself in concrete artistic experiences, I now reflect on an example of my artistic practice.

THE ARTWORK: SIMULACRA FROM OTHER DIMENSIONS



The sfod creatures have been integral to my art practice for the past ten years (see Gomes, 2002). The sfod (simulacra from other dimensions) were 73 alien creatures that I created during the final year of my visual arts degree. Each sfod was categorised according to the 16 personality types of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). I do not wish to dwell on the explanations of these constructs, suffice to say here that I have always been interested in the intersection of science and art, and how these scientific concepts can be transformed into artistic forms. As part of artist-in-residence programs, my educational art practice revolved around presenting children with a sfod creature sculpture (the image above showcases 6 of the 73 sfod creatures). Through guided play-art acts, children created components of an alien universe for their sfod creatures, which were then incorporated into my own artistic sfod universe. The particular educational-artistic encounter described here involved 70, eight to nine year old children, with whom I worked over a school term as an artist-in-residence. The culminating art-research-text was an interactive digital work. This final art-research-text incorporates various components from the sfod universe, but its significant element is the embedded videos of the children interacting with the sfod. An individual, interacting with the digital artwork, is required to click on an image of a sfod creature to play a video of a child in the midst of a sfod activity with the sfod that the child received during the 'sfod residency'.

The complete interactive digital work can be viewed at: http://www.sfod73.net/Galleria_sfod/sfod_worlds.swf

CULMINATING THE FINAL FORM OF THE DIGITAL WORK



I processed countless visualisations and conceptions of the work before the final form was achieved. I was driven by wanting to address the question 'why children' in my work. I wanted this question to be answered through the digital work. I wanted the work to depict what happened between me and the children in our artistic encounter and to communicate the sense of the experiences of the children who were involved in the project. However, trying to address these notions of childhood within the artwork was a problematic endeavour as it would implicitly engender reifying a particular construction of children in visual form. It could mean, for example, representing childhood as an 'affective condition' (Horton & Kraftl, 2006b) where 'our notions of childhood are profoundly evocative' (p.80). These affective notions of childhood would therefore echo the romantic paradigm of modernism's fascination with child art (artists like Picasso or Klee were drawn to children's visualisations as they saw originality, spontaneity and authenticity in the forms). Appropriating children's forms into ones work might also be seen as an attempt to recover childhood, reclaim innocence and freedom from imposed schemata (Fineberg, 2006).

I wanted to reject these romantic notions of childhood and liberate children from their passive and infantile state; but how could I ensure this through the use of children's work? Reconceptualist approaches to researching with children provide some answers, as they require for the underlying power relations between the adult and child to be exposed to reveal the 'silent voices' of children. In the sfod residency, children are positioned as co-participants. Christensen and Prout (2002) refer to such positioning as 'ethical symmetry' where researchers start with the premise of equality between adults and children in all aspects of the research process. In my context of considering ethical symmetry in the process of art creation, I sought not to represent

my stereotypical affective construction of childhood, but rather approach the situation in the same way as if I was collaborating with adult participants. Therefore, my artistic inquiry was driven by how to represent my experience of children in the work, and the artwork of these children, in an ethically symmetric way.

THE COMPONENTS OF THE WORK: RENDERING 'ETHICAL SYMMETRY'

THE CHILD-LIKE SCRIPT



The sentences in my digital work are written in a child-like script: Does this imply that I am utilising the stereotype of a child's cute incompetence and thus constructing the romantic vision of childhood? If so, this is not my intention. Rather, I am indicating via this 'index', that in so many ways, child and adult are on the same existential plane of becoming. I hand-wrote the script on the computer using the computer mouse. I was trying my best to form the letters. However, the fine-motor control required for this task meant that my best efforts turned similar to children's writing. The resulting script depends on the amount of practise in the hand. There is also other writing in this digital interface which I wrote with my weaker left-hand and then scanned. Again, the results remind us of children's writing, not because of their cute incompetence, just the resultant materiality between tool and embodied development. What I was attempting to do in these gestures was to bring myself into the realm of the child, as a way to challenge the position of bringing children into the realm of the adults (by reforming children's forms so that they appear more masterful). Am I operating like the modernist artist here? Finding the child within, appropriating the unconscious forms of childhood? I would argue not, as this position is dependent on ideological intentions. It is not an appropriation but a connecting. A point where the child/adult meets: not growing up, but going on (Horton & Kraftl, 2006a) and where the shared formulations exist at a point of sameness, not difference.



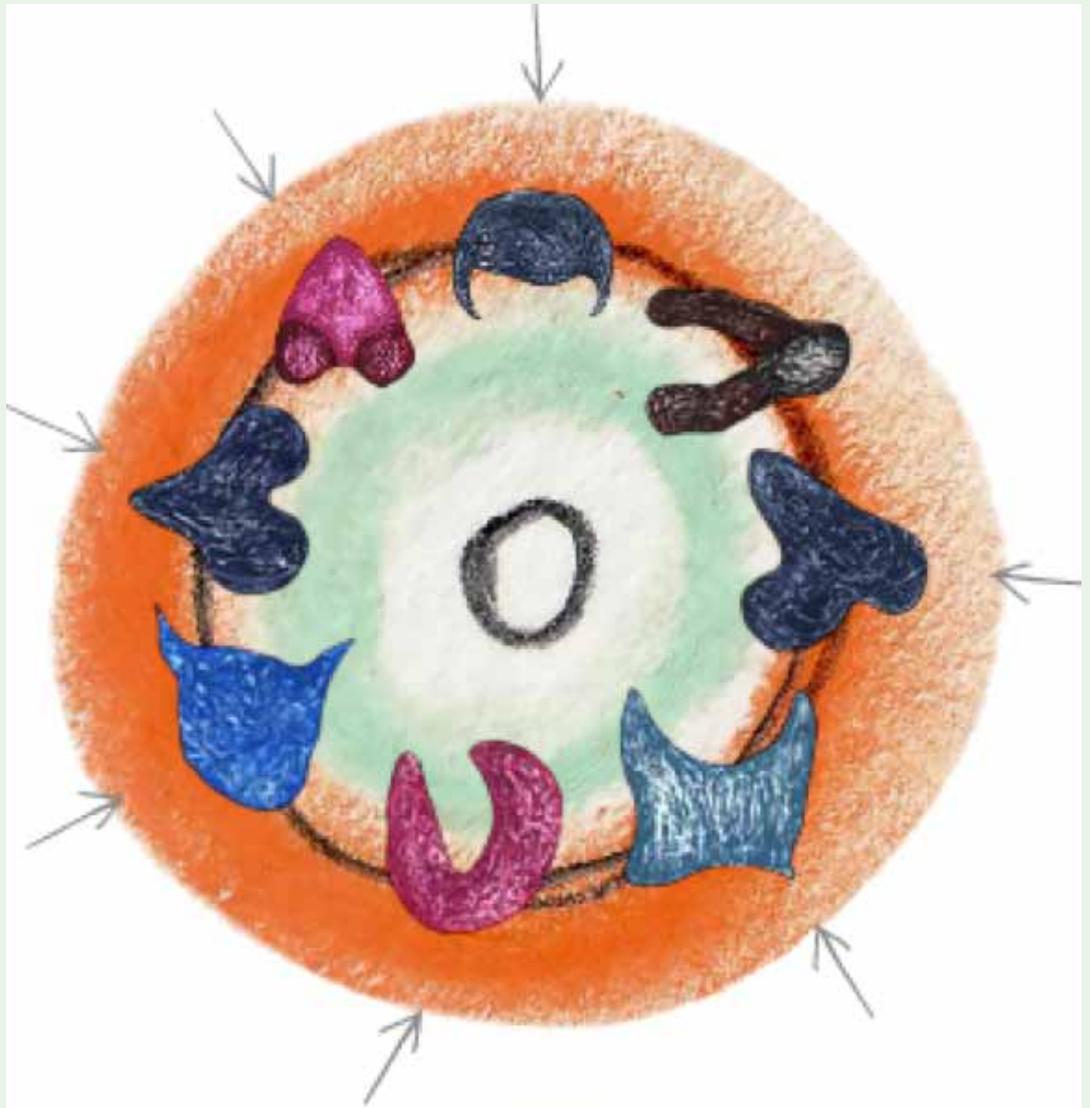
I struggled to find the appropriate metaphor to visualise the sfod worlds (the worlds categorise the sfod into their MBTI characteristics). I ended up with circular, minimalistic, geometric shapes, drawn with pastels, and then scanned into the computer. I tried to be consistent and find a 'rightness of fit' to my aesthetic decisions of the past; the materials and shapes that I was inherently drawn to. Fitting to the moments when the sfod were born through 'doodling' with plasticine. Fitting to the circle creations which were seared into my consciousness (as a child learning to handle a pencil I had an obsession with drawing circles).

In their current digital existence – rotating 'neurotic' (Price, 1998) entities - function as a contrast to the technologised interfaces - the slick and neat of the dominant digital framework. The rotating 'worlds' contrast to the technological aesthetic that is used to perfect and make easy. They bring the sense of the hand-made, the unrefined. Yet somehow they still perform within digital interactive rules - they grow bigger once we mouse over them and then they stick, suspended, and somehow bothersome. Their behaviour seems somewhat random but also uniform. I engage in digital play behaviour, interacting with the circles that become 'worlds' in the realm of play's make-believe. I have constructed a space to play with/in.

As I move deeper into rendering the visual components into textual understandings, the text slips into poetised renderings. I step outside, I become the participant of all participants, interacting and making meaning from the work. The worlds come closer via our touch. We focus in and focus out, using Eisner's (2004) first mode of

thinking. The closer we manage to get to this make-believe world, the more detail we see. We sense the marks of the pencil and the rough edges. In this way, we experience the everydayness of that act, we experience aesthetic poignancy in this detail, and we are trapped in time. We move out again and our fascination ceases for the moment. We see the 'worlds' in their entirety; and they appear to us somewhat deformed.

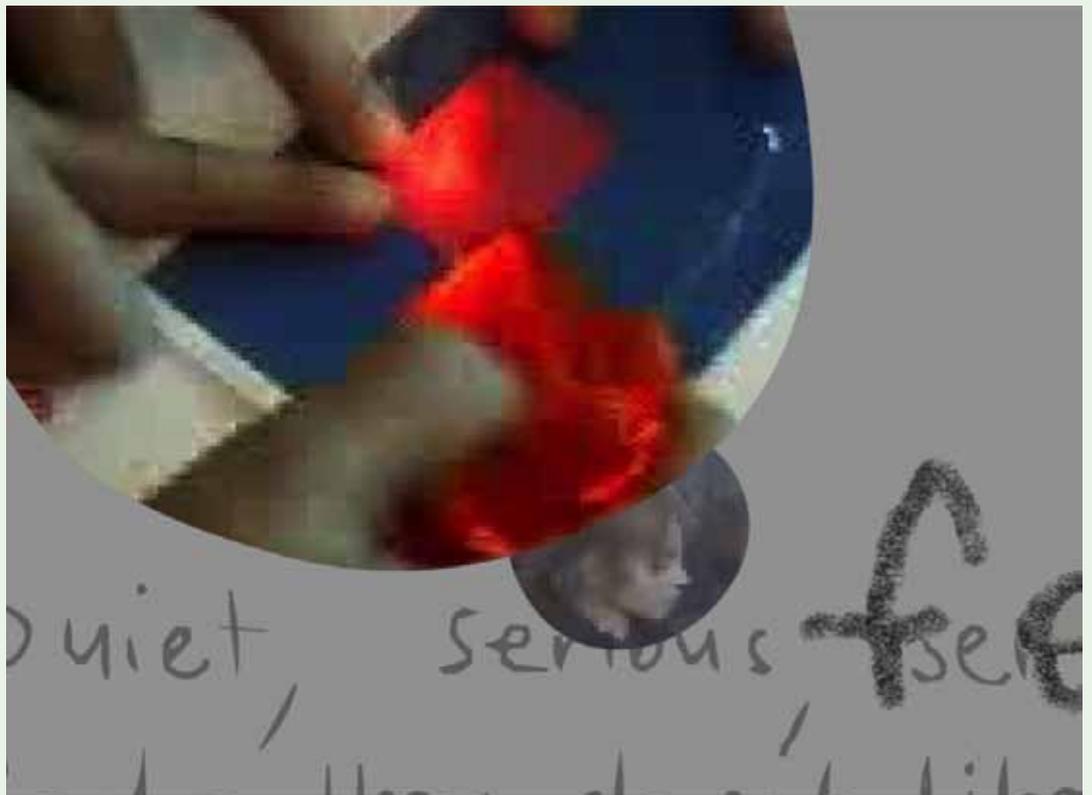
THE SFOD (SIMULACRA FROM OTHER DIMENSIONS)



The sfod are a constant, they are themselves, as they have always been. They are the stable entities among the raging dialectical torrents. They are able to exist in any habitat. Here, they shuffle within the rotating worlds when it is their time to speak. They are alive, creature-like, or they have become alive. When we want to listen to them, they do not speak in their voice, but in the voices that have imbued them with meaning, that animated them into existence and gave them purpose and function. They become real through naming, and through their sharing with an Other. They are vessels that carry messages from the Other, the other side of the dialectical edge; that usually separates us - us from them. They are carriers of meaning - meaning without purpose, but with substance and essence and all the things that matter.

They present themselves to us, cartoon-like, but faceless. We-adult cannot connect to this faceless presence. In the realm of the in-between, we project our faces onto the entities. They are us-child, they are alien. We-children transfer our desires onto their facelessness, we feel their vibrations projecting back their thought of us-child. They vibrate their visions into the world. Like a Babel fish (Adams, 1979), we take them in and we hear voices of others translated into our tongue - not only translated but transformed. Mutated?

THE VIDEOS



An attempt was made to get the children's voices into the digital artwork - their experiences and the fact that they existed. That they were there interacting with me and my world. The challenge was how to embed the video in a way that was somewhat transformed artistically so that it would meld seamlessly into the work. After various forms of mutation had been applied to the imported video, the simplicity and consistency of the circle emerged yet again.

I play with metaphors and metonyms (Irwin & Springgay, 2008); slipping efficiently into clichéd sentiments of space and time:

...It is...

...like a peephole through which we watch the mysterious play rituals.

...a wormhole into another dimension of the world of the in-between

...a telescope through which we view a distant land, the Other culture. Or we close one eye and peer through our fistful hands like a telescope. We are one yet apart.

...the Petri-dish where we see life forming. The artificial environment that still allows things to grow.

...something captured, mere snippets, and played out over and over.

...fragments of thought projected, experiences caught and bottled, infinitely stuck in the same moment. Playing out the same ritual over and over, like others have played out, yet uniquely, never to be repeated in the exact same way.

...multiples of windows emerging within the digital play space. Like the birth and death of stars.

...moments of life that spring out of nothingness. Like droplets of water uniting back with the ocean.

...multiple universes bubble out to the surface. We see such a different world through each portal, yet built of the same matter, united in existence.

Multiple voices rebound through space, reaching us on the other side of make-believe. The voices are indiscernible. We pick out some words. They are familiar to us but mostly it is a mass of sound. We hear the chirp of children, yet somehow unnatural, repetitive. We cannot understand because of the distortions of space, or we have difficulty understanding another's language and we pick out that to which we connect. We may want to connect to some sort of innocence, a cuteness. Are these just robotised thoughts, repeating, rebounding, transformed. Alien? So many voices. How can we make any sense? We want to make sense, but do we need to? Can't we just sit here and be in the moment of listening, hearing the variance of sounds as it is, in its being-ness? Is it exasperating? Maybe nauseating? Or just existence emerging to the fore?

So many movements of our hands. The interaction with the digital play space - each instance creating a ripple in the space, the opening of a vortex into this other world, the multiple universes of children's experiences open out to us, and we see traces of something that can be discerned. But really, we never can, we can never really fully be there, we can never return. We have our memories but these are also traces. From traces of these memories, and from real encounters with children, and what they choose to tell us, we make out a construct of what it is like, and what it was like - but we can never ever know in our adult-like state - what the be-in-ness of child is in its entirety. So we have a map, a simulacrum, a semblance of something, a distorted representation.

An entity seeks to capture experiences of the pedagogic encounter through crafting modal metaphors; searching for the evocative; assembling an a/r/tographic verisimilitude.

THE ARTIFACTS



The artifacts are the leftovers that remain after the seeking-entity, the witness, peers through the gaps into the other dimension of strange voices and rituals, repeating. This other culture not clearly understood, yet familiar. We remember sharing similar moments, being there, but now captured they remain trapped and repeating. We watch a moment appear. We focus our attention on this semblance. This semblance is unique yet the same pattern repeats. We witness them. The children are present here in this new world that has been made for them. We know that they were here. They were here in this state. This state that is captured - of chirping voices communicating non-sensical movements. They were here, I am showing you. Still there needs to be a remnant, a reminder lingering there, present and still. After the focus on the act of experience, there emerges this index, this thing that points to something that had happened. They remain there still reminding us of the noises. We hear them but they remain merely in mind and a marking is retained. What is it like? A captured moment of our encounter. Instructions given or my mind becoming real and actualised in another. A connection being made with the human race in neutine form. There are crystalline beginnings of actualisation - it is about life forming, life reflecting itself in formation of universal form, spread out like the cosmos. Little creations forming, witnessing Nebulas. They remain here like the traces of the big bang. This is where it started. It led to these - these still forms staring back at us, as if all knowing. They look back faceless and yet as grand and unfathomable as the dust and star formation. These forms have been transformed. They are merely childlike. They are merely a translation into the inept formations, but they are there. They have been formed to exist, by little hands that hear a voice, countless hands moving and generating, combining, trapping. There is no apparent reason except that it was said, without question because of the flow of the moment. They are present in many forms. They have been reproduced countless times now. They enter now into multiple assemblages where the time has slowed down. They have arisen from some random recesses of chemicals combining. They are united together to share the same purpose. They exist - these artifacts of trapped moments that can be anything. Just anything that you want them to be if you allow them.

SUMMATION OF THE SPACE

The space exists now and traps and combines all experiences. The sfod worlds that have merged with child world. They live together now in this digital space. I have manifested these worlds in this formation - this alien world with the child world. They are both imagined. Both are concocted and emergent out of thoughts rattling together and swirling. Here is the imagined world of the sfod. This particular way of making sense out of other swirling theories and concepts, translated into something that felt so comfortable. I remember myself toying with my dolls filled with personalities as a way to fulfil my sense of boredom. Then there is this other semblance. This child-world created at the meeting with the sfod. Which was more real? The child-world was tangible. I was there with these beings. I brought them the sfod and they liked each other. The sfod were taken up, they connected with many imaginary worlds, to live on. They exist forever in these encounters. They become real in this moment. For this short time, they were animated. I held on and captured this miracle. As soon as it formed it was gone. A memory is retained. It lingers. It can be let go. As the universe began, it ends, it does not go into oblivion. It remains as a memory in the witness. Was the witness satisfied with its creation?

There is no audible answer.

AND IN THE END...

The intention of my project was to render an artistic text that would connect me to 'the lifeworld of living with children' (1990, p.135), and in this way, avoid articulating a research text that abstracts pedagogical knowledge which distances us from 'the field of vision of our interest in children as teachers...' (Van Manen, 1990, p.135).

Recalling now the questions posed at the beginning of this paper; what does it mean to orient oneself to the lifeworld as both educator and artist, and what implication does this particular orientation have for generating research outcomes? I proposed that a lived experience description from the orientation of an artist would make implicit the meaning of the experience. In the context of creating a lived experience description of making art with children, the artist would create a transformed meaning about the experience, rather than making meaning explicit. However, in all these translations of experience, I still wanted to remain true to the nature of the experience being presented. The art/research/text had to orient me to the pedagogy in my relations with children.

A/r/tographical research renders a particular, anxious, epistemological tension. In my case, this centred upon asking; Does my lifeworld orientation stem from being an artist, teacher or researcher? Depending on the answer to this question, a different set out of research expectations and outcomes arise. The 'anxious life', 'nervousness' filled with 'a continual process of not-knowing, of searching for meaning that is difficult and in tension' (Springgay, Irwin & Kind, 2005, p.902), an aporetic praxis (de Cosson, 2003), arises from requirements of justification, and forces the search for shared experiences that can function as epistemological support. A researcher needs to select a methodology that resonates with their lived life. In this sense, only through experiencing my own methodological tension could I connect to the a/r/tographical condition; 'something that [I could] nod to, recognising it as an experience that [I] have had' (Van Manen, 1990, p.27).

In a way, a/r/tography, or indeed phenomenology, could not be comprehended theoretically. It could only be understood 'from the inside'; only be accomplished by 'actively doing it' (Van Manen, 1990, p.8) or actively being the condition. A/r/tography could only be validated by my lived experience in the act of research, not via something I appropriated prior to researching. 'A/r/tography is not something adopted ad hoc at the time of research dissemination; it is a thoughtful, enacted way of knowing and being' (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 904). Only by living through the tension evident in the roles of artist, teacher and researcher, could I further inscribe the spaces in-between each of the roles. The other methodological approaches that have been explicated here were also appropriated through the process of resonance, but not as completely. Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology was explored as it provides the articulation of reflexive techniques that allow for the investigation of the pedagogic lived experiences that deeply interest me. Within a critical pedagogic art rendering, my thoughtfulness can be enacted and maintained in reflexive creation as I asked: where is the child? How am I experiencing the children in the work? What are my experiences of making art with children? And how can I capture in the artwork my art practice with children as integral to my work?

However, when it comes to articulating these lived experiences from the orientation of an artist, Van Manen's (1990) phenomenology ceases to completely resonate as it does not allow for implicit imaginings. To counter this, Sullivan's (2005, 2006) practitioner-based research allows me to understand the centrality of artistic practice - that new knowledge is generated through the art-making processes accompanied by the techniques of reflection, creativity and critical practice. However, this still is not sufficient for the practitioner who tries to straddle educational and arts contexts, and particularly one who is trying to come to an understanding of the significance of children in their life.

In the end, did I capture/represent/translate/expose the children's experience or did I just render my own experience of them? 'A/r/tographical research as living inquiry constructs the very materiality it attempts to represent... engaging in a/r/tographical research constructs the very 'thing' one is attempting to make sense of' (Springgay, 2008, p.159). The "thing" made implicit through the textual and visual understandings rendered in this paper, speaks to me now as an abstraction. The children are reduced to illegible voices of babbling interaction, of unidentifiable identities frozen at a point in time. Endeavouring to bring children closer, the children are paradoxically abstracted in the artist's rendering of them. But ultimately, I do not feel distant from them. The work epitomises my lifeworld of making art with children: Children abstracted in the in/between space/time of the a/r/tographer.

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