

The Graduate School of Education
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UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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SPECIAL ISSUE

**A/r/tography
and the Literary and
Performing Arts**

Volume 3 | Issue 2 | 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.

A/r/tography and the Literary and Performing Arts

Rita L. Irwin and Anita Sinner
Guest Editors

Educators and policy makers in many countries recognize that formal education is often driven by a technical rationality to teaching and learning. Arts educators are often leaders in questioning this line of thought. Advocating for an education that is qualitatively different from the technical rationality approach is one in which the arts become central to inquiry. In doing so, arts educators foster the development of artistic ways of knowing, of perception and interpretation, and of cultural understanding. These foci lay the foundation for recognizing contributions that are uniquely personal and distinctive, as well as those that are socially engaged examples of creative action.

As human beings we experience the 'qualitative' world and through a constellation of formed and informed encounters begin to perceive, imagine and inquire into the potential of what it means to be human – human beings who are always moving toward our own becoming. As human beings we have a biological imperative to experience the world through our senses and thus make sense of the world through our many and varied sensory relationships with the world. We continually learn across the lifespan and as we do, we are quite literally creating our minds and our relationships with our bodies and their surroundings. The arts offer us sensory or 'sensational' ways of knowing and they offer us opportunities to engage in complex yet subtle forms of thinking about the uncertainties and ambiguities of a sensory laden life. As such, arts educators are able to create learning encounters that inspire aesthetic experiences and consequently engage learners in giving life to their imaginative capacities to perceive and discern emotionally rich experiences.

A/r/tography is one such approach to sensory ways of knowing through the arts that is becoming well-known as a form of living inquiry that draws upon the practices of artists (e.g., poets, story tellers, musicians, actors, composers, etc.), educators (teachers

and learners) and researchers (inquirers). It is a form of living inquiry because it is not merely added to one's life and practice but indeed, is one's life and practice, each becoming indistinguishable from the other. We are indeed lucky to have a remarkable selection of a/r/tographers from Australia, Canada, Spain and the United States who employ a/r/tography as a way of embracing their identities as artists, researchers, learners, and educators while simultaneously engaging in rigorous and vigorous research creation activities. This issue includes eleven articles and three interludes, the former representing in-depth scholarly and artistic presentations regarding a conceptual focus while the latter represents a purposeful pause intended to stretch one's perceptual inclinations. Both are intended to enhance, refine, revise, even transform our understandings of the world around us. Yet they are different and it is in this difference that we seek to complement rich scholarly engagements with equally rich artistic evocations and provocations.

In this special issue, we engage with literary and performative scholars exploring research trajectories through story, song, poetry and dance, along with alternate expressions such as clowning as a site of inquiry in education. Opening such diverse conversations in academic scholarship blends conceptual frameworks that intertwine practice-based methods and further the scope of a/r/tographic possibilities across fields of study and through multiple arts forms. Emerging and new scholars lead this conversation, collectively demonstrating 'a discipline of noticing,' defined by caring, sensitivity, awareness, and an attunement to possibilities in the moment (Mason, 2002).

We begin this dialogue with Reverend Kerri Mesner (Canada), who poses six questions from a radical, queer performative standpoint concerning "who's voice" and "who's silence." A tongue-and-cheek self-description as a "Christian with a brain" in the academy, Mesner employs visual, textual and audio sequences to draw attention to sites of resistance experienced in university settings. Mesner troubles notions of voice and silence through performance as a way into conversations that bring together anti-oppressive discourses and artistic practice.

Extending the discussion of voice, María Jesús Agra Pardiñas and Cristina Trigo Martínez (Spain) reflect on primary art teacher education by collaging their stories together with emphasis on metaphor/metonym while continually shifting between the reflective self and the act of teaching as embodied moments in the classroom. With this continuum of thought-practice at the heart of deliberations, Pardiñas and Trigo Martínez draw on rhetorical questions to propel our thinking through curriculum and instructional delivery. Focusing on the notion of passageways as in-between spaces, they attend to the "voices of dreams, expectations, failures and successes, reasons and feelings..." to attend to the inherent tensions of relational, historical and social aspects of teacher training.

Bringing us a music performance, Danny Bakan (Canada) offers a song, *This is the Beauty*, as a "rallying call to musical a/r/tographers" to take up practice-based research. In this playful rendering of a/r/tography, Bakan applies the traditions of folk and protest songs to acknowledge the changing dynamics of what constitutes research and the importance of bringing new forms of expression to our scholarly conversations. Posted to YouTube, Bakan makes his research accessible to all audiences, reminding us of the importance and the responsibility of scholars as public intellectuals in society today.

Building on the notion of what is arts research, Kylie Stevenson (Australia) outlines the relationship between research design and a/r/tography as a methodological approach at the heart of her dissertation project, and how through this lens, she engages as artist/researcher/teacher with the stories of a group of emerging scholars. In *Creative River Journeys*, ten doctoral students at several universities shared how creative practice reverberated in critical moments of change in their scholarly lives. Mapping journeys individually, collaboratively, and collectively to identify the intersections between arts practice, education and research, Stevenson reveals the layers of relationships that define becoming a practice-based scholar.

Maya Borhani (Canada) explores how mundane everyday spaces, in this case riding the bus and responding to a project that brought poetry to public transit, informs her understandings of transitioning as a graduate student entering a program of study and as a foreign student in a new country. Describing her experience like a sort of ritual with communion and prayer, Borhani reflects on bus poems as sites of connectivity about what was and what would be her future, drawing on familiar language in an unfamiliar landscape.

Sean Wiebe and Diane Morrison-Robinson (Canada) deliberate upon the notions of duality, hybridity and ‘contested rationalist values of work,’ in this case, *schoolwork*, to reconsider curriculum and the lives of students from a creative and imaginative disposition. Attending to transmediation as a process of making – making art, making knowledge, and making a life – Wiebe and Morrison-Robinson, teachers-educators who are also artists, challenge the neoliberal influences emerging in education today and consider how such thought is manifest in our relations with students, and how as teachers, we can facilitate an interpretive shift to identity exploration as potential forms of empowerment.

In-between the articles in this issue we have a cluster of three interludes or forms of artistic research expressed through art practice, with Lorrie Neilson (Canada), Victoria Campbell and Robyn Gibson (Australia) and Kathy Mantis (Canada), all literary scholars. Neilson presents two poems that address the challenge of finding balance, drawing on the a/r/tographical orientation that silence and letting go are paramount in shaping artistic works. Campbell and Gibson invoke Celtic mythology in a group narrative performance exploring the a/r/tographic rendering of openings for early career teachers. In *Hover I*, Mantis weaves together image and text as part of her ongoing process of becoming an artist/researcher/teacher in relation to the paradoxes, tensions and in-betweenness that surround her life as an educated woman of working class background.

Following the interludes, Peter Gouzouasis (Canada) links his article to several musical recordings that explore tonality as a metaphor by moving beyond a traditional approach to music education as rule-based and instead shifting to a multidimensional, subjective approach to music through autobiographical inquiry. Gouzouasis describes this as a space “to interrogate the changes, or ruptures, that unfold as writing metaphorically draws me into the complexities of diatonic tonality/modality.”

The rigours of theatrical training are taken up by Julia Lane (Canada), who proposes clowning as data, bringing attention to the absence of auto/biographical accounts of clowns in historical scholarly research. Lane seeks to “infiltrate the academy”

through a practice of clowning, and adopts a c/a/r/tographic approach to interpret critical clown practices as a reconsideration of academic conventions.

Sharon Chappell (USA) exhibited *Border Inspections* with works of art from public school students, university students, and teachers and faculty from across North America to highlight bilingual and bicultural issues impacting their lives. Through poetic self-study, Chappell raises questions about how language, identity, culture and power shapes our social lives and our cultural representations, and through her role as a curator and teacher educator, how she negotiates borders through art and teaching.

Kari-Lynn Winters (Canada), a Language Arts educator, explores power distribution in educational settings through critical literacy and discursive positioning theories. She generates insights into professional practices rooted in her memories and everyday life as a scholar, artist, teacher, researcher and award-winning children's author. Through 'think-alouds' and reflective notes, Winters creates an assemblage of forms of expression to document her thinking about three inquiries: how she became an author and scholar; how she took up discursive positions; and how teachers might take up similar practices in their own artful journeys.

We close with an article by Kathryn Ricketts and Celeste Snowber (Canada), dance scholars who examine body knowledge and body wisdom as a site of deep listening and expression. Interpreting knowledge through movement, body intelligence serves to increase understandings, perceptions and reflections through "embodied wakefulness." Ricketts and Snowber encourage communities of curiosity to pursue autobiographical footsteps and sensory awareness in an invitation for greater connections and intersections through creative expression.

In this special issue of *Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts*, the artists and scholars represented here look beyond the skills found within the performative and literary arts, and instead engage in the sensory and sensational processes of qualitative engagement that is distinctive to each art form. Rather than searching for certainty in order to substantiate a series of findings, these a/r/tographers engage their aesthetic and educational sensibilities to form discerning judgments as they gather deeper understandings of our complex world. The results are remarkably rich interpretations and representations of these new understandings.

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