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Posted Date: 7 November 2023

doi: 10.20944/preprints202311.0392.v1

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Article

From Creative, Reflective, Practice to Affective Reflexivity as an Art Research Methodology

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Abstract: A capacity to reflect on experience and learn *through* it (reflective and reflexive practice) is deemed an essential part of ethical practice and research. Challenging traditional research approaches this arts-based, inter-disciplinary, Ph.D. project explores artistic practice as a research methodology, and how learning *through* experiences of 'making' things may enhance and amplify our understanding of the more affective aspects of human situations and experience. Grounded in the author's artistic practice and learning *through* experiences of 'making', the author assembles and adapts frames from psychoanalysis, art (psycho)therapy, and the arts *with/through* which to observe and document their experience of an organisational situation. Describing the development of their method in three phases, analysis takes place through returning to revisit and rework artistic material produced, and engaging in conversation with the emergent material and others in response. Results take the form of artworks and artistic projects, including documentation of process. Emergent threads draw attention to the speculative, entangled, and affective nature of the research process, the reflexivity generated through moving and handling material, and the reflexive work of *undergoing*, foregrounding an ethics of responsibility, attention, and care *for/of* the body. As a space for imaginative encounter and performative enactment, and a site for reflexivity *through* which one may be pressed to notice and feel more acutely, the author argues that the research value resides in the capacity of this method to embrace complex relationalities, and engage our affective, ethical sensibilities in ways that may not emerge through more traditional approaches to reflective/reflexive practice(s). This has implications for both art therapy practice and research, amplifying the learning opportunities afforded by moving, modifying, and assembling things differently, the embodied 'work' of art as a method of enquiry, the cultural sensitivity of documentary fragments captured in/through various media and voices, and the value of collaborative endeavours where meaning is co-constructed in conversation.

Keywords: reflective art practice; affective reflexivity; art-based research; art therapy; response art; embodied observation; interdisciplinarity; ethics

Introduction

This article describes an interdisciplinary, arts-based, doctoral project which assembles threads from psychoanalysis, art (psycho)therapy, and the arts to explore the psychosocial role of reflexive art practice in honing sensitivity to the affective dimensions of human situations and experience (Michaels, 2022b).

Background

The philosopher Donald Schön writes of the inherently unstable, complex, nature of practice, of tangled webs and turbulent environments, and of swampy lowlands where 'situations are confusing "messes" incapable of technical solution' but where the problems of greatest human concern might be (Schön, 1983, p.42).

It is motivated by a concern that imaginative, reflective spaces that enliven our emotional, affective, and ethical sensitivities are being severely eroded (Bunting, 2020, Cooper and Lousada, 2005, Bolton, 2010, Etherington, 2004a, Huet, 2012). While reflective and reflexive attitudes are

deemed essential for responsible and ethical practice, increasing mechanisation, systemisation, and scrutiny of the human services with expectations of constant activity, efficiency, and productivity strike at the tacit, less articulable, subtleties of practice (McIntosh, 2010, Candy, 2019). Such demands make it difficult to adopt a contemplative, attitude or to engage with the complex and difficult in substantial and intense ways (Walker, 2016). This risks reducing reflection and reflexivity in professional practice to a simple matter of 'thinking rigorously' where emotionally-charged, affect-laden, landscapes, feeling, and imagination are downplayed in favour of more easily measurable targets (Candy, 2019, Boud and Walker, 1998, Bolton, 2010, Collier, 2010). Feelings, bodily sensations, and imaginings accompany all our practice and research encounters (Holmes, 2014); yet, the subjective, affective, cultural life of the practitioner-researcher is often seen as irrelevant, embarrassing, or disruptive, and relegated to an unspoken, unheard place (Healey, 2015, Kenny and Gilmore, 2014, Holmes, 2010, McNiff and Nash, 2017). Nonetheless, rooted in human experience and feeling, subjectivity, imagination, and affect remain the realm in which much clinical work takes place. This, it might be argued, makes attending to such matters even more important.

Art as Research

Arts-based research (ABR) asserts the fundamental belief that artistic practices are integral to learning and generating knowledge (Vear, 2022, Leavy, 2017). Increasingly acknowledged as a valid mode of enquiry (Nelson, 2013, Gray and Malins, 2004, Sullivan, 2010), and inherently interdisciplinary in nature (Cazeaux, 2008, Michaels, 2022c), ABR is especially significant to the field of art therapy. Expanding on heuristic self-dialogue, attention is directed outwards to dialogues with the making process and its products (McNiff, 2008), with meanings residing in the questions provoked, what is learnt along the way, and how new understandings emerge (Hogan and Pink, 2010, Candy, 2019, Ryan, 2014). Working across boundaries, the arts offer a multiplicity of models, metaphors, forms, and approaches *through* which to experience and consider different situations, articulate and share understanding, engage audiences, and facilitate critical reflection on the way practices are organised (Sade, 2022, Kaimal et al., 2022, McCaffrey and Edwards, 2015, Eastwood, 2022, Skukauskaitė et al., 2022). Rooted in feeling, while drawing on social meanings as subject matter, the arts make empathic participation possible through forms and practices that are evocative and compelling, facilitating access to marginalised perspectives and cultivating an increased social consciousness (Barone and Eisner, 2012, Leavy, 2009, Leavy, 2017).

Experiential processes of making are central to art (psycho)therapy trainings; art (psycho)therapists have been using responsive, reflexive, artmaking to deepen attunement and broaden understanding since the early days of the profession (Fish, 2023, Nash, 2020). Yet, while there is growing interest in ABR approaches (Nash, 2021, Huet and Kapitan, 2021, Malchiodi, 2017, Mahony, 2009, Eastwood, 2022, Gregory, 2021, Kaimal et al., 2022, Learmonth and Huckvale, 2012), it is still the case that comparatively few art (psycho)therapists write about, or undertake research *through*, their own art practice. Perhaps this is because staying close to more subjective or artistic ways of knowing goes against the grain of prevailing institutional norms and values which demand that art-based disciplines, including the arts therapies, justify themselves through 'scientific' evidence (McNiff, 2017).

Expanding on previous thoughts (Michaels, 2015) my hypothesis on starting this project is that, by assembling ideas and practices differently, embracing an attitude of curiosity, discovery, wonder (Kapitan, 2018), and learning *through* experiences of 'making', this research might contribute to thinking about the psychosocial role of reflexive art practice in honing sensitivity to affective dimensions of human situations and experience; my aim being, to explore how reflexive art practice as a research methodology may affectively enhance and amplify our understanding of the research subject. A primary objective, however, is *not* to be 'objective', in that I do not carry out an impersonal, systematic enquiry or present a complete, 'factual' account of events. Placing my artistic practice at the centre of the research process, I offer an account of my subjective sensitivity to a research situation I construct (in part at least) – a partial, situated, view which argues, after feminist scholar, Donna Haraway, that 'only partial perspective promises objective vision' (Haraway, 1988, p.583).

METHOD

Study Design

My method is grounded in artistic practice as an experimental, experiential, reflexive process of moving, handling, modifying, and assembling ideas, objects, and things (Vear, 2022). Specifically, I expand on a training model of organisational observation described in the psychoanalytic literature (Hinshelwood and Skogstad, 2000, Hinshelwood, 2013, Hinshelwood, 2002). This emphasises the subjective experience of the participant-observer and their ordinary human capacity to intuitively tune in to the atmosphere of a situation. Transposing this frame into the arts, I use it as scaffolding on which to build an original research response (Kapitan, 2018), adapting and modifying the model by weaving in threads from art (psycho)therapy that involve artmaking as a responsive, reflexive, space for broadening and deepening an understanding of a situation through allowing it to find an 'echo' in one's own inner life (Nash, 2020, Fish, 2012, Rogers, 2002, Townsend, 2019). Assembling these approaches I embrace my research as an active, imaginative, process of exploration, encounter, engagement, participation, and discovery *through* which new possibilities and insights into self and/or practice may emerge (Finlay, 2008, Linesch, 1995, Boud et al., 2013, Candy et al., 2022). The implication is that the world may reveal itself through fluctuations and movements in the situation I set up, that I am 'part of – affecting and affected by – the research process, and that the situation can answer back and contribute to this interaction' (Knudsen and Stage, 2015, pp.5-6).

Underpinning my method is the principle that my understanding of the world is unique to me, and that processes of learning and meaning-making are personal, sensory, social, and contextual, requiring my active involvement. I am influenced by psychoanalysis and approaches that emphasise the 'tacit' dimension, and the potential for intuitive processes to bring to awareness what is sensed but cannot easily be explained (Polanyi, 1966, Milner, 2010 [1950]). My approach is also informed by feminist ideas that challenge dualist thinking and embrace complex relationalities, encouraging reflexivity and responsibility (Etherington, 2004b), as well as ideas that emphasise the materiality of the world and invite, tentative, marginalised, affective, and subjective voices to be heard alongside more dominant discourses (Barad, 2007, Fox and Alldred, 2016, Dolphijn and Van Der Tuin, 2012).

I describe the study design in three phases:

Phase One – Prepare the Ground

Exploring the implications of crossing disciplinary boundaries from art (psycho)therapy to the fine arts, I transfer ideas, approaches, and practices from one place to another, tentatively testing out how documentation of personal experience through various media and processes might become material for artistic practice and research. I also prepare the ground for a participant-observation, approaching several different organisations in health and social care sectors. Identifying a host organisation, I work with staff to negotiate a twelve-week observational placement and apply for the necessary ethical approvals and permissions.

Alongside this, I prepare a small studio space away from the organisational site, assembling a range of materials and tools and installing various documentary devices including a paper backdrop, camera set on five-second time-lapse, and audio and video equipment (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Further data collection strategies include a research journal to record written observations, notes, and reflections, an iPhone to record fleeting thoughts and the use of Fitbit tracking technology to trace personal metrics including speed, heartrate, and journeys travelled.

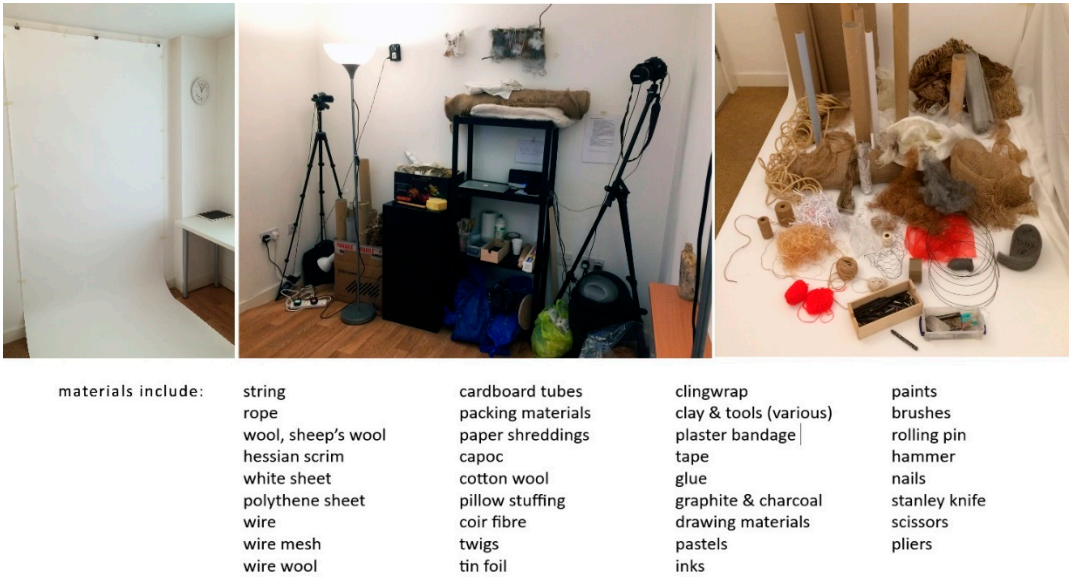


Figure 1. Studio set-up and materials, January 2017.

Phase Two – Experience the situation and myself in it

The host for the participant-observation is an NHS community-based service providing day rehabilitation for adults living with neurological conditions.¹ Following the psychoanalytic model I attend for one hour a week from 9.30-10.30am, over a period of twelve weeks, on a day allocated for people living with the residual effects of stroke. I sit in full view, in the same place each week, on the edge of a communal area where service-users are attended to by nursing and support staff and a range of health professionals. While I observe from a place that offers a wide field of view and hearing, I do not observe individual treatment processes which take place away from the communal area. I use my personality, as well as my sensory and emotional sensitivity as an apparatus for receiving and processing subjective information, adopting an attitude of ‘evenly suspended attention’ (Freud, 2001) and open interest in whatever is going on, without engaging directly with people, except to respond sensitively and respectfully to any approaches (Hinshelwood and Skogstad, 2000).

I follow each ‘observation’ in the organisation with one hour ‘making’ in the studio from 11.15am-12.15pm (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Responding to my experiences *in/of* the situation I engage with the space and materials, documenting my interactions through the various recording devices identified. From week two, I also record thoughts on my iPhone prior to each observation, and annotate photographs in my research journal. Such documentation combines the observation and noting of fleeting thoughts and sensory experience (Milner, 2011), and includes a written account of each observation, as well as personal thoughts, imaginings, associations, and speculations, material ‘things’ and aspects of subjective experience *embedded* and *embodied* in process.

¹ I undertook my art (psycho)therapy training placement here from 2003-2005.

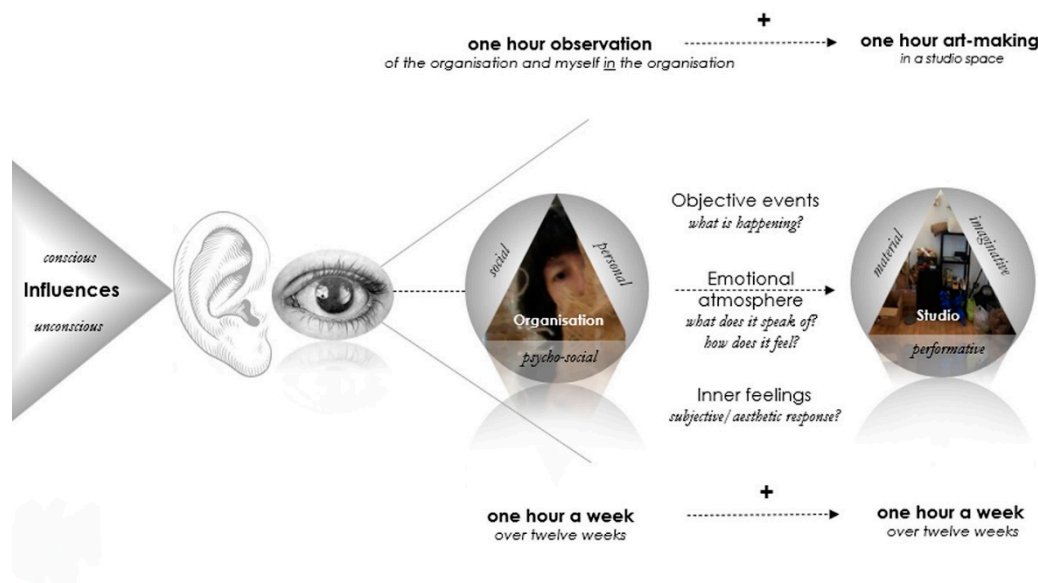


Figure 2. 'One hour in the organisation + one hour in the studio'.

Phase Three – Engage different audiences in meaning-making

After completion of the twelve-week project, I revisit and re-examine the body of material and documentation produced. Reworking and (re)presenting it in different situations across the arts and/in health and academia, I engage different audiences in the meaning-making process. Such opportunities include an art installation in the host organisation, focus groups with staff, conference presentations and interventions locally and internationally, and meetings with the art psychotherapy community.

Data gathering, production, and analysis

As practitioner-artist-researcher I am situated amidst, rather than separate from, the situation I seek to understand (Schön, 1983, Vear, 2022), concerned with listening, sensing, and imagining, with mulling over practice, and being impressed by a thing – 'feeling its touch and feeling in response' (Are, 2018), p. 2. Rather than searching for meanings, patterns or codes through more traditional means, analysis and the construction of meaning takes place as part of the gathering, production, and assemblage of data, as I *feel* my way *forward and into* the research situation. While each phase follows on from the other, it is through repeatedly returning to revisit the sites and material of my research, working *through* the artistic process, and engaging in conversation with the 'work' of art, and others, that thoughts, associations, feelings, and affects begin to gather around the making of particular artworks and projects, and significances begin to reach out or 'glow' (MacLure, 2013).

Ethics

The study was subject to ethical scrutiny and approval by Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Committee and all necessary permissions and consents were gained from the relevant NHS Trusts and others involved in the research.

RESULTS

Results take the form of artworks and artistic projects, written and recorded audio-visual documentation of process, and responses collected through exhibitions, art installations, focus groups, conferences, and other conversations. Collectively, these respond to the research situation as a whole. Detailed accounts and descriptions can be found in my thesis and practice submissions

(Michaels, 2022b) and at <https://www.debbiemichaels.co.uk/artworks.php>. For the purposes of this paper I identify key artworks and projects in each phase.

Phase One

'Hung Out to Dry' (Figure 3a)

Preparing the ground for the participant-observation 'Hung Out to Dry' responds to an initial meeting with a potential host. Without any prior concept in mind, the work emerges quickly through a process of using 'stuff' I have to hand and moving it from my art (psycho)therapy room to an adjacent space set aside for my research. It is only when I step back to look at the assemblage that the work takes on significance; offering a feel both for the ethical sensitivity surrounding 'observation', and what it means to transfer ideas, materials, and attention from art-as/in-therapy to art-as-research.

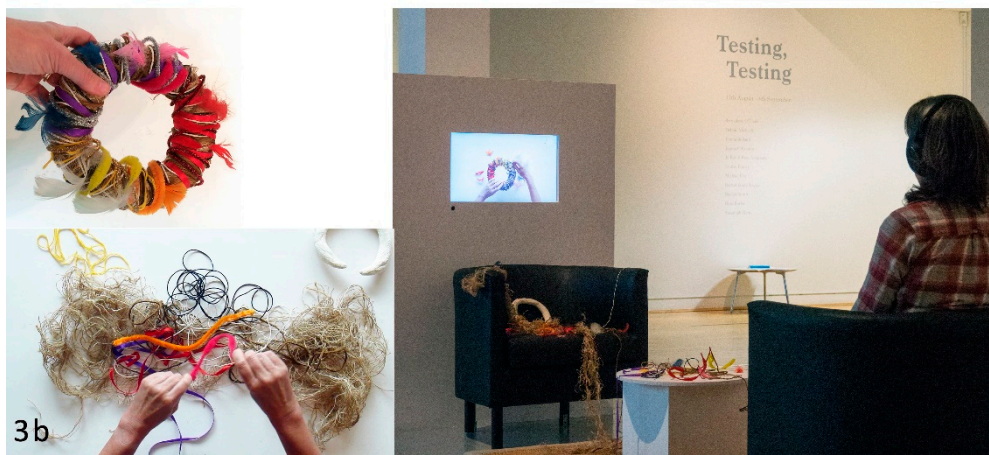
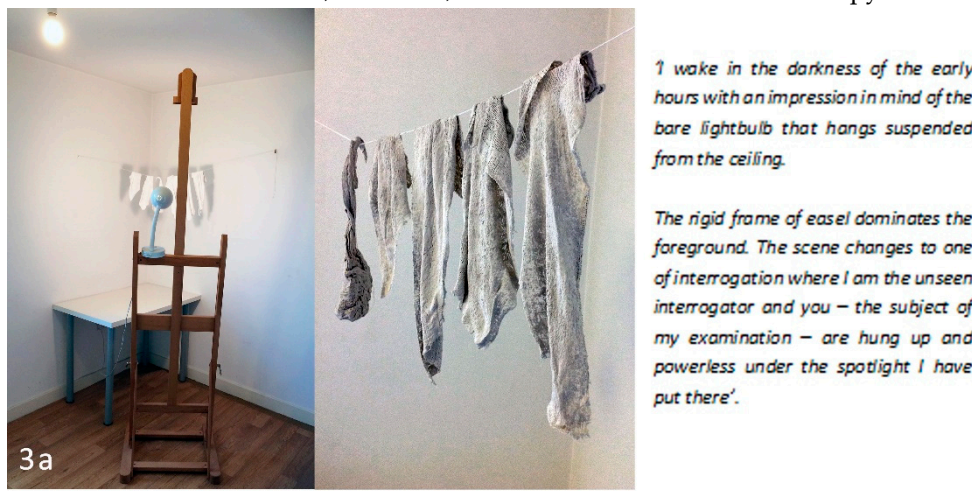


Figure 3. a - 'Hung Out to Dry'. Assemblage, 2015. Table, easel, lamp, string, nails, modroc, light bulb; b - 'Be | tween'. Multimedia installation, 2016 'Testing Testing' exhibition & symposium, Sheffield Institute of Arts. Video, audio, and other material, 340×150×150, Duration: 50 + 10 minutes (loop).

'Be | tween' (Figure 3b)

This project explores and documents the reflexive dialogues that emerge in the spaces between *unravelling*, *reconfiguring*, and *exhibiting* an 'art-therapy-object' (not made for public view) in a fine art research context. Staging an encounter with the object's unravelling, the installation and associated writings (Michaels, 2016b, Michaels, 2016c) reframe practice in a space somewhere between fact and fiction. Although I do not literally re-site the contents of my art (psycho)therapy room, the dilemmas raised by imagining, mulling over, and enacting the unravelling, re-siting, and staging of the work

Practice Documentation

The main body of work emerges through a multi-layered response to the twelve-week participant-observation. This results in a wealth of practice documentation which acts both as further artistic material, and analytical/ critical tools to think with. These include: written accounts of each observation, reflections, drawings, photographs, timelapse, video and audio recordings, digital tracings of journeys travelled, speed, and heartrate, and material remains known as the 'object-body-thing'.



The atmosphere in the rehabilitation setting generally appears settled; still, I experience significant emotional and sensory disturbance. For example, during observation-week-1, I am suddenly overcome with feelings of nausea and disorientation as sounds and voices coming from all directions merge into one nonsensical noise. At other times, I experience isolation, anxiety, sleepiness, and sadness, as well as powerful identifications, emotional disconnection, and impulses to help or leave.

In the studio I begin on impulse, working with the constraints of time and space and the available materials. During early sessions I recount my experiences *in/of* the rehabilitation setting to the various documentary bodies, as if silent witnesses. At other times their scrutiny feels intrusive, although the audio-recorder remains an empathic listener. The material object-body-thing emerges without prior conception but through the process of grappling with 'stuff' in an attempt to understand what I am making and how it responds to the research situation. For example, in studio-session-1, drawn gestures in graphite transition to wire and string drawn across and between nails hammered into the wall, where a network of connections develops, but with ends left dangling. While I do not consciously make a 'body', early interactions provoke unexpectedly powerful associations to 'brain', 'gut', and 'womb', and a body imprisoned – 'pinned to the wall [...] unable to move independently'. Building an independent structure alongside evokes thoughts of a conduit or transmitter but is followed by associations to body parts and limbless joints as the repetitive gesture

of wrapping it in plaster bandages to make it more robust turns warmth and softness to coldness and rigidity, and emotional deadness overcomes me.

After week-7, the atmosphere shifts dramatically as, presenting 'raw' material at a research seminar, I am pressed to 'disrupt' my process and break with familiar conventions and languages. While resisting at a conscious level, the experience nonetheless provokes a turning point. Feeling the intense scrutiny of the art-research institution, I cover the cameras and, like a mime artist, change into black clothes and an expressionless mask, entangling myself with the threads of the emerging object-body-thing, unsure to which institution I respond. As the work becomes more performative and entangled, what was once spoken in words becomes unintelligible noise and guttural expressions of rage at my attempts to make some sense of it all. Finally, I liberate the object-body-thing from the wall, strapping it to my body, before separating myself and attaching it to the tall, erect, structure so it stands independently – the black uniform and mask positioned neatly alongside.

Phase Three

'Interrupting the Flow' (Figure 5a)

For 'Interrupting the Flow' I move the object-body-thing out of the studio, (re)situating it in the rehabilitation setting, in the place from where I had observed, and invite responses from all present on the day, and in a subsequent focus group with staff.² However, moving the material residue evokes surprisingly powerful feelings as I realise that, rather than simply dismantling its parts dispassionately, moving the 'body' and (re)presenting it elsewhere requires very careful, sensitive, handling.



Figure 5. a - 'Interrupting the Flow'. Installation, 2018 Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre *Mixed Media*; b - 'The-voice-of-its-making'. Sound piece, 2018 Double Agency Intervention, Design4Health Conference, Sheffield Hallam University; *Audio, duration: 60 minutes.*

Responses from staff on the day and during a subsequent focus group include those shown in Figure 5a and range from 'it's just a pile of materials' and 'I don't understand it' to 'reaching out to

² The title references the interruption to the flow of usual processes and routines; whether through an interruption to blood flow as with stroke, my observational presence in the organisation, or an interruption that opens a space to see something differently.

something difficult to grasp' and how uncomfortable and frightening the mask felt – 'disconnected emotionally'.

'The-voice-of-its-making' (Figure 5b)

As part of a conference intervention, delegates are invited to engage with and respond individually to an installation of the object-body-thing with 'the-voice-of-its-making'; a soundtrack of its construction composed of twelve hours of studio audio-recordings compressed into one hour. For many delegates, the soundtrack distracts and annoys as the conversation is elusive and difficult to follow. For some, the random noises intrude and interfere with a visual, more tactile, appreciation of the material, creating anxiety and tension. For others they disturb, as it is unclear what the sounds are or from where they come, evoking someone in pain, needing help, or trying to escape a situation or body – thoughts that resonate with my own associations, on first listening, to a voice being muffled, gagged, bricked up behind a wall.

Emergent Strands

Viewed as a space for imaginative encounter and performative enactment, emergent threads indicate the speculative, entangled, and affective nature of the research process. Two core strands become apparent, encapsulated in Figure 6. The first is concerned with the reflexivity generated through the moving and handling of practices, materials, situations, ideas, things, emotions, and other 'bodies' – conceptualised in three 'Transpositions': *unmaking*, *making*, and *remaking*. The second strand, deeply entwined with the first in its underpinning of it, is concerned with the reflexive work of *undergoing* – conceptualised as an ongoing process of 'speculative weaving'. This presses me to notice and feel more acutely *into* the emotional, affective, and ethical dimensions of the research situation, foregrounding an ethics of responsibility, care, and attention *for/of* the body (in various forms) as material moves, and is moved, from one place to another across boundaries. New understanding emerges through the moving, (re)assembling, handling, (re)configuring, of diverse practices and material, the interweaving of dialogues, and the negotiation of tensions and resistances encountered at the borders between domains.

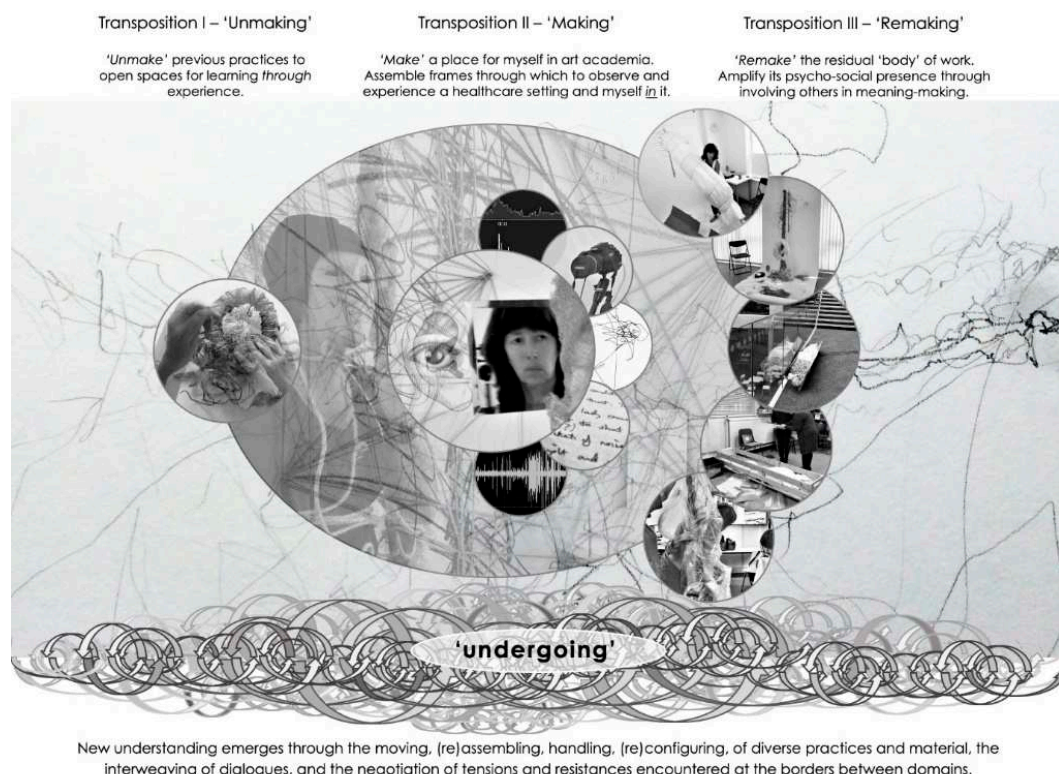


Figure 6. - Unmaking, Making, and Remaking: A Speculative Weaving in Three Transpositions.

Bound into this transpositional process and speculative weaving are three further gestural actions and practices – *move*, *make space(s)*, and *take time* (see Table 1 and Michaels, 2022b, pp.226-234). As characteristics or conditions that have facilitated developments in my understanding these actions or guiding principles are embedded and embodied in *undergoing*, implicit in which is a capacity to endure and sustain the slow, messy, material, affective, and emotional nature of the ‘work’.

Table 1. – Move, Make Space(s), Take Time: Guiding Principles.

Move	Make Space(s)	Take Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to a different context and/or position. • across professional, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries. • out of a comfort zone. • to defamiliarise previous practices, and challenge more established patterns. • to disrupt and interrupt the flow of usual processes. • to seek a different viewpoint – to touch the ‘stuff’ of the world in a different way. • to set up an artificial frame around an ongoing process. • to assemble and adapt frames through which to observe, experience, and document a situation and yourself <i>in</i> it. • from ‘doing’ to ‘undergoing’ (<i>embedded and embodied in ‘doing’</i>) • attention to the site of <i>making</i> as a multi-layered response to the research situation and a primary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for questioning established practices and approaching a subject from a different direction. • for preparing the conditions necessary to enter the creative process. • for the experiential – for trying things out and seeing what happens. • for wonder, surprise, and speculation. • to facilitate movement. • for the assemblage of frames <i>through</i> which to observe, experience, and document a situation and oneself <i>in</i> it. • <i>with</i> and <i>through</i> which to imaginatively explore real situations with all their conflicts and dilemmas. • for recording, documenting, and containing fragments of experience. • for the suspension of critical judgement (internal and external). • for patience, compassion, empathy, respect, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to put specific, regular, protected time aside. • to prepare the circumstances and conditions necessary for the creative process. • to prepare physically, psychologically, and emotionally. • to gather tools, materials and other resources. • to assemble frames through which to observe, experience, and document the situation and yourself <i>in</i> it. • to <i>feel</i> your way <i>forward and into</i> a situation. • to pay attention to process – to what is happening in the performing and undergoing of something. • to slow down and question established patterns. • to listen attentively as well as look. • to pay attention to the situation and your experience <i>in/of</i> it – how you <i>affect</i> and are <i>affected</i>.

<p>way of examining experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to change the register through which something is read. • to embrace practice-based research as an experiential process of making, modifying and designing objects, events and processes. • to hold an open, receptive, non-judgemental, frame of mind. • to sit <i>with</i> and <i>alongside</i> rather than over and above. • back and <i>forth</i>, between, and <i>through</i> different spaces and sites – external and internal, physical and psychological, real and imagined, fact and fiction. • to follow where the material leads. • toward knowing how to move forward. • to involve others in the meaning-making process. • away from representation toward performance, participation, and enactment. • toward the incorporation of multiple perspectives – ‘and’ rather than ‘or’ • to assemble different voices and identities <i>through</i> which insights might be read differently. 	<p>vulnerability, humility, and understanding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for feelings, embodied emotions, and imagination. • for listening closely and attentively as well as looking – for contemplation and reverie. • for encountering the unfamiliar. • for staying with troubling, messy, discomfoting experiences and complex entanglements. • for dwelling with uncertainty and not knowing. • <i>through</i> which to mediate and process sensory, emotional, impressions that are difficult to articulate. • for the seemingly insignificant to glow with significance. • for conversation. • for the inclusion of different voices and perspectives, and the interweaving and layering of different dialogues. • for exchange, reciprocity, and acknowledgment that others may experience and understand the same thing differently. • for revisiting, remaking, reassembling, and reconfiguring material as a process of ‘working <i>through</i>’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to dwell <i>with</i> and <i>in</i> a situation – with the uncertainty of not knowing, and with troubling, messy, unsettling, painful experiences and complex entanglements. • to allow for disturbing elements to be assimilated, worked <i>through</i> the body, and transformed into meaning. • to notice and pay attention to the incidental things that may seem unimportant or insignificant. • to document and record interactions, feelings, thoughts, imaginings, and speculations. • to engage in conversation and dialogue with self, others, and the material of a situation as it emerges. • to listen to the voices of others. • to mull over, filter and sort. • to revisit, repeat, re-read, review, re-turn, reorganise, and remake. • to reassemble and reconfigure things differently.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>towards</i> understanding rather than fixed meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• for the introduction of new concepts to make sense of experience.	
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Discussion

Unmake, Make, Remake

Transposition 1 - Unmake

‘Transposition’ implies an exchange of places, a move to a different context, or a change of key. Researching in the arts offers different frames and lenses through which to experience and observe organisational processes (my own included), shifting the emphasis from art *as/in* therapy to art as a primary mode of enquiry (McNiff, 2018). Nonetheless, the move is not straightforward. Without a fine art background or the familiar codes, conventions, and languages of art (psycho)therapy, I feel like an intruder in a foreign land – unsettled, vulnerable, exposed – and, like the art-therapy-object, unravelled. Nevertheless, engaging in conversation with other artists, researchers, and thinkers *through* literature and projects such as ‘Be | Tween’, I begin to get a *feel* for what it means to loosen the threads that hold me in place and open myself to new, unfamiliar, ideas and different ways of thinking.

Transposition 2 - Make

Although familiarity helped facilitate the ‘Twelve Weeks’ project, the observational role is unfamiliar, challenging convention for all concerned and provoking ongoing questions (mainly from staff) about who I am and what I am doing; whether I am ‘doing’ nothing or as one service-user remarks, do I just ‘sit there each week watching the telly’? Pressures from the art institution to ‘disrupt’ my process and break with familiar conventions and languages also unsettle, pressing me to notice and feel into the complexities of the broader research situation more acutely, as I realise how intimately my ‘making’ in response to the rehabilitation service is entangled with the institutional context in which I make.

The studio offers a ‘virtual’ space away from clinical and research settings (albeit connected to them), *in/through* which to safely explore, test and (re)enact relations, feelings, and thoughts; the various documentary devices observing, witnessing, and absorbing the affective, emotive, and chaotic tensions inherent in the making process (Nash, 2021). More than a bundle of projections the object-body-thing occupies an intermediate area of experiencing (Winnicott, 1991[1971]), ‘alive with gestures and answering forms’, that bear the residue of a living dialogue with me, as artist, and the research situation (Wright, 2009). Gradually, attention moves from something ‘made’ to the gestural, repetitive, performative nature of some ‘thing’ in the making – an intertwining of ‘undergoings’ and ‘goings on’ through which I access the thinking (Ingold, 2010).

Transposition 3 - Remake

Sharing my sensitivity across disciplinary and professional boundaries I test prior conceptions, opening a space for dialogue through the incorporation of multiple perspectives (Leavy, 2009) and amplifying the psychosocial presence of the ‘body’. Whether through interest, engagement, indifference, dismissal or devaluation, the audience is implicated in the meaning-making process *through* receiving, handling, and response. This deepens my understanding of the situation, drawing attention to the complex nature of different sites (what they might provoke, enable, activate, or silence), and an ethics of hospitality, responsibility, attention, and care *off/for* the body. It also offers an insight into how the art is working; revisiting and reworking material reframes experience, giving new texture and meaning to what has gone before as material ‘made’ in the past is ‘remade’ through

touching the stuff of new situations in the present, and affective understanding is *unmade* and *remade* with each 're' iteration and performance of it.

Similarly, as I revisit and rework the tracings of speed and heartrate what becomes significant is that, during the observation hour, my heartrate slows and no speed is registered, a realisation that 'glows' even more strongly in the face of organisational pressures for speed and productivity and to be seen to be 'doing'.

Learning through Experience

Grounded in a reflexive process of learning *through* experiences of making, the work of art-as-research is integral to the design of this study, the 'method' developing over time. Reflexivity is understood as part of a collective ethos; an ongoing, iterative, affective conversation with the complexities of a situation, including different subjectivities, around which various meanings float (Luttrell, 2019, Probst, 2015). A slow, messy, business this does not happen in a linear, orderly fashion, but through the complex interplay of different elements. Although each transposition foregrounds a primary gesture, each is intricately woven together in a reflexive conversation that repeatedly loops back and over as I *feel* my way into the situation, slowly moving *towards* 'knowing how to move forward' (Candy, 2019). More than adding 'this + that', the fact that I do 'this' as part of 'this + that' changes the nature of both as they become part of a new affective assemblage.

Schön stresses the tacit knowledge that is difficult to articulate, but 'implicit in our patterns of action and in our *feel* for the stuff with which we are dealing' (Schön, 1983, p.49). This research tests my capacity to dwell *with* and *in* a complex situation and observe its *affects*. Far from a systematic, mechanical, process, the performative, embodied, embedded, nature of the research *demands* that I engage in an ongoing reflexive and affective dialogue with the matter at hand; thinking *through* affect and the intensity of sensory experience evoked as I move, handle, and manipulate things, feel, mull over, imagine, filter, and sort (Massumi, 2015, Barrett, 2012). Feelings, thoughts, and insights emerge at different times, from all directions, the process fraught with tensions, ambivalences, and embarrassments at the borders between domains as I encounter, observe, undergo, and respond to various events and occurrences. Nonetheless, using artistic practice as a research method I come to a deeper understanding, not only of the events and situations I experience, but also the process *through* which this understanding develops. While documentation and 'things' *made* along the way act as residual evidence that something has taken place, it is through *moving*, *making space(s)*, and *taking time*, paying attention to how I administer and document the research process, and working *through* the ongoing embodied, transferential, process of *unmaking*, *making*, and *remaking*, that new concepts emerge and my understanding is also sophisticatedly moved.

Caveats and Limitations

Like all research, a Ph.D. sets up an artificial frame around an ongoing, evolving process. While the methods outlined here are repeatable, when undertaken by different people under different circumstances such research would be subject to a wide range of variables, producing different, albeit potentially useful, insights. I cannot return to where I was at the time things happened; insights and understandings come with time and space as I work through the research process. Therefore, I can only offer a partial, situated, view of my sensitivity to the research situation with all its inconsistencies and flaws (Haraway, 1988); I rely on working *with* and *through* extensive documentation to *feel into* the material as I produce it although, by its nature, all documentation is selective, incomplete, and abbreviated and, inevitably, excludes.

Mapping clinical concepts and practices onto social or artistic research, or vice versa, is controversial (Holmes, 2014); yet, while psychoanalysis, art (psycho)therapy, and the fine arts do not always lie comfortably together, I suggest that such models are not mutually exclusive and, when assembled differently, may produce new methods and useful ways to approach and consider a situation. By choosing particular sites *in/through* which to set up, develop, and test out my method, I emphasise the subjective, emotional, and affective dimensions of emergent material which involves

the complex negotiation of fact and fiction, memory, reconstruction of events, authenticity, and ethics. Accompanying this is the constant, shadowy, threat of self-absorption (McNiff and Nash, 2017) although, as the artist Grayson Perry remarks, 'I cannot step outside myself to look around the edges of my own humanity – see the world *not* through the lens of my own experience and emotions' (Perry, 26 December 2019). Engaging in reflexivity is a perilous endeavour, full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails (Finlay, 2002). Nonetheless, alongside well-trodden criticisms of navel-gazing and mirroring fixed positions, lie the considerable challenges of managing the self-doubt and anxiety provoked through questioning, and being questioned by, the dominant voices in myself and the academic (amongst other) institutions. The line between openness and intolerable rawness is difficult to navigate and my vulnerabilities, discomforts, ambivalences, embarrassments, and frustrations are exposed for all to see. This is not exposure for its own sake; rather, it is 'essential to the argument' (Behar, 1996, p.31). Indeed, I argue, after Eastwood, that making, sharing, and voicing through the '*work*' of art in an act of radical vulnerability can support the depth of reflexivity necessary to unsettle established patterns, value systems, and power structures (Eastwood, 2022).

Implications for Practice/Policy/Future Research

As a practice-based research project, grounded in learning *through* experiences of making, I claim a position in the broad area of reflective practice(s), including response art. Although I gain insights about the organisation, the specific contribution of my research lies in the multiplicity of ideas, strategies, processes, and potential positions *through* which I explore, examine, and respond to my experiences *in/of* the research situation as I undergo it; the making process acting as a keen observational tool (Fish, 2023). With creative experience at its heart, it contributes to a growing body of research emphasising the embodied nature of knowing and the value of affective methodologies that include (rather than exclude) subjective experience, imagination, and emotion.

This study also contributes to a broader conversation concerning the application of ABR approaches for art (psycho)therapy. Questioning more traditional approaches, and including the practitioner's voice, I move attention away from what the art 'means' or represents to how it 'works' – how it might 'move' us toward different positions or understandings (Michaels, 2022a). This broadens the scope from the visual, to the embodied, sensory, performative '*work*' of art as both site and material *with* and *through* which to affectively *feel* one's way into human experiences and situations – processes that are at the root of the art (psycho)therapy profession. Moving away from the single, linear, narrative trajectory of a case study, I redirect attention towards an intersubjective approach, assembling and interweaving analytic, aesthetic, social, sensual, and material considerations with creative and imaginative writing, and artmaking around artworks' (Gilroy, 2006), further extending processes of reflexivity and analysis (McCaffrey and Edwards, 2015, Eastwood, 2022, Skukauskaitė et al., 2022).

ABR works to disrupt and unsettle knowing (Talwar, 2018), resisting exclusivity, absolutes, and certainties, and challenging more dominant ideologies (Sullivan, 2010, Nelson, 2013, Gray and Malins, 2004, Barrett and Bolt, 2007, Leavy, 2017). Working across boundaries, this research foregrounds the learning opportunities afforded by assembling and exchanging ideas and practices *through* artistic practice, placing value on exploring the tensions, ambivalences, embarrassments, and resistances encountered as differences collide, as well as the affective, cultural sensitivity of documentary fragments captured in various voices and media. Drawing attention to how material and understanding is formed *through* the research process, this study amplifies the significance of 'transference' as a method of enquiry, as well as an ethics of hospitality, responsibility, attention, and care. Sitting *with* and *alongside* others in conversation, rather than *over* or *above*, this speaks to a broader agenda of equality, diversity, and inclusivity *through* the way we gather, produce, move, handle and analyse data, and how we collaborate with, and represent, our research subjects.

Conclusion

Kapitan suggests that 'art therapy research primarily involves the discipline of learning how to observe, how to place our observations in context so that we can see more accurately, and how to

return again and again to the evidence we see in order to validate our understandings.’ (Kapitan, 2010, p.2). As a site for affective reflexivity through which one may be pressed to notice and feel more acutely, and drawing particular attention to an ethics of responsibility, attention, and care for/of the body, the research value lies in the capacity of this method to embrace complex relationalities, and engage our imaginative, emotional, and ethical sensibilities in ways that may not emerge through more traditional approaches to reflective/reflexive practice(s). It is therefore relevant, not only for practitioners and researchers working across the humanities as well as arts and/in healthcare but also for those affected by, and in receipt of, the care that is delivered.

Notes on contributors: Dr Debbie Michaels is an HCPC registered art (psycho)therapist and associate lecturer on the Sheffield-based training course, with whom she has been involved since 2006. After a first career as an interior designer in the 1980’s, and following a period of illness, she subsequently began an intense period of personal change and professional retraining, undertaking a master’s degree in the psychoanalysis of groups and organisations in the late 1990’s. After reconnecting with her interest in art, this led her to pursue a second career in art (psycho)therapy, as practitioner and, later, as educator. She has contributed to the literature in psychoanalysis, art (psycho)therapy, and practice-based research in the arts, and has recently completed an art-based doctorate at Sheffield Hallam University. Her research interests lie with reflexive art practice as a research methodology and how this may enhance and amplify sensitivity to the affective dimensions of human situations and experience. Her clinical work is mainly based in private/independent practice and she supports and supervises art therapists working across a broad range of client groups and organisational settings.

Funding: The doctorate was funded by the author, however certain projects received funding from Sheffield Hallam University through a researcher-led activities fund.

Data availability statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the author, Debbie Michaels, upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgements: The author extends her sincere appreciation and thanks to all those who (knowingly or otherwise) have contributed to, and supported this research, without whom it would not have been possible.

Disclosure Statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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