Doing and Thinking on the Edge with Intermodal Expressive Arts

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Abstract

Three collaborators share their experiences and reflections on The European Graduate School’s (EGS) first Alumni Event. Graduates were invited to present the cutting-edge research in expressive arts and critical theory that they developed since their M.A. and Ph.D. programs. Details are provided of the art-making processes they used to recall the memory of the Alumni Event as well as how they harvested its significance months later. The collaborators’ topic was “decentering the self,” specifically how to decenter the self in community through expressive arts practices, such as co-journaling, deep listening, and photography. During the Alumni event these practices were intended to orient each to another’s inner landscapes. After the event and during the longer process of harvesting, these collaborators used the same methods to explore how to decenter and hybridize the self without losing their individual core. Bracha Ettinger’s notion of matrixial borderspaces was used theoretically and experientially throughout to recall the self’s interwoven and relational origins in the womb to bring the collaboration to its tentative fruition.

Bios

Katrina Plato, ATR, Ed.D, Ph.D., has been practicing as an art therapist, expressive arts therapist, and educator for 30 years. She has worked primarily with severely troubled youth and the homeless. Katrina has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in expressive arts therapy after earning a doctorate in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Expressive Arts Therapy from Appalachian State University, NC and a Ph.D. in Expressive Arts from the European Graduate School in Switzerland. While living in Phoenix, Arizona Katrina offers online group and individual therapy, as well as group therapy sessions for Charlie Health, Inc., a fast growing online Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) serving youth and young adults in 27 states within the United States. Katrina is the Regional Committee Co-Chair for the International Expressive Arts Therapy Association (IEATA). katrina@sensuousearth.art | https://sensuousearth.art/

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six companies for 17 years, bringing her expressive arts experience to levels of leaders internationally. With her business experiences, she created Orienting to a New Culture (ONC) as her doctoral research model. She is adapting intermodal expressive arts into new cultural projects including designing, facilitating, and training the internal coaches and leaders, cascading the new culture from top down.

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Valerie Oved Giovanini, Ph.D., is an independent scholar based in Los Angeles, California, and an affiliate faculty member at the Department of Philosophy, California State University, Northridge whose work mainly deals with critical questions in phenomenology, aesthetics, and feminist philosophy. Her doctoral research under the guidance of Dr. Judith Butler at The European Graduate School traced the close relationship between persecution and ethics in the works of Sigmund Freud and Emmanuel Levinas to develop an ethics of alterity. Her most recent work on alterity is published in Hypatia: A Journal in Feminist Philosophy and she was a contributing editor on the special issue of Free Associations titled “Aesthetic Subjects.” She most recently published on the gender gap in the discipline of philosophy, and is currently working in collaboration with phenomenologists on childcare and the ideologies of motherhood. Her more general interests include the intersection of new media with philosophy, phenomenology, and aesthetics.

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This article includes our (Valerie Giovanini, Sinem Lanaci, Katrina Plato) experiences of The European Graduate School’s (EGS) Arts, Health and Society Division’s (AHS) first Alumni Forum in a Hybrid Event which included six Expressive Art professionals (EXA) and one alumna from the Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought program (PACT) in 2022. We three share our collaboration to harvest the experience in the year afterwards—reflecting together on what was gained from that high-complexity hybrid experience. We also reflect on the very process of co-writing this article as professionals who come from different disciplines, professional expertise, cultures, time zones, and language-barriers. Metaphors of **interweaving matrixial threads** continually helped us to hybridize our experiences without losing our individual constitutions.

We attempted to resonate with what Bracha L. Ettinger would call matrixial borderspaces (2006) that is our mutual embeddedness in transgressive subjective frontiers. Several months after leading a sub-panel together for the EGS Alumni event, we implemented bi-monthly Zoom meetings. Art-based methods, such as daily practice, aesthetic response, phenomenology, and discussions about passages from Ettinger’s work helped us to remember, reflect, and harvest the original event at EGS with the goal of returning to the root of our collaboration. Katrina encouraged asynchronous writing and art-making as a daily practice to address our individual inquiry several times a week. Sinem encouraged that we create aesthetic responses to each other’s research, which will be illustrated below. Our bi-monthly Zoom meetings included five-minute reflective writing exercises and art-making practices for nearly two months. In the process of creating and documenting our collaborative practices, many threads were spun and some were frayed as themes between us unraveled, and some work was left unfinished for the possibility of future partnerships.
Preparation for the Alumni Event

The European Graduate School (EGS) in Saas-Fee, Switzerland was founded in 1994 by Paolo Knill to offer training programs in Expressive Arts, and operated under his leadership until his passing in 2020. In 1998 and in the same location, the Philosophy, Arts, and Critical Thinking program was developed by Wolfgang Schirmacher in partnership with leading intellectuals such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, which would later host leading intellectuals such as Judith Butler, Bracha L. Ettinger, and Slavoj Žižek. The graduate school is on the edge metaphorically for its cutting-edge instructors, intensive learning format of summer-long workshops, and the breakthrough ideas that emerged there from collaborations between instructors and students. The school is also literally on the edge of Saas-fee with 20-minute treks up and down the Swiss Alps to reach the classrooms. EGS prepared its first Alumni event in 2022.

For the school’s first Alumni event, seven women gathered (Figure 1) from all around the world who work in different professions, such as psychotherapy, business entrepreneurs, artists, life-coaches, and professors in academia. The shared ground that held all seven participants together was EGS. Our culture, language, education, professional fields, and research-interests were very different from one another. Understanding the language, the terminology, and finding how we would like to shape the Alumni event was a very enriching and challenging journey.

Figure 1: Members of the 2022 EGS Alumni Panel. Screenshot by Katrina Plato.
Following brief introductions, the group of seven alumni was divided into three small groups according to mutual themes. The three of us, Katrina, Sinem, and Valerie, were placed together based on our common interest in research on decentering the self. In Expressive Arts practices (EXA), decentering refers to the facilitation of an art activity that moves the participant away from logical thinking around an issue of importance toward the unpredictable (Knill, 2005). After we witnessed how each of our art processes and ethical approaches aimed to decenter the self in therapy, business, and philosophical inquiry, we agreed to name our workshop, “Being and Doing Human on the Edge: Poiesis as an End in Itself.”

Our presentation offered graduate students an invitation to decenter themselves through EXA practices that culminated in a theoretical reflection on how challenging the process of decentering can be. With the common ground of EGS to contain our different work, interests and goals, everyone was courageous enough to trust the process of decentering. Art met theory when the process was understood as a transgression into the matrixial sphere where “a borderspace of simultaneous co-emergence and co-fading of the I and the unrecognized non-I” occurred (Ettinger, 2006, p. 139). Each came ready for our emerging selves, our I’s, to be affected by another. How could we cross the individual yet porous borderspaces of ourselves through art-making? What does it look like to become informed by an unknown other who is always in the process of becoming? We came prepared to facilitate a workshop of co-journaling with a partner that was led by Katrina, and photographing the here and now led by Sinem. Each of us individually waited for the presentation to begin, in our unique geographical locations and in our own time zones, to see together the effects of such practices.

**European Graduate School First Alumni Event (Hybrid)**

**Our Group Presentation**

During the Alumni Day we were made acutely aware of the totally new and multilayered way we were to experience this event. It was the first time we presented in hybrid formats. Some of the Alumni and graduate students were online and projected onto a screen, while most of the students and Alumni were at EGS in Saas-Fee. Katrina started by presenting a summary of an intermodal workshop given at the 2022 International Expressive Arts Therapy Association (IEATA) conference titled: Partner Journaling: Accessing the Language of the HeART. The method developed from a five year long intuitive writing and drawing discourse with Katrina’s expressive arts colleague, Christine Sita Dave. Sinem presented her Ph.D. dissertation topic on Orienting to a New Online Culture in Business (ONC): The Integration of Intermodal Expressive Arts into the Business Onboarding Process (2021). Her dissertation on the ONC model was implemented in fourteen ONC programs of one thousand three hundred hours to one hundred and one international participants during the COVID-19 period. Valerie presented research completed at EGS on the close relationship between psychological forms of persecution and morality, which led into her tips and insights about how to proceed in the challenging but praiseworthy Ph.D. process.

With the overall theme as a decentering of the self, we found ways to be present with one another in different methods of art-making. From Katrina’s practice of journaling with and about a partner, to Sinem’s orienting the experience to our here and now with images, Valerie took it to the ways of being in this world, the way we encounter and ethically relate to others. These encounters are not easy, necessitate breaking the boundaries of self, and going into an unknowable space to find what’s next. Though Valerie
did not offer the participants an art-making activity, her tears and vulnerability were offered in a watershed moment when she admitted that she felt like an outsider to the group and EXA school, but kept with the process of co-creation.

The main culminating message of our panel, and the core of Valerie’s research on the relational-self, is how the process of decentering oneself can be difficult in life, as well as in the academic process of research. The psychological process of decentering for Jean Piaget (1977) highlights the developmental move from an individual constitution of self toward a social one. According to Ettinger’s (2006) understanding of ethical subjectivity, decentering refers to an irreducible difference that resides within oneself for the possibility of its re-formation, which “transforms from within what it means to be a subject, for it is the kernel of ethical being, the ultimate measure of the ethical relationship” (p. 189). There is an inherent openness and vulnerability in a self that becomes decentered by another. It can hurt to let go of the self and encounter another or others in an unknown space that can in-form and in-spire a change in our person. At these difficult moments, Ettinger’s (2006) work, that pulls from Levinas’ ethics of the face-to-face encounter, framed the overall process of our sub-panel: “matrixial accessibility to the other implies becoming vulnerable,” (p. 144) or exposed to the point where the others can become traumatizing to an idea of ‘me’ that I possess. Me is in quotation marks because for ethical subjectivity there is no stable me to decenter. The matrixial echoes our place of origin, in Greek it means the womb, and highlights our relational and processorial aspects of self. The vulnerability and trauma in these relations, however, is in their ability to break our individual selves, to share with the jointness of others through what is called the "borderlinking" (Ettinger, 2006, p. 144). We most certainly shared our borderlinks among the larger group of seven EGS alumni panelists, and then especially among us three for our sub-panel. Our borderlinks led to the unique art we made together over several months, a process that can be fruitful to understand when decentering the self through art-based practices.

After the event we continued to collaborate and hit a generative question: How can art allow us to hy-bridize ourselves without losing our individual core? How are matrixial borderlinks negotiated? It was during the final and longer harvesting period that these negotiations continued in a more explicit form.

Harvesting

Re-membering the Decentering Experience of the Alumni Event

When we met virtually a year later to remember and thus write about the presentation, it dawned on us how little could be recalled. We decided on a reflective practice to properly harvest our alumni presentation (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2010). We agreed to remember each of the experiential sections we led the graduate students through by reliving them. With all three of us present virtually, we lit a candle and Katrina guided us through Partner Journaling following the steps below:

1. Active listening: in pairs, one person at a time shares a question they are living with at this moment.
2. Write: each person writes for their partner. Ideally, write for 15 minutes.
3. Sharing: each person shares their writing for their partner.
4. Having shared your reflections, create a piece of art or poem for one another if inspired to do so.
During the reflective writing practice listed above, Katrina invited us to write a “question” about a topic or challenge that we faced in the current day and moment. Each of us took another’s question and began the process of deep listening to the other’s inner landscape. Upon hearing the question, each partner wrote an answer they intuited for the other person. After several minutes of this intuitive writing, we shared what we wrote for our partner. The goal was to attune ourselves to each other’s current concerns.

We only had time to complete Katrina’s portion of our presentation, not all three as we planned. Time, or chronos, was a significant challenge but we adapted. This article became a remembering and integration process starting with a reflection on how we used the process of co-journaling with a partner. While we wrote this article, Sinem encouraged us to give aesthetic responses to one another from our question, and Valerie offered her philosophical contribution through our writing process together by introducing snippets from Ettinger’s work.

At this stage, the process felt more like what Ettinger’s matrixial approach calls carriance, the ability to carry through to the inner worlds of each participant with care and compassion. Our interests co-emerged and co-faded in the process of reflective writing. Each person guided another to engage the forgotten regions of our shared memory and to orient us in the present moment. Over the long harvesting stage, gradual changes occurred to each of our persons as a metramorphosis (Ettinger, 2006, p. 140). We each shifted in our ability to hear and respond, and as such to act, “as a carrier of such [an] originary difference and of its transforming potentiality, [that it] induces instances of co-emergence and co-fading ... In the matrixial borderspace, a specific aesthetic field with ethical implications comes to light, with metramorphosis as the poietic-artist process” (Ettinger, 2006, p. 140). We excavated into these inner landscapes with the use of sensory images or movements, tools that mostly bypass linguistic expression. These aesthetic fields ethically demanded that we each take care to preserve a space safe for growth and the co-emergence of a new self with each other. Our memory was forgotten at first blush, but with the use of our brushes together, and in rituals, dialogues, art-making processes and transcriptions in writing, the memory of some of our experiences emerged.

Carriance through a negotiation of our borderlinks did not always occur. The overall experience of collaboration was ecstatic when resonances flowed and guidance was received in our co-emergence, but also frustrating when we simply could not attune to the other’s needs. At times our cultural and personal worries were revealed like stubborn walls that acted to preserve our individuality during our collaborative work. For example, designated roles and keeping time felt most comfortable for some, while for others these clear delineations were not a priority in the collaboration. At other times, however, we could deeply hear into the other’s questions, guidance, and concerns for the fruition of our carriance. We owe this document to the ebb and flow of both the links that were created during the ecstatic flows, and our embrace of pain when we failed. We inquire further into the experience of co-fading and co-emergence through sharing our individual processes in the next section.

Valerie’s Process

Below is my (Valerie’s) experience of the writing process in collaboration with Sinem and Katrina. I take the view of a novice to EXA and interweave philosophical insights about radical trust and the event for the process of decentering in collaborative work.
As a member of the PACT program (Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought) at EGS, reflective writing is a new process for me. Usually I have academic concerns, such as my contribution to philosophical literature, the organization and structure of an argument, and whether my research speaks to other specialists. So I always ask: Am I begging the question in my arguments, or are my examples apt? Though I write, I often feel like a child holding a big unwieldy sword that are my words. The heavy metal blade loses and regains weight on its own, and so my feet follow where it takes me as I pretend to have some mastery. But the weight is more than I can handle and in writing I often feel clumsy, uneasy, and without total possession of the flow in which I participate. Cuts are made. I was excited then to dive into an intuitive form of writing.

After listening to Sinem’s and Katrina’s dialogue about techniques for intuitive writing, such as opening with a ritual and listening for subtle sounds in the environment, I needed to start with the basics. How do I come to hear or listen to my expression in this art-encounter event? How do I connect my experiences and those of my partners? Katrina’s and Sinem’s responses were resounding:

Practice: Listen, observe, hold
Sound: Transition into the space of writing as response. Hold the flow. Listen.

For 5 minutes a day, I’d start by lighting a candle and giving thanks for any inspiration that might come in the flow of my pen. I sat, listened, and wrote whatever I heard to begin the practice. The 5 minutes always passed too fast and closed with a blow onto my candle.

Ten entries later in my journal, I have pictures of a mouth with lines emerging, a horizon drawn with birds and words that say mewemewemeweme inspired by a work in Barbara Bickel’s and R. Michael Fisher’s (2023) book *Art-Care Practices for Restoring the Communal: Education, Co-Inquiry, and Healing*, which I was reading at the time. My journal also included a prompt from their book on how to free-write our way into radical trust, which coincided with the challenges in our collaboration.

I heard it. The prompt asked:

What experiences have reminded you lately about your level of radical trust? ... Art-care in wit(h)ness re-establishes an instinctive radical trust in our dreaming and aesthetic intelligence. This restoration process requires us to unlearn and relearn “art”—as an inherent creation-making-ability and response-ability to co-make social practices. The journey of recovery can be both joyful and painful, spontaneous and disciplined. (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. 62)

More than, or along with the aesthetic response, aesthetic *intelligence* implies here a desire to learn with and embrace what arises in the process. I needed this reminder. In our collaboration, we initiated an intra-subjective process within ourselves to unlearn and relearn how to write, to act as a wordsmith, with different means and ends in mind. My standards for what can be good writing came to be altered. Additionally, I am still myself learning a new vocabulary in the discourses of Expressive Art therapies to ground what I find to be theoretically true about challenges brought to our relational-selves in this communal work.
I found a new pleasure in this kind of writing that accompanied my aesthetic responses and budding intelligence. It also illustrated the inter-personal process that I engaged in with all the members from the EGS Alumni panel and especially with my partners-in-arms-and-writing-hands from our small group. I radically trusted Sinem and Katrina. They offered a container for these new experiences. We had to work through disabling constraints like cultural differences and earth-shattering events like the quake in Turkey for Sinem, Katrina’s new career trajectory, and personally shattering ones for me as a first-time mom that commenced at the start of COVID lockdowns. In my mind, these demanded Ettinger’s (2006) idea of wit(h)nessing—to apprehend in a flash another’s partiality and vulnerabilities while also offering a space of curative healing through art-making (p. 143). The goal was never to cure for resolution, but to make visible and accept all parts of ourselves.

The ethical concern and difficulty in balancing all our needs emerged soon for me. Different priorities along with fatigue, and mis-communication led to several break-downs and break-ups in our process. Like Katrina’s use and reflection on the liminal spaces, a view of our mutual fragmentation with the desire to share and join with others indicated for me, “that something happened and the event has passed, and also that someones were there and these someones have already changed” (Ettinger, 2006, p. 117). Ettinger’s use of the plural selves for each of our individual persons speaks to the dynamic self that is in process. With an acute awareness of our mutuality and fragmentation, Sinem’s prompt to photograph our here and now lead to my aesthetic response: one photograph that I constructed out of several (Figure 2).

Figure 2. “Collage of Fragments with Interwoven Threads,” Valerie’s Aesthetic Response to the Writing Process. Photographed by Valerie Oved Giovanin.
A collage of disparate corners dis-assembled of one rug represents how this process feels in my body, this process of recollecting, remembering, and harvesting the EGS event nearly one year later. The rug represents the mutual work and care in our *communitas*, the threads trace each of our individual concerns that weave into the concern for our mutual projects. The need to attune together makes up a full rug, but individual threads are what make it. The collage shows how we are brought together in asymmetrical relations, but the ripped edges visualize our separate confusions, discontinued threads, the places we left-out and where we ran-out of time or concern.

Still, we forged forward through the frame of our Zoom meetings and with the embodiment of an evolving document. Merging, then letting go. Words that appeared for me were rhizome and constellations. Although our growth is rhizomatic in the Deleuzian sense (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), a non-linear movement that does not have a center and without a clear path forward, it is constantly on the edge of doing, being, and creating together. Our collaboration is a type of node, pregnant with meaning and possibilities in between the shoots of sprouts and roots. And from where it comes, and whether our node will germinate or take root, neither horizon, nor mouth can know. Alain Badiou’s (2007) work on Deleuze emphasizes the non-empirical and non-linear movement of the event, where:

> to break with empiricism, the event must be thought as the advent of what is subtracted from all experience: the ontologically un-founded and the transcendentally discontinuous. To break with dogmatism, the event must be released from every tie to the One. It must be subtracted from Life in order to be released to the stars. (p. 42)

Into the stars of other people we go and went together, to see what constellations can be made from this rhizomatic interchange shrouded in darkness and mystery. The stars shine bright. Their patterns arise after the fact of their appearance and articulation (Figure 3). Similarly, the event was not the EGS panel as originally conceived, but in the work we forged after. The event’s lines and traces that sprayed out between the appearance of our words, art, and dialogue continue to work and re-shape each of us still.
To return to the process of our intuitive writing, I must admit that lists of to-dos often popped into my mind during the process, but I would return to my partner’s faces on ZOOM and ambient sounds to ground me. Honks in the street, the hum of a lightbulb, dogs barking in the distance and the images of their artwork all returned me to the flow. I felt less unwieldy in this process and in my academic writing after I routinely practiced listening and attuning in this way. Thank you, Sinem and Katrina.

Sinem’s Process

Paolo Knill’s concept of “intermodal decentering” (IDEC) does not place the problem at the center but rather “decenters” from it, putting it aside and giving free rein in the imagination (Levine & Levine, 2017, p. 59). In other words, Paolo Knill’s concept of decentering allows us to put our difficulties on hold first, invites art into the center, and with this invitation the coach and client become explorers of the current moment. Decentering also invites us to remember a challenging experience like the one we were curious to harvest from the EGS Arts and Health Division First Alumni Event. Paolo Knill’s concept of decentering, “is a good way to overcome or bypass these reductive trajectories and open the human’s mind to the multitude of vivid, detailed, complex, sensible differentiations in sense experiences” (Kriz & Atkins, 2012, p. 78). I (Sinem) started a journey to remember and harvest the Alumni Event through meetings with Valerie and Katrina in the very process of writing this article. As Levine shared in the book, New Development in Expressive Arts Therapy,

[W]e developed a renewed artistic perspective based on the competencies that are required by the change agent, competencies that connect to low-skill high-sensitivity and also theoretically to our understanding of “active imagination,” as it is called in Jungian literature. The phase of alternative world experience, in which we access the imagination through play and art, has come into the center of our work. (Levine & Levine, 2017, p. 59)

I find myself more attuned with the use of images, and for this reason painting is the main art-form that I prefer to use in my art-based research. I also like to play within intermodal arts in different verbal and non-verbal forms such as dancing, singing, and photography. Decentering methods are used in my everyday practices. Thanks to Katrina, after meeting with the three of us to remember our sub-panel, I also integrated intuitive writing as a tool in my daily practices.

In our first session in the intuitive writing experience with Katrina, my question was, “How to build a healthy relational space and care for a heartfelt relation?” Although we each could have different backgrounds and identities, there can be a common language and understanding that comes from the heart. While I was listening to Valerie’s intuitive writing for my question in our trio session, I felt like diving deeply into my art-based research on the importance of listening, taking care, respecting, and accepting the cultural, educational, and professional differences of the self with the other’s realities and conditions in life. But how can we really take care to know, feel and understand our different cultural, educational, professional differences? What I heard from Valerie’s response to my question in the intuitive writing process inspired me to form a new question. My new question from Valerie’s attuned response during this harvest from the Alumni experience became, “How to be more skillful in our meetings at every moment with the self and others, and remain in the in-between spaces among us?” This question was like a sub-question to the first one.
Events in real-time occurrences can affect these processes of deep listening and challenge our understanding of the needs and boundaries of myself, others, and the atmosphere that is created between us. If I can understand how to become aware more quickly during these real-time occurrences in addition to the cultural, educational, and professional differences, I can develop interactive encounters in the current moment with another. Eberhart and Atkins’ (2014) book, *Presence and Process in Expressive Arts Work: At the Edge of Wonder* provides details for this awareness where, “presence is not only a quality of being. Presence is also an interactive encounter with whatever is present in awareness, including the self, the other and the atmosphere that is created in the in-between” (p. 75). I initially experienced this interactive encounter of presence and process at the EGS Alumni Hybrid event. The participants were from all around the world. We drew on many new unknown needs and different skills from all our individual potentialities. Anxiety, as much as excitement was produced in facilitating this group activity. As facilitators, we were expected to work with multi-level states of presence and awareness. Ultimately, however, we were lucky to experience this first international hybrid facilitation at EGS since the participants were skillful in Expressive Artists practices. Together, and in real time, we learned and illustrated how to engage the creative processes in hybrid forms. Now in harvesting the experience, I can practice the skills needed to develop coaching and facilitation of the present moment to harvest heartfelt relational spaces for others in the future.

In the following days, I was ready to start a journey with IDEC Decentering according to the question of how to skillfully meet others and attune to the spaces in-between us. I started by taking a photo (Figure 4) as a sensitization practice for connecting between myself and the environment.

![Figure 4. IDEC Decentering 1. Photo taking : What attracts me, What guides me, What moves me. Image drawn and photographed by Sinem Lanaci.](image-url)
The image guides me to see and reflect like the birds on the branches. The birds give me joy. Birds also remind me of the soulful connection that unites us and birds. They remind me of the heartfelt connection and relational space. The feeling of joy was brought into my body, and the joy guides me to bring colors into a drawing or a painting.

I followed through in an Art-Based Dialogue through painting (McNiff, 1998). There was an intuitive writing process that accompanied my art-making (Figure 5). An aesthetic analysis accompanied my intuitive dialogue and provided material for me to harvest afterwards. The first steps to harvesting my new question was:

pausing,
breathing and
listening as needed in the art-making process
and there was a tiny moment of change in our dialogue and in-between the artist to art, and from art to artist.

It felt like an encounter could be welcomed between myself, the other two in the group, and the environment that surrounds us with all that is carried and created in-between through deep listening (somatic body sensations, emotions, inspirations, ideas etc.). Deep knowing can then come and go in the process of pausing and listening to the body. I continued to ask: "How could deep listening to my body help me become more consciously aware of those tiny moments of change?"

The next day during a pause, I was inspired to start intuitive writing and to continue painting (paintings 5-6-7-8 in Figure 6) with the intention of catching more of the in-between spaces to pause and change the dialogue that speaks from me to the painting, and from the painting to me.

Figure 5. IDEC Decentering 2. Art-making process from the theme of Joy & Heartfelt Connection. Images drawn by Sinem Lanaci
Figure 6. IDEC Decentering 3. Art-making process from the theme of Joy & Heartfelt Relation. Image drawn by Sinem Lanaci.

Figure 7. IDEC Decentering 4. Art-making process from the theme of Joy & Heartfelt Relation. Image painted by Sinem Lanaci.
Firstly, pausing and deep listening developed my awareness of the dialogue between the art and artist. Secondly, intermodal transitions from writing to painting and painting to dancing helped me to sense this tiny moment of change in my body, and also, in between art and artist (me). These tiny moments had no words, they contained sensations that then informed me of my process in each phase. These two elements shaped each other during those in-between moments and became amplified with my guiding question of how to be more skillful in our meeting and attuning with others. After painting (Figure 6), the art making process felt more complete. Days passed and the art pieces became more whole through the new medium of video. This intermodal art process of decentering helped me remember the experience of the Alumni event a little differently. The mountain under the stars.

A dialogue on the in-between of improvised art-making processes illuminated a new way. The mountain with a beautiful starry night appeared for me, like the mountains in the Swiss Alps at EGS that reside on the cutting edge. I was surprised by the painting’s similarities to Valerie’s Aesthetic Response (Figure 3), a constellation of a starry night and so I called my painting *Starry Night* (Figure 7). I understood that the improvisational flow from Katrina to me, and from me to Valerie, created the link between stars and formed a constellation from the facilitation of our sub-group’s alumni event and was taken into the process of writing our article. Valerie’s and Katrina’s Aesthetic Responses broke barriers that resulted from different cultural and professional backgrounds and helped me to understand them differently. I continued to find connections between themes in our writing and to become inspired by them.

After painting the mountain, I continued to research the tiny moments of change after our sub-group’s workshop at EGS and in these meetings with myself, these two others, and the spaces in-between. I continued to move forward to research and develop my coaching and facilitation projects. After months of practice, the tiny moments became larger moments of awareness during the art-making processes. These practices developed my embodied awareness to step-in and step-out from the self, with others and in these encounters. The harvest that followed from my first question started to become clearer. I asked, “How can I become more skillful in my meetings with others to remain in the moment and the in-between space?” My answer: my body becomes a guide to step-in and step-out of myself, with others to hold the space in-between us.

Surprisingly, the answer to my second question helped me to understand the answer to my first original question, *How to build a healthy relational space and care for a heartfelt relation?* As facilitator or coach, the use of intermodal arts such as painting, dancing, and singing is key to building heartfelt relations when there are meaningful differences between everyone, such as in professional fields or in speaking different languages. *Art is the center that holds us united.* These experiences and intermodal approaches to the arts continue to inform my ongoing research in ONC methods (Orienting to A New Culture - ONC) after my Ph.D.

The art-making shown in Figure 8 helped me in the process of writing with Valerie and Katrina to understand each other. As an Expressive Arts Professional, art-based research is the center of my work. Listening deeply and understanding another’s needs are primary skills for designing intermodal expressive arts structures for different organizations. This method allows me to discover in each moment what are the diverse needs for different organizations, groups, or individuals that I work with. IDEC Decentering
as an art-based intermodal practice helps me to listen deeply in verbal and also non-verbal areas to find inspiration, guidance and insights for different clients. With these new insights, my designs for facilitation or coaching can become more effective and supportive for multicultural, multinational and different professional background participants. In addition to that, everyday art-making processes develop my artistic skills too. Not only to understand the needs of others, but intermodal art-making is also a way to let go of unnecessary tension in the body and an important way for Expressive Arts professionals to practice self-care and maintain their wellbeing.

I deeply thank Valerie and Katrina for their knowledge, aesthetic responses, and care.

Figure 8. IDEC Decentering 5. Art-making process before meetings, in the meetings, and after meetings. Images drawn by Sinem Lanaci.
Katrina’s Process

It is through poiesis, knowing through making, that we remembered the EGS event. We lit a candle, which held the space for our ritual (Figure 9). We shaped our questions, listened to one another, and then sounded a bell that marked the transition from questions to writing and drawing for five minutes or longer.

My (Katrina) question in our subgroup’s harvest was to seek insight about a book I want to write. Sinem took my question and quickly responded, “trust the play.” Sinem suggested that the scent and spray of the sea could be very grounding for my writing process. Her full message was to take care of my health and not to be too critical with myself or my writing expectations. I trusted Sinem’s intuitive answer, as she regularly uses the process of deep listening in her art-based practices.

That meeting was in late February and by April I had the writing retreat of my dreams. I was house-sitting for a friend on the salty Salish Sea in Washington state for two weeks. I woke at dawn, and was on the beach by 6am where I received my inspiration for writing from calm or stormy waves, brisk cold winds, eroding clay bluffs, and a new batch of vivid stones and shells on each walk. In this deep listening each morning I would innocently listen at the edge of the water like a child for mantras that rang like simple reminders:

Figure 9. “Lighting the Candle.” Art and photo by Katrina Plato.

Pause. Listen. Write.
Dance. Listen. Write.
Breathe. Listen. Write.

http://opensiu.lib.siu.edu/atj/vol8/iss1/28
As I prepared to write this reflection, I pulled out my copy of Shawn McNiff’s (1998) book, *Trust the Process*, and found a single highlighted sentence in the whole book, as if to emphasize that the importance of this part of writing and any creative process is to, “begin in stillness and make contact with what moves through us at the moment” (p. 65). In this stillness each morning I received a new playful surprise to develop in my writing. In EXA this surprise is referred to with affection as “the third” (Knill, 2010, p. 133) and has been described as “a sudden new understanding” (Eberhart & Atkins, 2014, p. 150). These new understandings from moments of surprise arise within rituals, such as walking a beach. In walking a beach, one falls into what Victor Turner described as liminal spaces, “a moment in and out of time” (Turner, 1969, p. 96). The deeper I looked, the more surprises I witnessed to take to my journal. Sinem had encouraged me to listen to who or what guides my process and to “improvise a play.” Stacking a clay rock cairn (Figure 10), hunting moon snails at low tide, peaking through driftwood windows (Figures 11 & 12), listening to waves: these became somatic inspirations for my daily practice of writing for five minutes. In the afternoons, I worked as a group therapist meeting clients on-line. At dusk, I returned to this liminal play at the water’s edge, and then back to the writing table by candlelight.

Figure 10. Clay rock cairn “Salish Sea Inspirations.” Photograph by Katrina Plato.
On arriving in Washington, I kept seeing birds, and then saw the word ‘Fly’ written in clay on a glacier boulder not far from where I was staying; a boulder that was not about to fly anywhere (Figures 13 & 14). Birds remind me of messengers, a metaphor that took on more meaning when I met with Sinem a week into my retreat. As Sinem spoke, I noticed the synchronicity of colorful birds behind her head, painted on a tree on her wall (Figure 15). She did another intuitive writing process for me after I shared with her that I was feeling a creative block. I was overthinking and stuck, like the metaphor of the rock that could not fly. I found Sinem’s words after the writing meditation encouraging:

“I just write whatever comes into me. I’m reading to you what I wrote”:


Sinem stressed in closing, “What wants to come? Come as you are.”

This second meeting, in the middle of the process that Sinem had advised, was an embodiment of the very essence I hoped for in the alumni event—to bring to life the deep listening by our writing partner through the intermodal process of attunement to the other, journaling, and aesthetic response. The three of us manifested the suggestions shared with us, and were living them. The intuitive guidance that Sinem shared with me to write by the water had become a reality. My aesthetic response to Sinem’s writing is a nod to flight, and the air, the idea of the three of us, ‘birds of a feather flock together,’ each unique, reflecting joy (Figure 16).

While on my writing retreat, I attended the book launch for *Art-Care Practices for Restoring the Communal* (Bickel & Fisher, 2023). The authors were inspired by Bracha L. Ettinger’s matrixial aesthetics, and so invited her to present at their book launch as she had written the Foreword. My eyes widened as Ettinger read from her journal, paused, and turned to show us one of her pages (Figures 17 & 18) stating:

> You can see that I’m writing slowly because I can change colors and I can change pens and pencils. Because, it’s not like I’m writing as a sentence. I’m writing and then I’m thinking, ‘Oh my goodness what now?’
... We can do the passage from the more instinctive attitude, primordial wandering and care...
If it’s not exactly affect, and not really thinking, and not necessarily acting. So, what is this? ... I found this word, in that moment in the notebook, to talk about this kind of mode that is both spiritual and psychic, for example ... And so I said maybe it is psychic, an effective spiritual model/orientation ... And it’s being, is an access, access to that which is more important, or more, I called it Divine in the other page ... in painting, this attunement is created which is the feeling of freedom which one can’t explain through reason. (Ettinger, April 3, 2023)

Leaning forward, I listened to Ettinger’s words succinctly map, “an effective spiritual model” of what I understood to be her method of writing with images. I remember her pointing to a painted figure in her notebook and sharing that she painted an image first, then came the words. That a philosopher and psychologist would give homage to the creative formation of an image first, then the thoughts, ideas, words, gave me pause to review my own journaling method. As she held up her page to illustrate her use of different colored pens and pencils I looked down at the green, blue, and black inks on my page representative of different threads of thoughts I hear in her words, “primordial wandering,” and instinct. Her brief talk beautifully mapped a process of weaving between image and word, thinking and writing. Not a way of being, but as being. Writing as being gives us “access to that which is more important, or more.” Her reference to the Divine here gave me courage to name my process as spiritual, what I often, “can’t explain through reason.”
For me, as Ettinger succinctly put it, my notebooks contain a form of “... an effective spiritual model/orientation.” This is not a new model, but an ancient one that is articulated again. What does this language mean? As an art therapist, I have long admired Pat Allen’s (2005) writing about the use of art methods as written in Art Is a Spiritual Path: Engaging the Sacred Through the Practice of Art and Writing. Her first chapter title, “The Practice of Intention: Divine Alignment,” describes her studio practice that uses the word Divine. Art methods such as the intimate process of journaling, are an effective mode of inquiry that lead us into liminal realms. The challenge then is how to describe what we have perceived there, and then bring those realizations into action. If we have traversed the ritual well, we will be successful in bringing forth new insights on the questions that live within us.

Hearing Ettinger at that moment in my retreat, and at that time in our collaborative writing, felt like an affirmation of the form of journaling I presented at EGS, and that Valerie, Sinem and I practiced as we harvested our experience. The three of us, describing our journaling experience in our own words in this article. I’m grateful to Valerie and Sinem for the gifts of this writing collaboration that included slowing down to listen to and digest new concepts, inviting “spontaneous creation-making” (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. 40) together, and puzzling through language.

Conclusion

What began with the three of our work at an alumni event for The European Graduate School is documented here, specifically in preparation for the collaboration followed by participation in the hybrid highly-complex event itself, and the year-long processes to harvest the experience. More than an analytic evaluation or linear timeline of what transpired, there was an attestation of the inner work and processes through art-making that each of us experienced and shared together. Sinem brought her experience with EXA into this community, IDEC Decentering, low skill and high sensitivity, active imagination, and used different intermodal expressive arts processes like decentering, and deep listening, while Valerie’s reflection to decenter the partial self with the other who is always matrixially interwoven with oneself, offered ethical sensitivities. Together with Katrina’s work on collaboration as co-poiesis through ritual, and entering liminal spaces, we shed light on the guiding questions that emerged: In the process of co-poiesis, of collaboration, how can art allow us to hybridize ourselves without losing our individual core? And how are matrixial borderlinks negotiated? The metaphor of interweaving matrixial threads helped us hybridize without losing our individual constitutions. Through these decentering art-processes, guiding questions, rituals, metaphors and theoretical reflections, we each have offered a view of the dark skies and edges through which the decentered self can be grounded to grow with and through others. Intermodal art-making in the research process carried our differences and also united us in a heartfelt common, non-verbal language that lingers from where we all originate.

References


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