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Invitations & Purposeful Encounters with Expressive Arts

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art (n.) early 13c., “skill as a result of learning or practice,” from Old French *art* (10c.), from Latin *artem* (nominative *ars*) “work of art; practical skill; a business, craft,” from PIE **ar-ti-* (cognates: Sanskrit *rtih* “manner, mode;” Greek *arti* “just,” *artios* “complete, suitable,” *artizein* “to prepare;” Latin *artus* “joint;” Armenian *arnam* “make;” German *art* “manner, mode”), from root **ar-* “fit together, join”

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Submissions

Artizein welcomes submissions addressing the significance of understanding the roles of teaching, learning, and inquiring through the arts, relative to the arts themselves. We publish articles, artworks, poems, visual essays, book reviews, digital media, and other materials:

- **To deepen** perceptions about the creative capacities of all people, and how this ability, that is innate to all, unfolds and develops in a wide array of ways, tempos, and settings
- **To inform** and engage readers in expansive thinking about what the arts are and can be, and how to teach, transmit, and facilitate their emergence, where it might take place, and how to recognize its impact on those that make and those that experience the arts and their effects
- **To expand** possibilities for how the arts as inquiry can contribute to the learning and unlearning of ways of being and knowing for just and sustainable societies (communities)
- **To direct** attention to instructional approaches (some new and innovative, others neglected or forgotten) that are currently restricted by an emphasis on normalized arts instruction in public schooling and higher education

Please visit our website for specific information related to upcoming volumes:
https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/atj/call_for_papers.html

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Editorial Foreword

A Métissage of Presence-ing

Darlene St. Georges & Barbara Bickel

In this era of global reach coupled by unyielding political and religious divisiveness, this curated special issue of Artizein entitled "*Invitations and Purposeful Encounters with Expressive Arts*" offers an alternative way of being—*presence-ing* with one another. An alumni circle of the European Graduate School co-curated this collection with an approach to living with|in the world on an edge of epistemological realizing—through invited presence and compassion with others. Through aesthetic and therapeutic complexities each article and book review risks communal healing and even blessings while decentering the individual. Readers are invited to witness the authors intimate exchanges that shine a light on relational aesthetics, creative subjectivity, vulnerability, bodily experience, affect, and difference. Conversations focus on transformational relationships through acts of affective and purposeful encounters that explore a re|turn to cosmic repair. This is a type of creative exhalation that gives rise to transformation and envelops a sacred space in which to restore and heal (St. Georges & Bickel, 2022). In this animated center we can align with creative impulse in a world pulsating in-to and out-of existence—ancestors, reciprocity, unconscious, and imaginal realms—embodied, somatic, and intuitive ways of knowing (Fidyk & St. Georges, 2022).

Walk the labyrinthal
path into the womb of the Earth
balance to remember the bonds
before abandonment
resuscitate the genesis stories of our
winged parentage¹

With fluid keys dangling between point
I traverse portals and corridors
seeking the wild things beneath my skin
perching on smooth edges in caves and wombs
drawing out silences
storying into existence
a view beyond my own horizon²

[inhale trust; exhale fear]

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Fidyk, A., & St. Georges, D. (2022). Poetic Inquiry for Synchrony and Love (Eds.). *Art/Research International: A transdisciplinary Journal*, 7(2). Special Issue.

St. Georges, D., & Bickel, B. (2022). An inspirited artistic co-inquiry with raw energy. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 7(1), 210-256.

Endnotes

¹ See: published poem by Barbara Bickel p. 234, in St. Georges, D., & Bickel, B. (2022). An inspirited artistic co-inquiry with raw energy. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 7(1), 210-256.

² See: published poem by Darlene St. Georges p. 239, in St. Georges, D., & Bickel, B. (2022). An inspirited artistic co-inquiry with raw energy. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 7(1), 210-256.

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Editorial Team Welcome to

Dr. Jeeyeon Ryu

As Artizein looks toward the future and expands its reach, we are very happy to welcome Dr. Jeeyeon Ryu to the editorial team. Jeeyeon is a piano teacher-researcher who incorporates a diversity of artistic practices in her scholarship, such as music, video, poetry, creative writing, and storytelling. Her scholarly interests and publications include themes and variations related to arts-informed pedagogies, curriculum studies, praxis and teacher education, early childhood music education, and creativity in teaching and learning. Currently, Jeeyeon is appointed as Interim Associate Dean (General Education) with Yorkville University, Canada and brings valuable editorial and design experience to Artizein's editorial team. She has stepped into our collaborative editorial process with both feet and has co-designed the layout of this issue with Darlene St. Georges. We are excited to be on this journey with her.

Darlene St. Georges, Barbara Bickel & Laurel Fredrickson (Co-editors)

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Introduction: Invitations and Purposeful Encounters

Guest Editors

Valerie Oved Giovanini
Katrina Plato
Alexandra Goodall
with Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

The virtual-physical journal you are about to read has been woven by seven arts-based researchers from around the world in Switzerland, Canada, Peru, Spain, Turkey, and the United States. These seven women first came together collaboratively in June of 2022 to facilitate a historic physical-virtual Alumni Festival at The European Graduate School (EGS). The connections built amongst the group of alumni became so immensely supportive and energizing that they decided to move forward together as a group of co-researching, co-writing, and co-inspiring collaborators who are passionate in their parallel pursuits of expressive arts, and critical theory. *Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal* offered a platform for the next iteration of their work together—articles based on the original sub-panel presentation groups at the 2022 alumni event. The invitation germinated intimate (see Torres & Goodall), affective (see Giovanini) and purposeful (see Cueva & Zorzi) encounters. Eberhart and Atkins (2014) explain the “invitational presence” encountered in the collaborations:

In human-to-human relationships, [we] often experience a quality of *invitational presence*. Each person attracts and in turn is attracted by the other or others in a kind of call and response... Each one calls and each responds to the call of the other in a back and forth or simultaneous interactive dance of experience. Thus, in this sense, 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)

Presence with one another was a central theme on their writing journey alongside vulnerability, the difference of cultures, languages, and time. The training and research received in Expressive Arts and Critical Theory at EGS was the ground for their writing processes, however unwieldy these could feel when seven people of different cultures were collaborating from around the world. A coherence came through in the final collection that we as guest editors (and contributors) could never have contrived or consciously fashioned through a curatorial intention.

In this collection, all the articles invite and welcome readers to witness intimate exchanges through the experimental conversations between artists, expressive arts professionals, counselors, business-practice innovators, and educators. Descriptions of the art-making processes that accompanied the authors’ transformations, over the course of writing together, are included for those interested in arts-based research experiences and structures. Included in this introduction of the articles are aesthetic responses (Figures 1-6).

Valeria Rocío Gonzales González Cueva and Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi's experimental conversation in *Borders and Bridges in Virtual Work: Between Real and Imaginary*, addresses the therapeutic potentials and limitations for Expressive Arts practitioners who engage in virtual spaces (Figures 4 & 5). They navigate 'fluid time' and 'everyday time,' traverse imaginal layers of reality, and prioritize "a genuine confrontation with the complexities [they] seek to understand" (see p. 78 in this issue). A digital media piece brings their real and imaginary conversation to a close.



Figures 4 & 5. *Embodied Conversations*, artwork by Carmiella Salzberg and Valeria González Cueva (2023)

Following these collaborative pieces, **Valerie Oved Giovanini** takes the language of Expressive Arts into *Teaching Philosophy as a Pedagogic Practice-ing: Are You the Type of Person that Says, "Everything Happens for a Reason"?*, to understand and illustrate how pedagogical practices can include the arts in higher education for the development of a critically minded community.



Figure 6: Aesthetic response to "Harvesting a Blessing" by Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi (2023)

The media piece, *Harvesting the Blessing* (Figure 6) edited by **Alba Torres Robinat** is a playful aesthetic response with five of our seven members: **Alba Torres Robinat**, **Katrina Plato**, **Alexandra Katherine Goodall**, **Valerie Oved Giovanini**, and **Sinem Lanaci**. It reflects the purposeful, affective and transformational relationships that were created through the collaborative writing journeys found in this issue.

To bring in additional expressive voices into the issue, the authors in the collection were invited to write a review about a book that inspired their profession as artists, teachers, and consultants.

Seasoned art-therapist **Katrina Plato** invited her creative writing teacher and author **Lucien Zell** to write a collaborative review based on their shared admiration for the book by Margo Fuchs Knills' and Sally S. Atkins' (2021), *Poetry in Expressive Arts: Supporting Resilience through Poetic Writing*. Zell eloquently dives into the theme of resilience while Plato explores the nurturing therapeutic writing practices within the book's poetry prompts.

Feminist philosopher **Valerie Oved Giovanini** understands her review of Barbara A. Bickel's and R. Michael Fisher's (2023) book, *Art-Care Practices for Restoring the Communal: Education, Co-inquiry, and Healing* through the Jewish lens of *Tikkun Olam*, which is the social action of cosmic or communal healing. Spontaneous Creation-Making (SCM) is a form of art-making that cares to restore communal healing and is shown to stand in proximity to Bracha L. Ettinger's (2006) ideas, such as the *matrixial* and *wit(h)nessing*, as carried from Ettinger's work and found in her book, *The Matrixial Borderspaces*.

As a researcher, client, and therapist of expressive arts, **Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi** reviews *Spacious Theories of Object Relativity and Objective Reality* by Carlo Rovelli. Zorzi recommends the book for its poetic telling of the history of physics and the simplicity of its thought examples. She demonstrates how this book's clear explanations of complex ideas, in regard to the relativity of time, can be useful to expressive arts professionals as a guide into and back out of the imagination.

At the heart of all the articles, book reviews, and the media pieces, lies an invitation to return to the body. The reader will find this theme expressed as: borderlinks (see Plato, Lanaci, Giovanini), *cuerpalma* (see Torres), *sentipensar* (see Cueva), affective encounters (see Giovanini), spiritually weaving the heart and mind in poetry (see Plato, Zell), and grounding oneself in the physical world (see Zorzi). We are grateful for this journey through which we traversed metaphysical-physical-virtual presence-ing to collaboratively explore our learning through arts-based research.

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Eberhart, H., & Atkins, S. (2014). *Presence and process in expressive arts work: At the edge of wonder*. Jessica Kingsley.
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Doing and Thinking on the Edge with Intermodal Expressive Arts

Katrina Plato
Sinem Lanaci
Valerie Oved Giovanini

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/>

Sinem Lanaci, Ph.D., Professional Certified Coach (PCC). Sinem is a ICF (International Coaching Federation) Gestalt & Intermodal Expressive Arts Coach, Facilitator, Lecturer and Artist based in Istanbul, Turkey. She has led the People and Culture Department in

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.

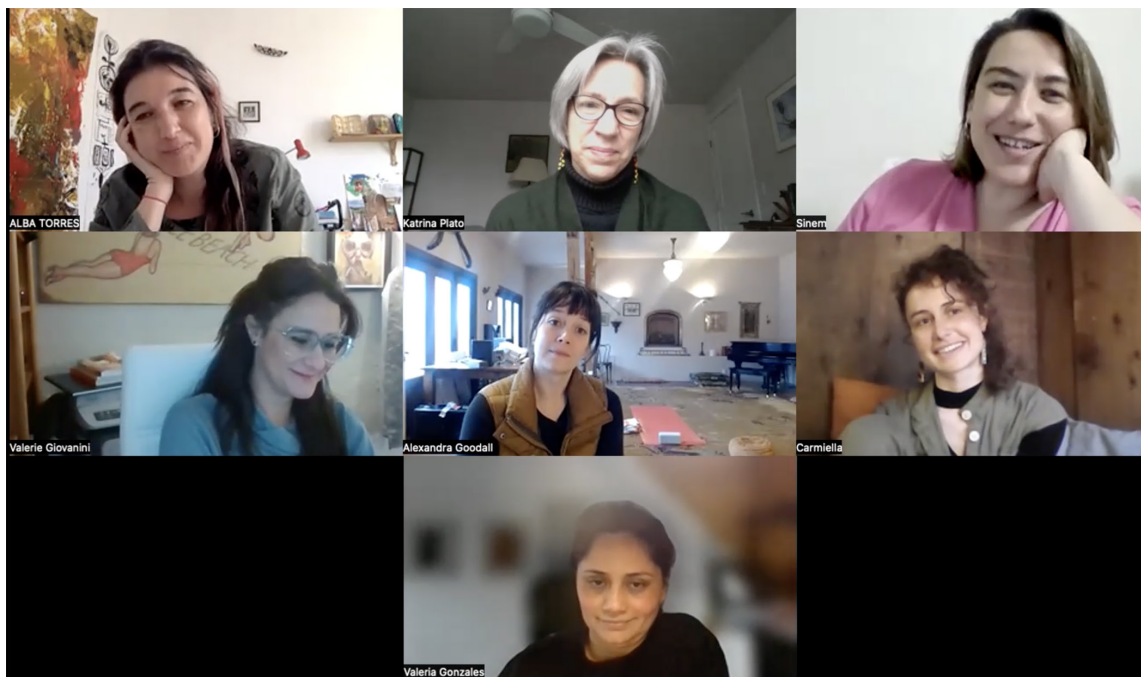


Figure 1: Members of the 2022 EGS Alumni Panel. Screenshot by Katrina Plato.

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-form-ulation, 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 hybridize 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-remembering 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).

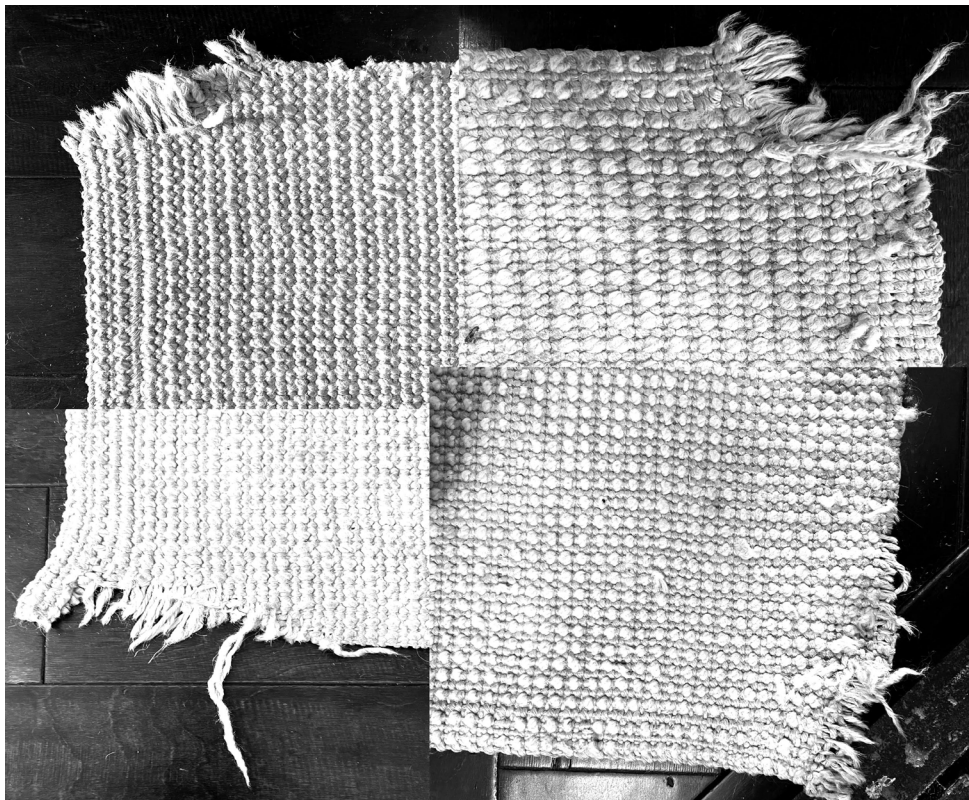


Figure 2. "Collage of Fragments with Interwoven Threads," Valerie's Aesthetic Response to the Writing Process. Photographed by Valerie Oved Giovanin.

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 transcendently 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)



Figure 3. Starry Night. Aesthetic Response by Valerie to the Article's Writing Process. Image 'Pleiades' produced by STScl and created, authored, and/or prepared for NASA under Contract NAS5-26555.

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.

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.

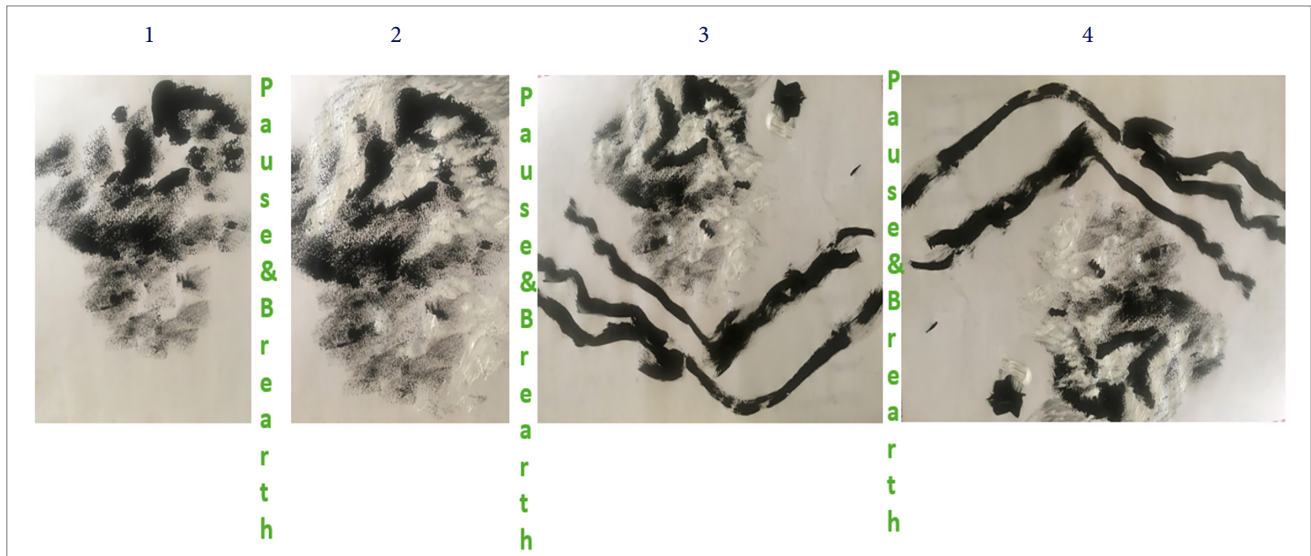


Figure 5. IDEC Decentering 2. Art-making process from the theme of Joy & Heartfelt Connection. Images drawn by Sinem Lanaci

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.

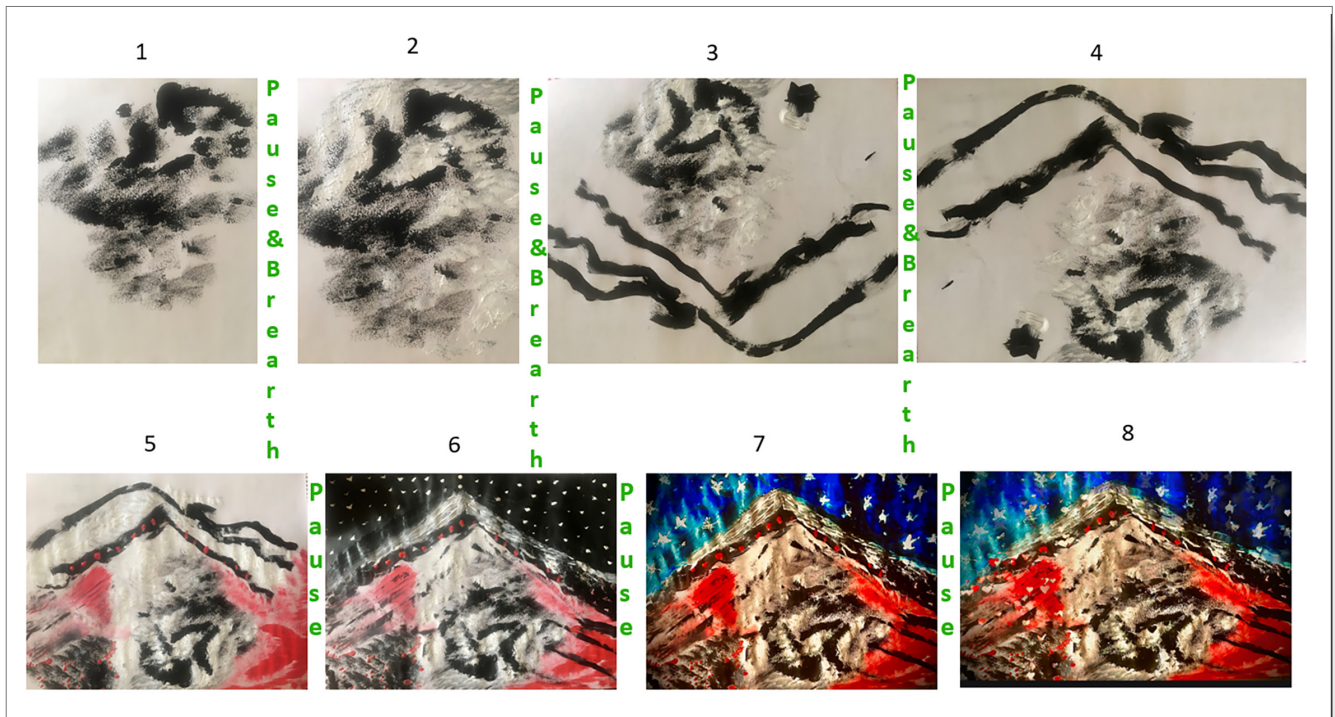


Figure 6. IDEC Decentering 3. Art-making process from the theme of Joy & Heartfelt Relation. Image drawn by Sinem Lanaci.

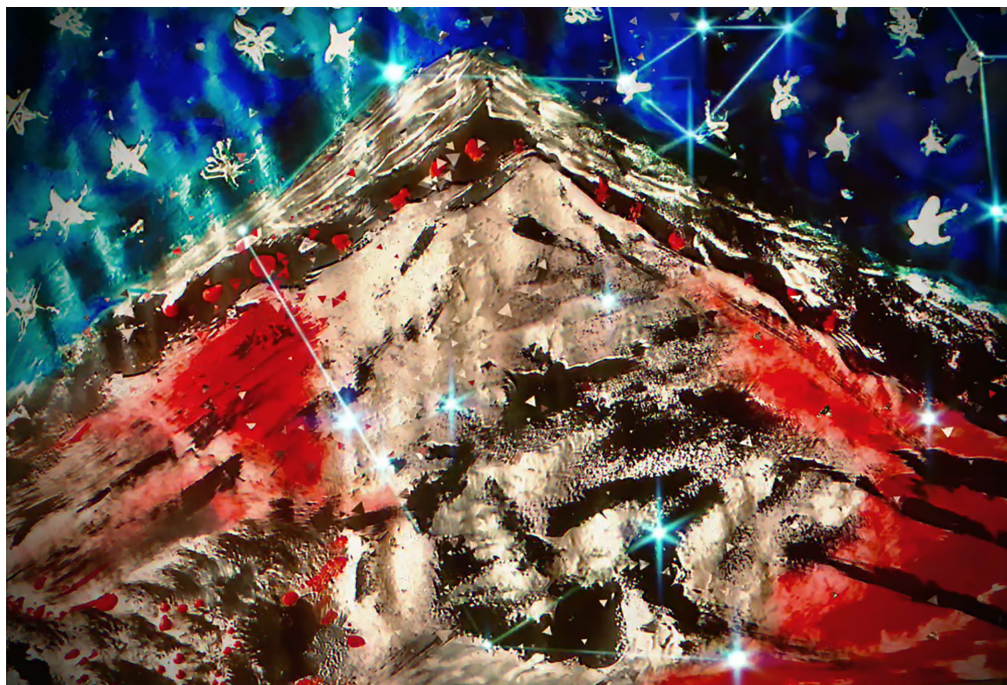


Figure 7. IDEC Decentering 4. Art-making process from the theme of Joy & Heartfelt Relation. Image painted by Sinem Lanaci.

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.



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

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:

Pause. Listen. Write.
Play. Listen. Write. Dance. Write.
Dance. Listen. Write.
Breathe. Listen. Write.
Pause. Touch Clay. Listen. Write.

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 space 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.



Figures 11 & 12. Driftwood windows “Salish Sea Inspirations.” Photographs 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”:

... Just to breathe. Just to breathe. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. Trust. Trust. Trust. Paint some days. Make a collage ... Make it simple. Make it easy. Where is the joy? ... What is nurturing for you? ... Walk to the beach. Seasalt ... Joy and enjoy. Dance. Sing. Make art for yourself, for your days, like an art journal. It is done.

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



Figures 13 & 14. “Fly.” Photographs by Katrina Plato.

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).



Figure 15. Sinem’s birds on her wall. Image drawn and photographed by Sinem Lanaci.



Figure 16. Birds of a feather. Photograph by Katrina Plato.

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)



Figures 17 & 18. Bracha L. Ettinger sharing her notebooks and writing process. Screenshots by Katrina Plato shared with permission from Bracha L. Ettinger.

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.

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Collective Memory and Creative Subjectivity: A Living Conversation

Alba Torres Robinat
Alexandra Katherine Goodall



Abstract

This article is the record of a dialogue between two artists and Expressive Arts therapists, Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Katherine Goodall. They chose to undertake this conversation in the form of letters that were written back-and-forth over a period of time in a shared document, which places their correspondence in the tradition of epistolary writing. This decision to write the article as letters lends the conversation an immediacy, a warmth, a sense of time, distance and familiarity, and a feeling of intimacy.

The authors invite readers to witness the deepening of a relationship and the development of their conversational themes. Here, witnessing is a type of co-creative engagement. In the thread of this conversation emerges some of the core explorations in their practices such as intergenerational trauma, the role of bodily experience, and what responsibility and safety mean in the context of artmaking, facilitation, and therapy—in public spaces such as art galleries and private ones such as their home studio or therapy spaces. The conversation is a candid non-linear unearthing practice, a connecting practice, as they circle towards the central themes of their life and work. The conversation happens through multiple mediums: writing, spoken word and visual media art (a video entitled “A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow” and still video images). The work reveals its “spine” as the art is created, reaching its fullness in a media piece. The conversation then folds back in on itself through more integration of media works and text in the letters themselves, an ouroboros-like process, illuminating even deeper themes, spoken and unspoken.

Resum

[Abstract translation is in Catalan language that was prohibited and persecuted during Franco's dictatorship in Spain, from 1939 to 1975]

Aquest article és el registre d'un diàleg entre dues artistes i art-terapeutes, l'Alba Torres Robinat i l'Alexandra Katherine Goodall. Van optar per dur a terme aquesta conversa en un intercanvi de cartes. Així doncs, el seu text s'inscriu en la tradició de l'escriptura epistolar. Aquesta decisió aporta al text sensacions d'immediatesa, de calidesa, del sentit del temps i la distància, de la familiaritat i la intimitat. L'interès de les autores és que això convidi al lector a ser testimoni de l'aprofundiment d'una relació i dels seus temes de conversa. Així, ser aquest testimoni és una mena d'apropament co-creatiu a l'obra. En el fil d'aquesta conversació emergeixen algunes de les exploracions centrals de les seves pràctiques, com el trauma intergeneracional, el rol de l'experiència corporal i el que significa la responsabilitat i la seguretat en el context de l'art i la teràpia, tant en espais públics com les galeries d'art o en espais privats com els seus tallers o sales de teràpia. L'Alexandra i l'Alba comparteixen amb franquesa. La conversa va desplegant-se de forma no lineal, com si anessin donant tombs i desenterrant a capes els temes centrals de la seva vida i obra. El diàleg es desplega a través de múltiples mitjans: l'escriptura, l'oralitat i l'art visual. Les imatges que creen queden amalgamades en un vídeo titulat “A World : A Map || A Pam: A Drow”, traduït com “ Un Món: Un Mapa / Nu Apam: Nu Nòm). Un treball visual que ha anat revelant la seva pròpia columna vertebral a mesura que s'ha anat creant, arribant a la seva plenitud en la peça final audiovisual. Una obra que integra moments de tot el procés i de tots els mitjans expressius utilitzats. A través d'aquesta obra s' il·luminen encara més les profunditats d'aquesta conversa, d'allò dit i allò no dit. Un diàleg que acaba replegant-se en si mateix com el símbol de l' Uròbor.

Bios

Alexandra Katherine Goodall, M.A., is a multidisciplinary artist and psychotherapist living in British Columbia, Canada. In her studio practice, her passion lies in sculptural textile and installation. In her facilitation work and individual sessions, she combines the disciplines of art, relationship, psychology, and bodily presence.
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Alba Torres Robinat, M.A., from Spain (Catalonia) Languages: Catalan, Spanish, English, French. Alba is a multimodal artist focused on performance art; her last artwork focused on dreamwork. Alba's work as an artist is the base of her work as an expressive arts therapist. She is an expressive arts therapist working in several Spanish public mental health services and a private psychiatric hospital with adults. She also has her own art workshop where kids and teenagers come to make art. Alba has 15 years of training and practice in expressive arts therapy. She attended Instituto de Arteterapia Transdisciplinaria de Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain) and the European Graduate School (Switzerland). Alba is a researcher on Arts and Health Anthropology in West Africa.
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The Birth of a Conversation

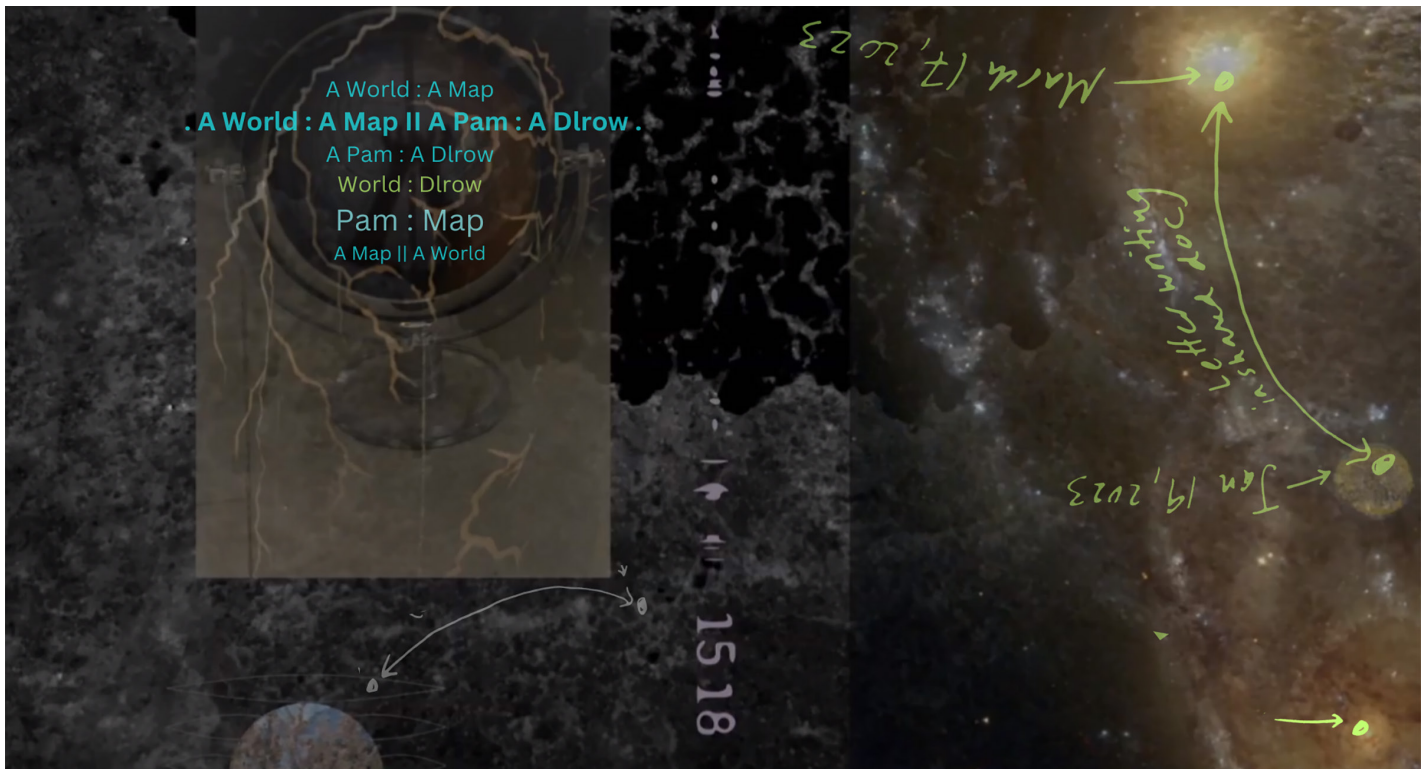


Figure 2. First image in the series of digital photo/text art. Timescales that fold in on each other. Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023) Courtesy of the artists.

Conversation connects us to what is other, lets in the converse, the opposite - we allow the solid walls between things and the events of our lives to melt; we step to the side of positions we habitually hold, we explore, fall silent, hesitate. Conversation loosens and re-forms us in the questions that arise, in incompleteness, differences, beginnings, contradictions, new possibilities—a surrendering of what we know towards what is as yet unknown—sensed perhaps, but as yet unformed. In conversation everything is movement, our boundaries loosen, even break, and some of what we are spreads out and changes. A conversation dies the moment we forget to listen. (Tufnell & Crickmay, 2004, pp. 41-42)

To be aware of the in-between means to be aware of the environment, to sense the tone and rhythm of the changing atmosphere... and to notice and trust what is happening in the ongoing moment-to-moment process of encounter. This awareness includes holding the intention to create an atmosphere of confidence and trust while simultaneously holding an expectation for surprise and change, and paradoxically, at the same time, letting go of expectations. (Eberhardt & Atkins 2014, p. 71)

The following is a conversation that took place over a year and a half between Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall. We are two artists and Expressive Arts Therapists from different parts of the world. Alba is located in Tàrrega, Spain. Alexandra is located in British Columbia, Canada. Life's synchronous circumstances brought us together, pulling us into the whirlpool of this dialogue.

In this conversation, which sits in the tradition of epistolary writing, we churned the waters of our experience regarding our artistic and therapeutic practices. We danced with concepts that don't live easily in the superficial, like the informal conversations you have with your most trusted friends at a table in the corner in the late evening. We kissed concepts and experiences that relate to the mystery of living, collective memory, and subjective creativity.

We welcome you to this conversation in which we engage in “a surrendering of what we know towards what is as yet unknown” (Tufnell & Crickmay 2004, p. 42).

AG: *Alba, would you prefer to write in your first language, and then we can translate it? It's up to you but I would also love this :)*

ATR: *Oh waw, mmmm... But I also feel it is too much work... So let me keep on training to think into another language, english, I also like it :)*

AG: *Ok, perfect! Love that :)*

ATR: *But related on it, I'd love to add expressions in my own language and translate them in same paragraph :)*

AG: *Yes, wonderful! Ok, I'm signing off. I will revisit this later and answer my question. Bye!*

ATR: *Great, thanks for caring on mother tongues :) Bye :)*

The conversation ahead is a path that meanders. It is a long pilgrimage. Stop sometimes. Drink water. Sit on a stone. Build a fire and rest. Come back to it the next day.

Let us walk together

The purpose of our work as therapists and artists is to accompany ourselves and others in an evolving path. A teacher also does this, but in another setting. In this way, there is a common interest between the fields of art, teaching, and therapy. We describe our process in detail in the pages that follow as a way of map-making, so that others might borrow, adapt, and build on the footsteps we have taken.

You are about to wander through our living language; a language that is sometimes spontaneous, sometimes colloquial, sometimes academic, sometimes reflexive, sometimes poetic, sometimes trite. We use emoticons.

Our language contains earth from the soils we are writing on

Sometimes our language emerges from the digital pool in front of you in different sizes or boldness. This decision is a conscious one. In our process, we exaggerate and highlight significant words in the text as a way of feeling into the viscera of the work, as a way of illuminating the central spine of our conversation. Through this, we have been uncovering yet another, deeper and non-linear subtext. Because some of this subterranean world doesn't fit easily into organized thought structures, sentences, and paragraphs, we use these words as visual prompts, creating images from the text. This helps us to reach places that words cannot take us. These images and others, Figures 1-23, flow fluidly as visual texts throughout this document.

Much of our writing is inspired by other conversations with mentors, colleagues, collaborators, friends and clients that took place in oral and experiential environments. We give credit to these conversations and elaborate on them in our footnotes when needed.¹

Sometimes, you may lose the thread of our conversation as if you were “listening to a conversation at a nearby table, you cannot clearly hear what is being said—it is too remote; but no sooner do you begin to understand a small phrase, to tune in on the details of the talking, than the conversation comes within range” (Sudnow,1978, p. 42).

We invite you to come within range.

The Map or Timeline of Our Process (...or What You Can Expect to Find Ahead)

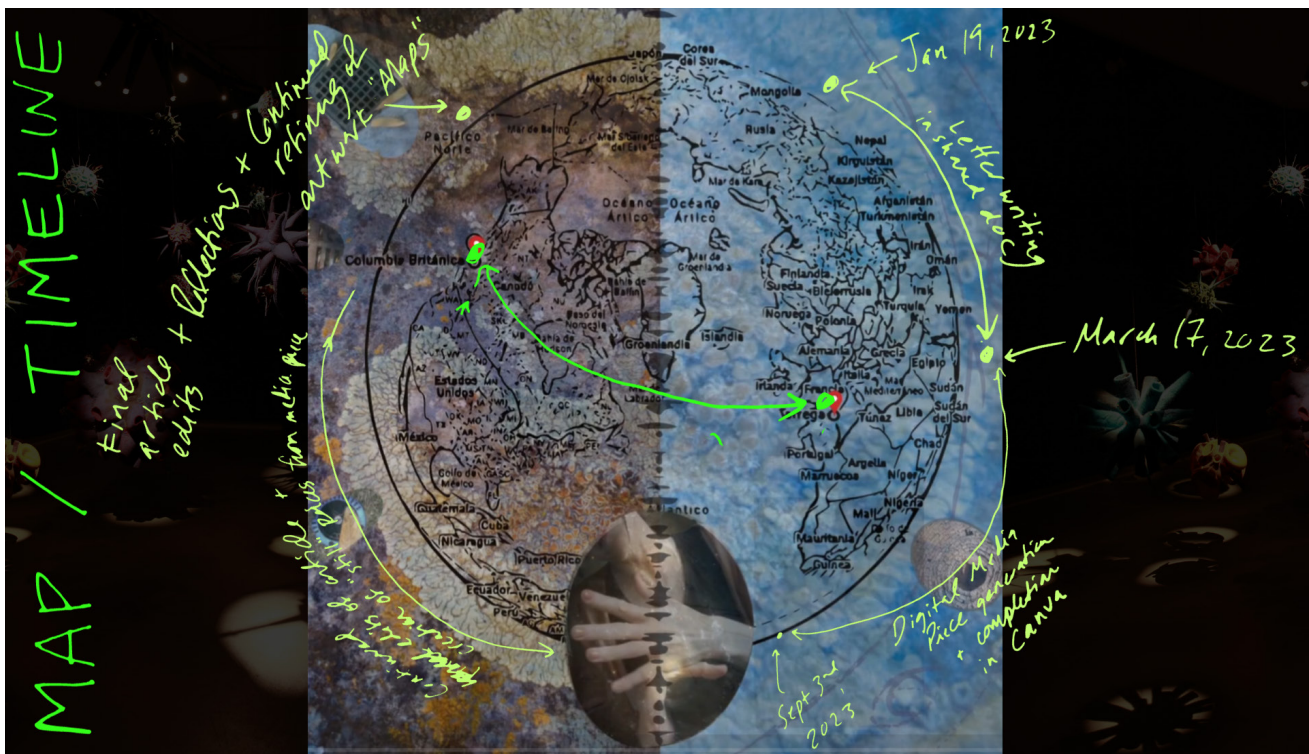


Figure 3. Second image in the series of digital photo/text art. Maps and starting points. Chicken scratch writing (not necessarily decipherable) as we continuously find our location in the work and process. Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

Between January 19th, 2023, and March 17th, 2023, we, Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall wrote letters to each other in a shared online document from our homes in our respective countries. The intention was simply to share in a conversational and fluid way our artistic and therapeutic practices, and to see where this dialogue took us. As we wrote, we manipulated words in the document (selected intuitively, resized, bold, italics).

At the end of the letter writing period, we took the words we had visually manipulated and created a digital media piece using these words. The impetus of the letters themselves, as a starting point and inspiration, allowed for certain words to shape and drop away.

We then watched the media piece together to generate new words spontaneously as a response to the visual media piece. Alba turned these words into an improvised spoken poem. The artists layered this over the original media piece to complete the final work (entitled, “A World: A Map || A Pam: A Dlow”).²

Finally, during the editing phase of this article, we took stills from the media piece, “A World: A Map || A Pam: A Dlow,” and reworked them back into the article text using more words, sentences and images derived from the article/letters themselves, thus forming a body of digital photo art that accompanies the reader as a type of visual map throughout the letter conversation.

The letters, January 19th-March 17th, 2023



Figure 4. Third image in the series of digital photo/text art. A spine of words collected by intuition from the original text of the letters. A skeletal map to build from. Text, used as a type of mark-making, is too small to be read, yet reveals a larger shape. Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

Thursday January 19th, Barcelona, Spain

Dear Alexandra,

As an artist, I am touring my last performance³ called, in Catalan (my mother tongue), “**Ignota Pell**”, meaning “**Unknown Skin**.”

UNKNOWN SKIN: This is a 40-minute show where I recite and perform my dreams and daytime poetic reports that took place during a three month anthropological Expressive Arts research trip in Burkina Faso, West Africa, into animist funerals and ancient textile art. After the show I open a dialogue with the audience. The aim of my artist soul, besides the joy of performing, is to open a ritual space for valuing dreams and putting them in the center of life, hand in hand with the language of art. My aim is to open a space to understand and integrate the unconscious lives of human beings.



Figure 5. Performance of *Unknown Skin* by Alba Torres Robinat (2023). Photo courtesy of the artist.

“**Ignota Pell**” was performed once in my studio, and a second time in a social center with a small audience. Now I am ready to share it with a bigger audience in my hometown. It makes sense to me as an artist to perform for the community in the town where I was born. At this moment, I am awaiting approval from the City Council as to whether the Cultural Council will support the work’s performance at the local Art Museum or another public space.

Simultaneously, I am happy to be sharing my work in academia with people interested in research and Expressive Arts therapy.⁴ I shared it last year with students in the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies track at The European Graduate School, Switzerland. Sharing my research (both my arts-based research and my research-based art), was a great experience and very grounding. I feel similarly nourished by this opportunity to write for *Artizein*.

Going back to my performance: UNKNOWN SKIN focuses on a big issue that is present for all therapists. In accordance with Jungian studies, the principle states that a therapist must become aware of at least the main contents of his or her unconscious, so as not to alter the clarity of his or her judgment (Jung, 2013). The artwork in Figure 7 also refers to this thought. And you, Alexandra, tell me about your practice.



Figure 6. Drawing a dream during the performance. *Unknown Skin* by Alba Torres Robinat (2023) Courtesy of the artist.

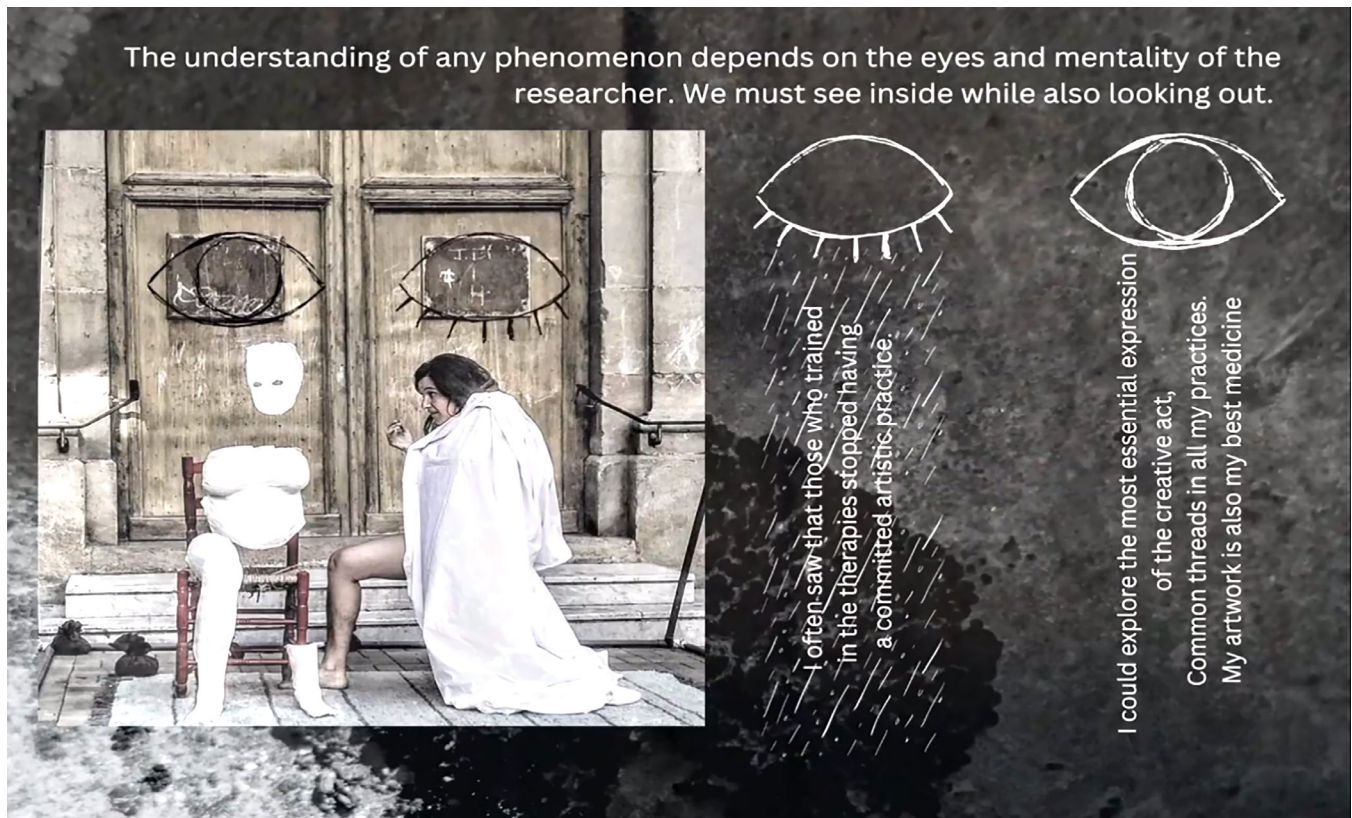


Figure 7. Still image from the media piece, *A World: A Map || A Pam A Dlrow*, Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists. The image of Alba Torres Robinat was a picture taken at a previous performance called, "Shields, 2019." Text reads, "I often saw that those who trained in the therapies stopped having a committed artistic practice." And "I could explore the most essential expression of the creative act, common threads in all my practices. My artwork is also my best medicine."

Friday, February 3rd, British Columbia, Canada

Dear Alba,

I work as both a visual artist in textile sculpture (as well as other mediums), and a psychotherapist in private practice. I am always looking for the place where creative process in both disciplines meet: **Where is the electric center of creativity in both art and therapy?** I have found that I can work in a way that feeds both expressions of creative process because both therapy, whether it is an arts-based therapeutic modality or not, and artmaking are expressions of creative process in my approach.

This was something I really struggled with in my development towards my vocation. I always wanted to do both **art and therapy**, yet **I often saw that those who trained in the therapies stopped having a committed artist's practice.** As beautiful as the many therapeutic modalities are, I suspect the reason for this bifurcation is because the conceptual and pedagogical substrates of most therapies are not derived from the arts themselves. I was very lucky to have discovered Expressive Arts Therapy. This is a modality that derives its fundamental sense of meaning, framing and definitions from many disciplines, but most importantly, from the arts. Ellen Levine explains,

We are trying to develop an arts-based perspective which can encompass the psychological dimension without being subsumed under it. The explanatory frameworks of psychology have tended to reduce and contain the creative process... Working in the arts is primary for us, and understanding what we are doing comes afterwards in a reflective turn. Staying with the artistic work and continuing to push the image further yields much more information and opens many more doors than simply demonstrating how our explanatory framework is illustrated by the work of art. (Levine, 2003, p. iv)

Rather than training in a therapy, per se, I felt I was participating in an educational experience in which **I could explore something essential and relational about the creative act.** I needed this experience of studying **creative process and relationship in a very immediate way, through the arts.** It is from this place that I approach both my psychotherapy and artmaking practices (and I am bringing this orientation to our conversation through these letters).

So, this is where I place myself at the beginning of this dialogue with you, Alba. Earlier this year I completed a 4-year multimedia project with a long-term collaborator of mine, a sound-artist and composer.⁵ The project hinged on the **intermodal skills and skills in creative 'processing'** itself that I learned in my Expressive Arts training.

This project involved the development of an installation, but also was an arts-based research project. The making of the artwork unearthed some really challenging material for me around my relationship with collective energies. I am now, in my personal explorations and my therapeutic private practice, inquiring into this material to understand what I experienced in a non-verbal and non-linear way in that process.

Two questions that continue to accompany me are:

What is the phenomenology of collective relational fields?

What is the relationship between these fields and ancestral/intergenerational experience?⁶

Saturday, February 4th, Barcelona, Spain

Dear Alexandra,

I am really happy to hear from you and to be a witness to your process of harvesting these last 4 years. Yes, I agree that art making can be a process of transformation, of going to places we don't know. If we are focused on evolving, it is research, guided by intuition, conscious and unconscious needs, and vital energies. I mention this because I also see that art making itself is not therapeutic, as forces of destruction, neurosis, psychosis, schizophrenia can sometimes increase through the making of art if it is not done in a safe way. So, it is a delicate field that needs a safe frame. In the safe **frame**, we can welcome all disruptions, emergencies, neurosis, etc. and work with them.

I guess this is a moment for you to clarify your vision, to harvest, open to insight, and to bring up new questions that will coax you forward or deeper, such as the questions you bring up on the collective relational field. I will refer to them later.

Let me share that my artwork is also my best medicine, and my deepest path of evolving. I am also an artist and Expressive Arts therapist. From my point of view, I see my artwork as the base of my Expressive Arts profession. I take both paths as creative processes, as you mention, but in my case, I feel my artwork roots my Expressive Arts work, just as it roots my *soulbody*.⁷

Nowadays my therapeutic work takes place as weekly regular Expressive Arts therapy group work in four mental health services for adults. I work in governmental public services and private ones. Additionally, I facilitate a group of kids and a group of teens in my private atelier.

I take my time to find the common threads in all my practices: my artwork, my research, my life. I strive for all these practices to complement each other and nurture themselves. I also try to work on the same metaphor in all dimensions of my life, if possible, for about three months each. This trimester I am working with the metaphor of "the mask." The metaphor in my previous trimester was "creation of your own symbols."



Figure 8. "Fast masks" at the Community Rehabilitation Center of the Psychiatry, Mental Health and Addictions Service, Hospital St. Maria Lleida, Department of Health, Catalanian Government. Anonymous participant artist. Used with permission.

My research on Arts and Health Anthropology started the moment I attended a workshop in 2013, at the Gestalt Institute of Barcelona (Spain). The workshop was on mourning rituals, led by Sobonfu Somé who is an African spiritual leader of the Dagara ethnic group. Sobonfu shared her vision and spirit technologies in the workshop, which opened me up to a new view on grief.⁸ I decided to go and see it alive in her community. I learnt French and collected the money, and two years later, I went there. Finally, I arrived at the house of a traditional healer, whose name is Doow Somé, and shared life with his family for almost one and a half months. I observed and participated a lot in the community, as I focused on understanding their approach to healing and mourning ceremonies. I came back home, and this wisdom, summed up in three affirmations, stayed with me:

The dead are not dead.⁹

If a soulbody has an illness, the first hypothesis is there is something pending to be solved from its ancestors.

If a soulbody is ill, the community is sick, but one of them is embodying it.

These are significant elements when we are discussing the question of what is transgenerational trauma¹⁰ collective unconsciousness and the ways these are related. The word transgenerational in this article refers to a realm of experience that exists in the present moment and contains the psychic and collective content from the entire lake of our ancestral experience.

What are your thoughts on this? What have you seen in your work and practice?

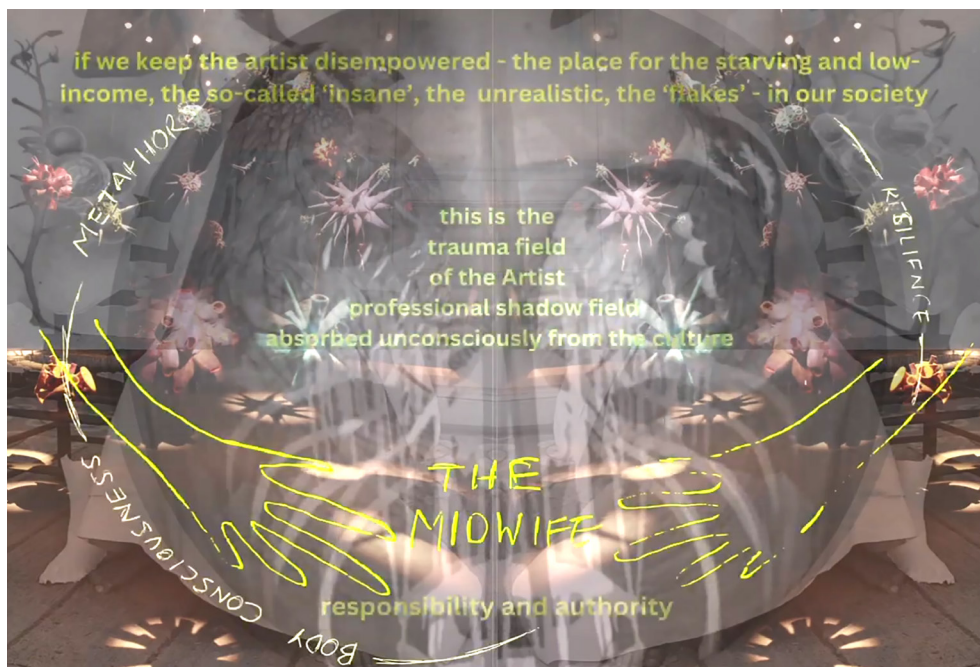


Figure 9. Still image from the media piece, *A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow*, Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists. Text reads, “If we keep the artist disempowered—the place for the starving and low-income, the so-called ‘insane’, the unrealistic, the ‘flakes’—in our society.” And “this is the trauma field of the Artist. Professional shadow field. Absorbed unconsciously from the culture.” And “The midwife. Responsibility and Authority. Body consciousness. Metaphors. Resilience.”

Wednesday, February 8th, British Columbia, Canada

Dear Alba,

I love what you are saying here about artwork not being innately therapeutic. Furthermore, I experience creative impulse as powerful and certainly existing beyond any kind of moral structures in its essence.¹¹

I often wonder what my responsibilities are given this power. What qualities do I need to cultivate within myself to negotiate this power when I engage with the arts?¹² Doctors and therapists have a professional code of conduct to protect the people they are working with, protect themselves and help them navigate **the position of authority and responsibility.**

Why do we not talk about the responsibilities of the artist in regard to this? Is it because we are too scared to recognize how powerful art is?¹³

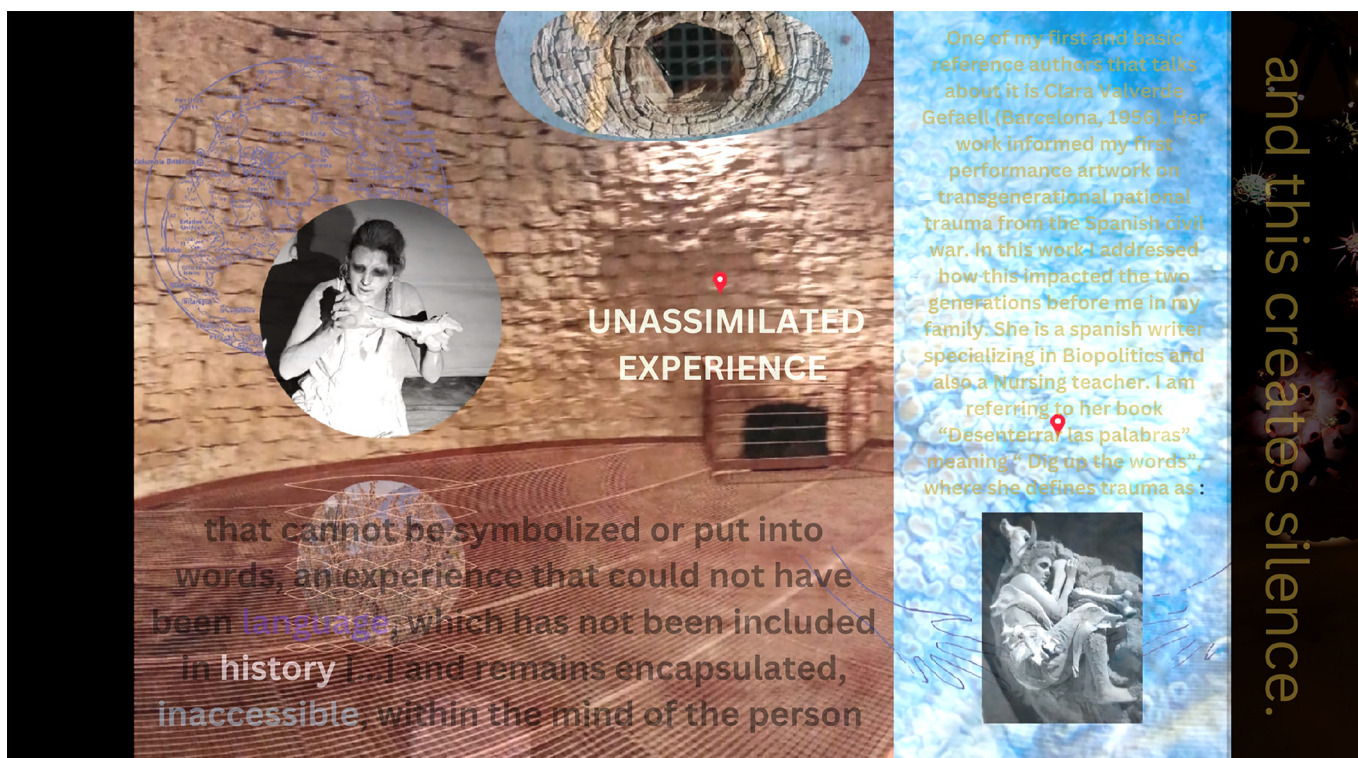


Figure 10. Fourth image in the series of digital photo/text art. What we sometimes find in the well...Text reads, “and this creates silence.” And “unassimilated experience. History. Inaccessible.” Other text is obscured and layered, a carpet of textural glyphs. Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

I heard a colleague say once that the artwork won't bring up what can't be metabolized or what is not ready to be brought up. I am still unsure if I agree with this. It opens many questions: **Who's perspective** are we coming from when we ask this? **Who is the one that is not ready? The artist? The collective? The Artwork? The facilitator (if there is one)? What if their capacities, drives, and needs are at odds?**

In my experience, the work does have a certain regulating function—**it is certainly limited by** my ability to be present with the energetic intensity of the content. And you can hurt people with art. You can also hurt yourself.¹⁴

I experience artmaking as a type of magical practice.¹⁵ When we work with magic, this comes with responsibilities.

Yes, the ‘**delicate field.**’ One that requires a very specific type of navigation. **The question of safety.**¹⁶ What an exploration!

Friday, February 10th, Tàrrega, Spain

Dear Alexandra,

Waw, we are diving into some very important aspects at the core of artmaking. How great :) Is it us driving this dialogue? Is it this frame that makes it possible? Is it a collective need to be explored? I hope this creative exchange makes us evolve :) Yes, the creative process can be very transformative, especially in dialogue with other(s) :)

Is it the work itself that leads? Is it the frame? Is it me or the group? The words **responsibility and authority** that you mentioned before are coming back to me.

Sometimes I have seen it happen that a person begins making artwork, and the person cannot hold—somehow cannot look at—what emerges. This person cannot continue the creative process, at least at this moment, in that group or at that time. This person decides to leave (in some groups I work with a social worker who acts as an assistant. This helps me in this kind of critical situation). Some people have come back after one year, as if to say, “I am now ready”; some only need to leave the space for a few moments and then can come back.

I work with both more and less stable groups, in the sense that the same people attend every session. I open the group every three months for new people to enter when possible. With some of my services, the groups are always unstable. In every meeting there are new people. Old ones come randomly. This happens mostly at the Psych. Hospital.

From my 6 years of experience in Expressive Arts therapy practice, but most intensively since Covid 2020, I notice that the most stable groups can get used to my Expressive Arts way of approaching life, illness, bonds, languages of expression, and resonances, and can easily go further or deeper in the work. The artwork appears with more maturity, depth, and freedom. But this doesn't happen in all groups. Other stable ones remain on the surface most of the time and we navigate there. I attribute this to the collective need or capacity of each group. So, even if the frame is there to go deep safely, the group sometimes doesn't take the opportunity (at least, this is how I imagine it!).

This brings me to talk about the collective soul in a group, the collective unconscious, and its collective voice. Collective soul is made of diversity. This collective soul has a color, an essence, a perfume, an elasticity, or rigidity. Let's keep talking on these collective aspects as we go :)

Sometimes, a new person comes into the group either at the beginning of a group process, or at the half-way mark, and I try to facilitate their connection with us and the task at hand "using" the group itself. Sometimes it is difficult. Sometimes many people join us all at once and they do not connect with the group, with me, with the frame, with the task, with...

Earlier, I was talking about Expressive Arts therapy tackling trauma, this delicate "material", this high vulnerability, this wound, this highly intensive pain that needs the safest space. With warm sensitivity, colours, echoes, prints on clay, paint, trauma **can be expressed, symbolized, and become language**. These techniques can become a self and collective hug. Trauma can be transformed into a garden where we can connect with the cycles of death and life. It is the place where we can connect with the force of the turning wheel of life.

So, my dear Alexandra, I'll finish my reflection here today. I am not going to ask you anything new. Let's just keep weaving :) Big hug, it is getting so interesting :)

Friday, February 17th, Okanagan, Canada

Dear Alba,

Thank you for sharing about your experiences working with Expressive Arts groups. You said, "*This brings me to talk about the collective soul in a group, the collective unconscious and its collective voice. Collective soul is made of diversity. This collective soul has a color, an essence, a perfume, an elasticity, or rigidity.*"

This is also my experience. My journey with exploring collectives started many years ago in my 20's. A mentor at the time advised me to **'heal my relationship with the collective.'**¹⁷ I had no idea what this meant! Years later, I finally found the tools to begin this encounter through a personal practice of phenomenology and arts-based exploration/experimentation.

In 2018, I conducted a research group. The goal of the group was to **gather self-identified artists together to explore embodiment**. In my own artwork and personal journey, I was in a long and involved process of 'coming into' my body, knowing myself as body, and exploring what this meant to me. I was also curious about the **identity of 'artist'** and whether this could be a resource for this kind of **exploration**. We gathered as artists to explore what embodiment meant to us, using arts-based exploration and expressive arts structures in a multi week format.

What came out of this fascinated me. By the end of the group, it became palpably obvious that there was not only an individual body that we were each learning—our 'own' bodies—but **a group body**.¹⁸ And this group body had its own phenomenology. It had its own colour, essence, perfume, texture, elasticity, as

you describe above. The group body brought up material through one or more group members to be metabolized in the context of the **collective**, in this case through the artistic ritual structures we were **navigating**. This happened spontaneously and unplanned, as a result of our weekly explorations. I came to understand just a little bit more clearly what had been happening in earlier therapeutic groupwork I had attended¹⁹ where everyone's 'work' struck a chord in the room with each individual, no matter how personal and specific it seemed to be, and where there seemed to be an invisible hand or '**inner logic**'²⁰ **to the group healing process** beyond the orchestration of the facilitator or the impulses of the individual therapy clients.

My passion for this grew. I entered into a **long-term artistic collaboration**, as I mentioned above, to re-search this group phenomena directly.²¹

It is a hard thing for me to translate my experiences making this work into words in the context of this article. My work occupies a little bit of a different world than you are describing above, Alba, as this was a collaborative project, **funded by the Canada Council for the Arts and hosted by a public gallery**. We hired a group of artists, completing overlapping collaborations (which we navigated as 'aesthetic responses').²² So this project was squarely—at least on the surface—in the realm of the public arts, **not a therapeutic context** (despite the fact that **one of our intentions was personal and collective transformation**—I love your word, 'evolving'). It is my hope that these reflections might add to our dialogue.



Figure 11. Dancers, Gita Harris and Jess Glavina (both in British Columbia, Canada), moving in and around the *Migration Parade* sculptures built by the artist/author, Alexandra Goodall, and Danielle Savage (March 2022). Exhibited at The Penticton Art Gallery, British Columbia, CA. Photo by Kristen Brown (Montreal, Canada), from her film, *The Mirror of Others* (2022). Used with permission.

A huge thing for me was accepting my limitations about what I could and couldn't give in the process. There are places I am not solid enough to go. Rather than pushing myself, I learned to accept I was just not there yet and adjust the work to suit my very human limitations. Learning to adjust the expression of the artwork in reciprocity with my emotional needs and limits was a huge insight for me. **I came very close to being overwhelmed by the magnitude of what we encountered.**

There was a pivotal point in this work. The energy of the work was gaining momentum coming towards **exhibition time**. We had several collaborators creating their own pieces within the finished installation that Danielle and I were creating. Three weeks prior to installation, a huge well of fear and anxiety came up in us, manifesting as a conflict in our friend group. The intensity of the energy was overwhelming for both Danielle and I. The work was partially set up in our studio, but not put together in the space. It was only when we were able to start installing the work in the gallery that I was able to sleep again, and the anxiety subsided to a degree, replaced by emotional release of grief and a complexity of emotions. **This was so important for me to see.**

We asked a consultant in collective trauma²³ to work with us in a supervisory role for these weeks because we were so overwhelmed. She suggested that these collective energies were too much for Danielle and I to hold in our bodies. When the work was finally set up in the gallery space, however, the work did what it was made to do: Hold and channel the energy. From then on, the ritual space of the artwork became the holding space. The sculptures themselves were the container for the energies that were too large to touch, and the dancers danced in amongst them, protected by their resonance and **group coherence**. I am still digesting many pieces of this experience.

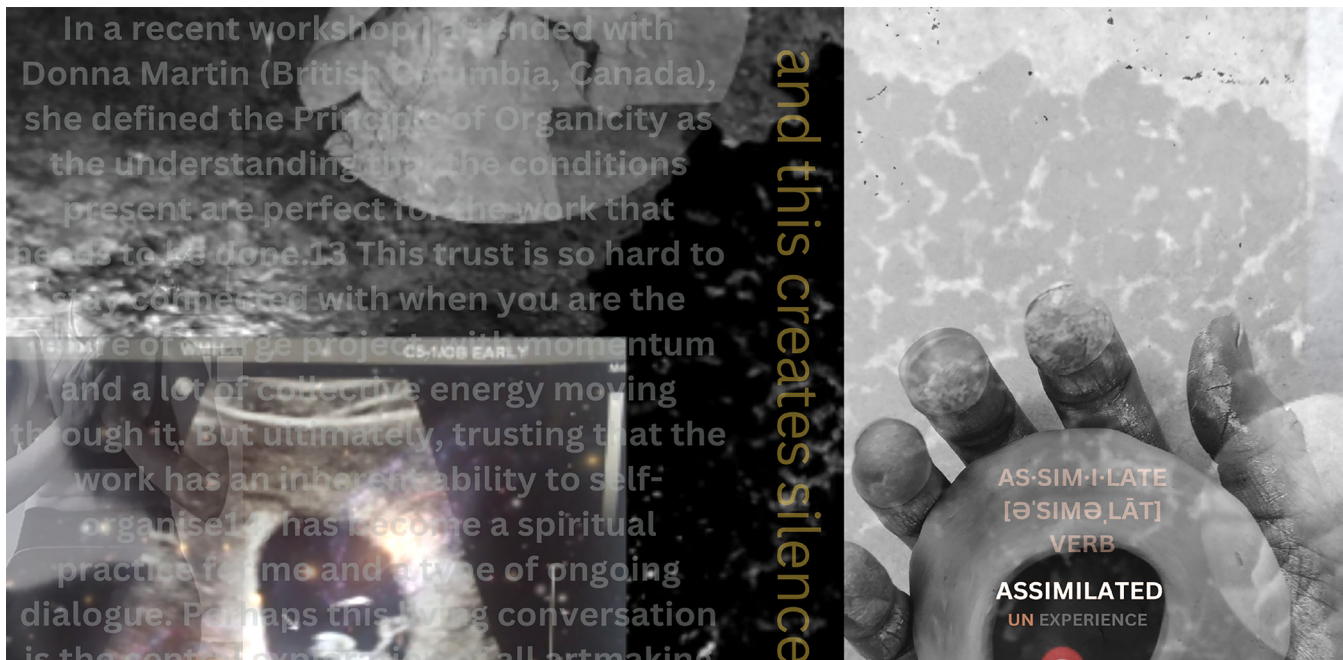


Figure 12. Fifth image in the series of digital photo/text art. *The Principle of Organicity: The conditions present are perfect for the work that needs to be done.*²⁴ Obscured text, not so much meant to be read, but absorbed. Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

Thursday, February 10, Tàrrega, Spain

Dear Alexandra,

Let me describe to you a situation from my life that feels relevant to our conversation. It just happened this morning.

Today, at the public mental health service, I started our warm-up playing some music and asking participants to move the body freely, stretching, mobilizing, with lively music. In the group of eight, two women have shown dance abilities over the course of our work together. I turned the music to Brazilian samba, tomorrow is Carnival, and all of the group danced, even if it was a few gestures.

One of the two women I mentioned, I am told, complains she cannot walk properly because of foot problems. By only the second session, I saw her showing no foot problem, and today she expressed a great samba choreography appearing as a samba queen :) Waw. It is not the first time that the social worker tells me some people react very differently in my sessions than in group psychotherapy sessions or other activities, as they are focused on **less complaining and a more proactive attitude**.

After that I suggested we make a “circle of emotions”, each of us would say an emotion or feeling and we would express it through the body. We already practiced this in our last session, so it was not new, and they took less time to warm up to it than in the previous session. We were doing “fluid sculptures”²⁵ and going back to a neutral and meditative position.

After two rounds in the “circle of emotions,” I invited the group to go and sit around the big table and share whatever came from the exercise. The group talked one by one, in no particular direction. The first feeling put into words was happiness. Second one was the strange feeling one gets when we change our emotional state fast, and I reflected on the fluid nature of emotions. The third, which was linked to this, was the position of being able to observe all the emotional movements: meditation. From this stepping back from the psyche, the next spoken word from another participant was “dissociation, not connecting to emotions,” and the question was:

When I step back, am I scared of my emotional connection to a scene or am I protecting myself?

The same person shared her story around this theme. Then everybody saw and reflected that her act was a protection. She expressed her feelings regarding bravery and weakness, re-evaluating the bravery of taking distance and self-care to protect herself, while at the same time, understanding the other people involved in the situation.

After these comments and reflections, the next person started to talk about suicide and her cowardice to live, and everybody reflected on their point of view regarding suicide. Every person in this group, seven people, has attempted it. At one point, one person in the group stood up and said he was leaving to smoke a cigarette. I was about to say, “No please,” and to ask, “Can you share how you feel?” but to my right there was the social assistant from the service that helps me with the group. She didn’t let me talk and gave him permission to go. I said (feeling shocked but also trusting her), “OK you are the boss now.” And she let me know the man has been near suicide in the last two weeks.

Ok, safe frame, safe containers, and a cigarette.

The group kind of understood; I opened the space for the others to express what they liked, but also suggested we could also close the talk and go to artmaking. A woman stood up and said she wanted to go outside to help him. I said "ok, but please come back soon," and she said, "Yes, only some puffs," and asked me not to take it as disrespect to me and the group.

I started to take out some new materials—tin foil paper—and laid long pieces on the table. I said they were welcome to keep on talking, but it could be good to find an end to words now. I said I would make some noise preparing. They kept talking until a natural end came.

The couple came back meanwhile.

By then everybody had six layers of tin foil paper to put on their faces to make a mold. We then created masks.

I got scared at one point. The point of the lure of pain. Of going in circles around talking on suicide. We were in a dark and painful imaginarius. We had descended there. **I needed to stop. Artmaking was the next phase. Changing point.**

Thursday, February 23rd, Okanagan, Canada

Dear Alba,

I am moved by your writing. Today I am thinking of your words, "Is it us driving this dialogue? Is it this frame that makes it possible? Is it a collective need to be explored?" There is an **electric center** to every creative 'spirit' that visits us. When I start a new work, I submit to a type of blindness. I see with eyes closed—with **tendrils that sense the 'nucleus' of the work**. I feel into the organizing factor, the first pulse that transforms stillness.

I circle around this sensation, in an almost amphibious way. I feel like a blind salamander with electric skin, sensing and moving closer to some form of heat. The subtlest shift in the water molecules.

I sense a path. I follow it. It is born, lives and dies. I keep moving, looking for the new path.

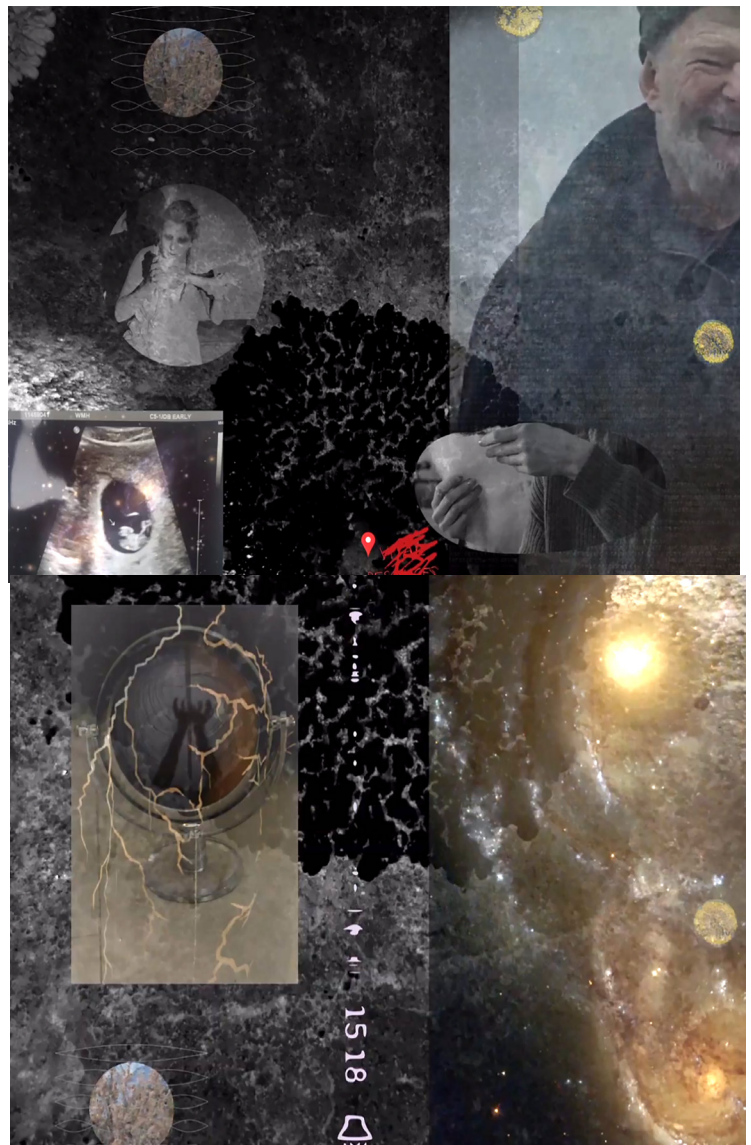
I can never stare directly at the organizing factor of the work because my perceptual apparatuses are not equipped to receive it. Instead, I circle. See it from new angles, but obliquely. Watch as themes break water and rise, then submerge, only to reappear six months later, or two years, or three days. Now a theme is not just a personal one but **is playing out in some relational dynamics around me—I suddenly see the connection. I notice another reflected in global news. My body registers another in physical discomfort or release**, in the quality of constant expansion and contraction. The themes—the stories—re-emerge as both fresh and new, as if I had never encountered them before, and at the same time as the most

intimate lovers, a knowing so familiar that sometimes even putting them into words feels like artificial distance. *Is this where the lure of pain resides, or is 'pain' just one of its masks? The imaginarius? The unspoken central myth of the group? Sometimes we cannot stare at it directly, so we circle.*

I needed to stop. Artmaking was the next phase. Changing point.

And then I remember to soften—this has played out so many times and each time I have to remind myself to do this. I open, soften my eyes, and acknowledge all the structures—language, concept, time, culture, discipline, and many more—that have regulated, organized, made digestible that which is too much. Those that have protected me, helped me to achieve things I never would have without them. They refine, mitigate, compassionately match the energy to my insignificance and emotional/sensorial/perceptual abilities.

Over time, I put the puzzle pieces together. I find language and concepts that hint at the experience, sit beside it rather than attempt to encapsulate it. Find supportive structures, acknowledging the ineffable. For reasons I am still specifically unclear about, I remain tentative where language and concepts are concerned. A sort of inborn mistrust of concepts in their ability to coerce, of language in its inaccurate and desperate attempt to pin down, make safe, control.



Figures 13 & 14. Two still images from the media piece entitled, *A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow*, sewn together to create a whole. I am moved by Deborah Hay's words, "I remember sitting at the side of my father's bed as he was dying. His hands were pressed together and tucked under his cheek, forming a pillow for his head. There was a moment when I thought I saw him choose not to hold up the flesh of his face anymore" (Italics from original text, Hay, 1997, p. 3). Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

Saturday, February 25th, Tàrrega, Spain

Dear Alexandra,

While reading your letter I remembered some of my artwork from my training in Expressive Arts. It resonates for me on the level of inner dynamics in a group and on many other themes in your last text.

This egg-box is the cover of a booklet in which I reflected on my learnings. I made six of these egg-box-booklets. Each one reflects a learning module from my post-master's year in Expressive Arts at Instituto de Arteterapia Transdisciplinaria de Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain, 2010-2011). I have selected two inner pages to share from the first booklet.



Figure 15. *The egg-box*. Meanings: The opening up to a group work, an opening up to each individual life, what will we cook together? Cathartic opening. Open & close the box, the group, the content and the container. Alba Torres Robinat (2011). Photograph courtesy of the artist.



Figure 16. *Supervision booklet*. Each small circle represents a person in a group, but when you turn the page, the colours that appeared before in each empty-cut circle belong to a big organic form that conforms to an inner logic of togetherness. Alba Torres Robinat (2011). Photograph courtesy of the artist.

It resonated for me when I read your words: “Everyone’s ‘work’ struck a chord in the room with each individual, no matter how personal and specific it seemed to be, and where there seemed to be an invisible hand or ‘inner logic’ to the group healing process beyond the orchestration of the facilitator or the impulses of the individual therapy clients.”

I would like to deepen our discussion around this point. In my experience, my role as a facilitator is to follow a facilitation structure wherein participants can mobilize their own healthy inner logic. This is a sensorial perception too. Inner logic, inner dynamics, inner perception to serve a process of healing. This is also called salutogenesis process.²⁶ Directing this towards what needs to be attended to, so we create the best response, the best meaning, rich, profound, belonging response.

But besides this, you are pointing to an independent inner logic, as if it has nothing to do with the facilitator or clients. I think this is not possible :) but maybe you are referring to unconscious forces in the unconscious collective, and as unconscious ones we may never know the mystery; we will remain blind to them. But between the most mysterious ones, the not accessible ones... to the most conscious ones, there is a ladder. There are steps of consciousness. The good facilitator or Expressive Arts therapist, I believe, is the one who works at the beach where the water of the unconscious reaches the sand, the consciousness.

I strongly prefer attending to and working on my own individual unconscious as much as possible before the group one. The inner individual work of the therapist should be the basis of our work with any collective. However, how can we be ready for everything?

I remember now my experience with a group of women **suffering from domestic violence**, in the public social service. The safety of the frame was very important because most of them were suffering current high violence in their house from their husbands or even their sons. Some of them were facing judicial complaints; some of them were there secretly. We started by creating an altar with **personal objects** I had asked them to bring. The intention was to focus on their **identity, self-value, resources, belonging**. From this altar, I asked them to share their stories related to the object. There were ten women in this group, some from sub-Saharan Africa, some from North Africa, some from Latin America, some from Spain, some from Eastern Europe. Some only spoke Arab and some were translating. I set the tempo and the dynamic for the spoken word, the frame.

A terrible **force of sharing** started to develop, filled with suffering. The group started to interact with responses and support. Terrible stories came up. The most terrible ones, one after the other. I was terrified. If it were up to “me,” I would have stopped all that speech.

I wasn't able to listen to all that terror.

I wasn't able to listen to the story of the current sexual abuse in the family of one of the women in the group, to her little daughters. **But I was there and this was my task and I was ready to learn and evolve in my role.**



Figure 17. Still image from the media piece entitled, *A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow*. Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

We transferred the talk into writing words and playing with colours on the altar, then into bodywork—from massage, to everyday movement choreographies, to dance. I also prepared a thick paper, folded like a small accordion, where they would draw themselves at one end of the paper as they see themselves in that moment. At the other end, I prompted them to draw an image of themselves in a better place, evolving into a better situation. **I activated hope through imagination. I invited them to draw their way from one end to the other**, also using words and writing if they wished. After the session I asked the social worker to attend to the **urgent social aid and legal steps** needed by the women, **and the lack of economic resources**.

Very soon, a very strong sense of support developed in this group, as they shared resources, and felt understood.

As I noticed this strong inner support and salutogenic dynamic developed in the group, I realized **I could step back from the group** when they entered into these intense terror stories. I learned to take an inner step back, as if I wasn't listening to everything, kind of blurring my listening, while feeling the group itself. It was a great container and it was doing the healing work by itself at this point. Then **my soul could release and have perspective in regard to our work**. It was so beneficial for them to have this talking and sharing space. When everything was said, **when the most poisonous thing was put into words, we could move towards** other languages and other landscapes.

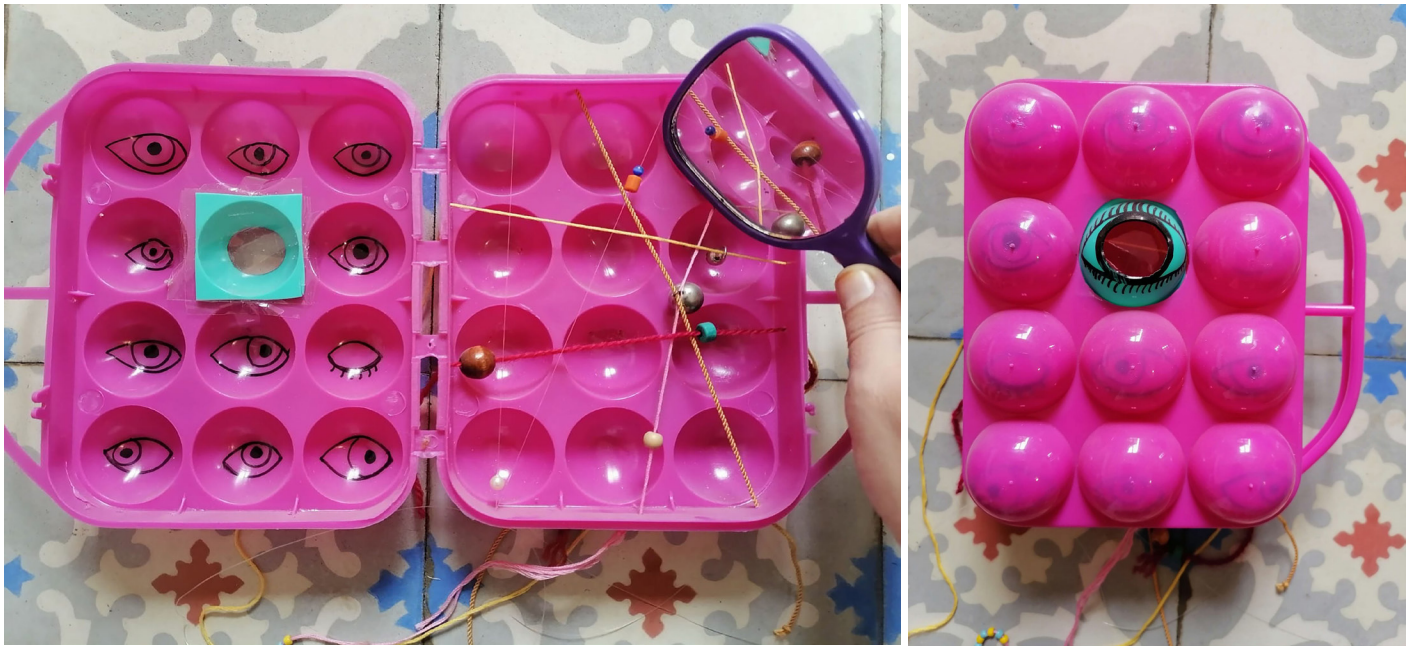
The work lasted four sessions, each had two hours of intensive work. We ended the process with a very rich performance. One by one, those brave women would embody and perform their paper accordion artwork of evolution. It was such a transformative experience. In front of my eyes, I saw those rigid and painful bodies, hidden in veils and trapped in violence, evolving to a greater place of freedom and force. **The inner path was there, visible and embodied. The work was a reminder, a light.** The group was a big force.

They created a whatsapp support group from their initiative. And they asked me to continue after those four sessions. This was December 2021. **Continuation didn't happen, but I hope they are still in touch through the whatsapp group frame :)**

The following is a collective poem from those sessions, published on social networks in Spanish and translated into English:

"Juntas nos enlazamos mas fuerte a la vida. Compartimos nuestro trayecto vital. Nos apoyamos en la reconstrucción de nuestra seguridad y nos permitimos volver a regar el jardín de los propios sueños." Taller art-terapia amb dones que pateixen violència domèstica, a SIAD BALAGUER. 25N 2021. SIAD Servei d'Informació i Atenció a les Dones @siadnoguera #arteterapia #noviolencia

"Together we bond more strongly to life. We share our vital journey. We support each other in rebuilding our security and we allow ourselves to return to take care of the garden of our own dreams." Art-therapy workshop with women who suffer domestic violence, in SIAD BALAGUER. 25N 2021 SIAD Service of Information and Assistance to Women @siadnoguera #artherapy #noviolence [Spanish to English translation by Alba Torres Robinat]



Figures 18 & 19. *The 5th egg-box* : From the monocular point of view of the phenomena to the multi-ocula points of view and its reflections, all in the same container. Alba Torres Robinat (2011). Photograph courtesy of the artist author.

By the way, thanks a lot for your sensitive way of expressing your inner perception of approaching nuclear forces in a group process. You describe it as the *“organizing factor, the first pulse that transforms stillness.”* Organising factor... could be the title of a whole book? You say you *“feel into it”* and *“you can’t look at it directly.”* You also describe it as *“The unspoken central myth of the group.”* And after connecting to it, it starts to appear in other dimensions, randomly presented: Encounters, news... within oneself.

Mmmmm... This makes me think of something that has happened several times to me: I get sick after getting so close to the trauma of others. Then I work on myself, I go deeper into my trauma related stories, crossing layers, as I integrate and refresh aspects of myself and gain new abilities. Helping myself in this way I get the ability or the key to help the group or person attend. Even though it is a deep move in me, it is usually a fast move. This way of working reminds me of the archetype of *“The wounded healer: Chiron.”* Sometimes, as a therapist, I am possessed by this archetype. I reflect on collective trauma and on the *“healer,”* facilitator, Expressive Arts therapist, artist, as all a part of this. I think one of the responsibilities of the *“healer”* to work on the reflection of the attended *“trauma”* within oneself. I always evolve by facilitating all groups and individuals.

Again, I thank you for your last text. It awakens a sensing in me, a new perception of my surroundings as an amphibious creature :)

Friday, March 10th, Okanagan, Canada

Dear Alba,

It has taken me a few days to sit with and process what you have written here, as it taps into many tendrils of experience for me.

I love having this glimpse into your artistic journals: how you can peek through the layers of pages and uncover something large and sprawling and technicolour. And what a fascinating way to **digest the group experience** in your training group. It inspires me to want to try something similar myself!

When I worked with Paolo Knill, one of the founders of Expressive Arts Therapy, as a student at EGS, I fell in love with his prompts and references to **self-organisation in groups**. It became a major exploration of mine to learn: **What are the ingredients that best support our natural self-organisation towards a state of vitality or life**, not just in groups, but in an artistic work itself? Perhaps it is one of the central explorations in my artwork up until this point.



Figure 20. Still image from the media piece entitled, *A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow*. Iba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artists.

In terms of an “independent inner logic,” I wonder if what you are picking up on here is a habit I have of externalizing phenomena as an artistic approach to creative process. I have a tendency to **externalize** in my artwork, largely because I love how that creates a situation of dialogue for me in regard to the work. My work is highly devotional, and I find if I use the function of externalizing elements, in my experience, I can then **be in devotional relationship** to it through my creative process. It is one of the ways I’ve learned to mobilize my natural capacity for **awe and reverence in the making of a work**, helping me to connect with creative process as a **spiritual practice**. Yet, I recognize this is more my aesthetic decision than my belief about what is true regarding collective experience (if it is possible to pin down a truth). I would agree that this space we are circling around, describing, and exploring does exist everywhere, in facilitators, clients, the work and everywhere else.

Thank you for commenting on this, as it causes me to remember something intrinsic that I often take for granted about how I work, and it is beautiful to be more conscious of this, to be reminded of what is both important and eccentric, perhaps.

I have also been very impacted by the feeling of others' trauma, though I don't think I have become sick yet. Although I do know I am very idiosyncratic about how I practice as a therapist, to keep myself healthy and clear enough to be able to move in and out of those experiences with others. For instance, I am very sensitive to buildings, the feeling of shared spaces and rooms, as well as furniture (the feeling it carries) etc. **I have found that working online**, in a situation where I control the room and the feeling of the space I am in, resolves this problem of certain buildings with very distracting sensations.

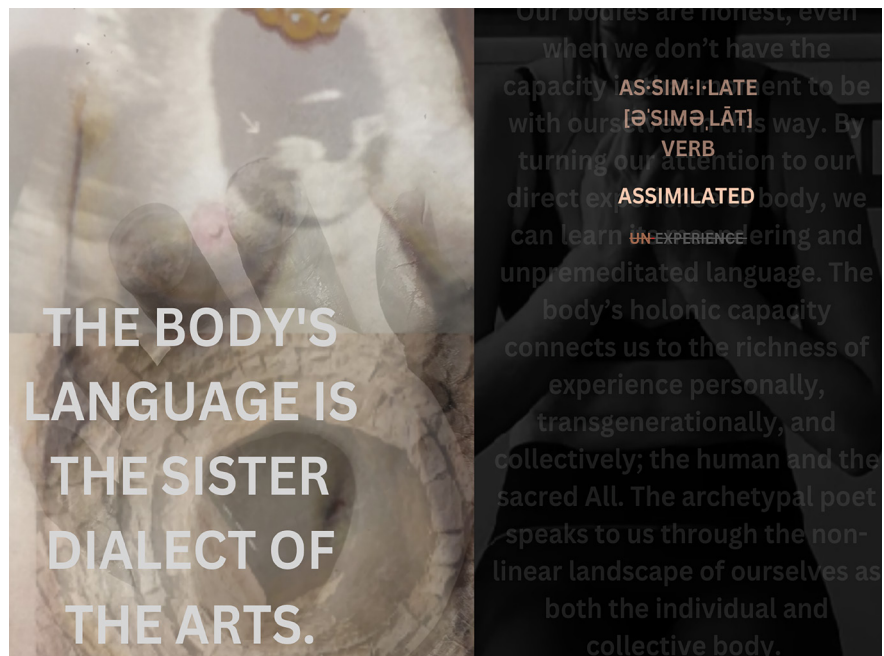


Figure 21. Sixth image in the series of digital photo/text art. Text reads, “The body’s language is the sister dialect of the arts” and “Assimilated. Unexperience.” As well as obscured and layered personal writings. Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artist.

As I write this, I wonder if this is why I enjoy working in textile installation specifically. The way I express this artform revolves around large textile objects in a room, usually a gallery space. I like to feel the hidden sensations, all the interactions that happen in the air around the objects, all the feelings the objects can emit into that negative space in the room. The space in the room is as present and tended as the sculptural elements and the walls themselves. So, I get to really tend that invisible space in my work—no wonder I am very sensitive to it in regular life!

This work with the 10 women you describe; How challenging and transformative it sounds. You describe a “terrible force of sharing.” I have seen this force in groups, and it terrifies me also. I have so much ad-

miration for your courage in that moment to stay with the group as it purged this and metabolized it into something new.

When you say, "I realised I could step back from the group when they entered these intense terror stories. I learned to take an inner step back, as if I wasn't listening to everything, kind of blurring my listening, while feeling the group itself," this is such great learning for me. I will try this next time that happens. Thank you.

Saturday, March 17, Spain and Canada

ATR: We are here together online, Alexandra and I, just coming from exchanging through zoom, viewing ourselves on the screen, checking in, and figuring out how to get to the end of this article. So, we are going to finish in a written on-line dialogue.

AKG: We've been talking about how relationships can be inexplicably built online. A collective space develops, even over writing in a shared document like this, and even over many miles, in different countries. It is a tangible collective relational space.

ATR: Alexandra... :) Yes, it is tangible because the imaginable space is sensorial, and I feel it.

AKG: Yes! I love how sensorial it is. And I love that you are calling it imaginable. That the relational exists in the realm of the imaginal as well as other realms. That is so beautiful.

ATR: It has been a big pleasure to be in touch with you for these two months in a weekly written dialogue back and forth. From one week to the other, the quality of our thread discussion has been weaving my daily experiences from time to time, connecting things, and making me take perspective.

AKG: I have had a similar experience, Alba. I would even say that there has been a healing in this for me. A few months ago I wrote in a journal that I wanted to re-find the place that my art was a contribution again - I felt that I had lost this. I think, after that last large project, I was having a hard time connecting with *my* reason for being an artist, or engaging in creative process. *And through writing with you each week, revisiting what is most important, I have come into myself again, away from the group field that I was inhabiting in that earlier work, into an incubating space here that has reminded me what I value most.* But I wasn't able to do this alone before—I love that it happened through relationship again. It was our dialogue that unlocked this for me.

ATR: Alexandra, you only have ten minutes left, right? :)

AKG: Yes, but maybe I can go until 10 past... so we can have 20 minutes? I will run after that :)

ATR: Great! I didn't understand this sentence that I highlighted above in blue.

AKG: Ah yes, it is not clear. What I mean is, there was a group relational field to that artwork that I engaged in last year made up of all the collaborators and the spirit of the work itself. And I think I merge

in with it and couldn't feel myself and my reasons for being an artist and this writing has helped me to refine myself again after that feeling of being spread out—splattered in a way—in a group momentum. Which is interesting to reflect on. Only coming into words for me now. Does that make sense?

ATR: Ah, you mean you lost yourself in the group?

AKG: Yes, I think so. It is just coming to me now. I hadn't realized until writing now that I think this is what happened. And I've been trying to get myself out of that group field again since, through trying to understand all the psychic levels that were present. And I feel like I'm finally landing in the present.

ATR: Bravo, welcome back! :) We met for the first time and decided to talk at an EGS summer school presentation called DANCING WITH REVENANTS: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND CREATIVE SUBJECTIVITY. I remember recalling this last part: creative subjectivity, subjectivity as a quality derived from the process of INDIVIDUATION.²⁷ But it is fun because while we both love to explore the collective, we cannot miss individuation. Right?

AKG: Yes :) Exactly.

ATR: Changing tracks... From our first question, where are we as artists? I can add that finally my performance on dreams called “IGNOTA PELL” meaning “UNKNOWN SKIN” has been accepted to be supported by the Town Council. I got this news last Friday. I am very happy to share my art with the collective of my town in a public art space. And the greatest news... I will be able to perform underground as I dreamed. I've got the acceptance to perform inside the old ice well of the town, is it not exciting?

AKG: This is wonderful news! Congratulations!! Is it meaningful to share this work in your town specifically, as opposed to a different area?

ATR: Good question. I have a special feeling for the piece of land where I was born, even though I feel so connected to the world at large. Here are my first roots, here is where I work as an Expressive Arts Therapist in several “mental health” services, and here is a big part of my born family. My performance is a sharing of personal dreams: Night dreams while I was doing my last three-month anthropological Expressive Arts research trip in Burkina Faso, West Africa, that I mentioned to you at the beginning of our conversation. I embody the dreams that touch more clearly collective issues. There are several born place scenarios and some African scenarios in the dreams. Performing in my town; It is a feeling of getting out of my egg :)

AKG: You are hatching out, again, in your town... for the second time since your birth?

ATR: hahahahah :) I am an egg-box, so I am born many times! hahaha

AKG: Me too haha
Hahahaha good ending
Sure!!!! Haha love that

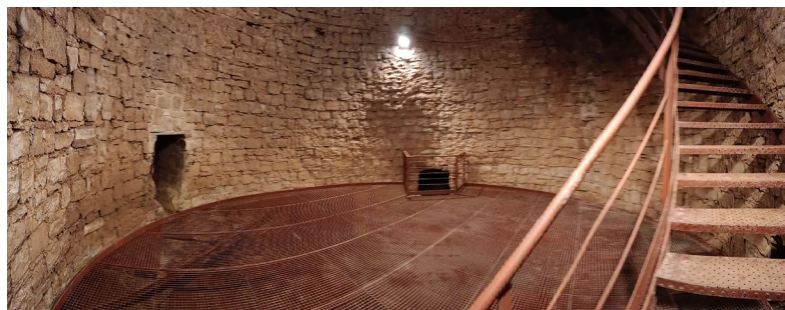


Figure 22. Interior of the public ice well of my town, Tàrrega, Spain, where I will probably perform. Photo by Alba Torres Robinat (2023). Courtesy of the artist.

A World: A Map || A Pam: A Dlow

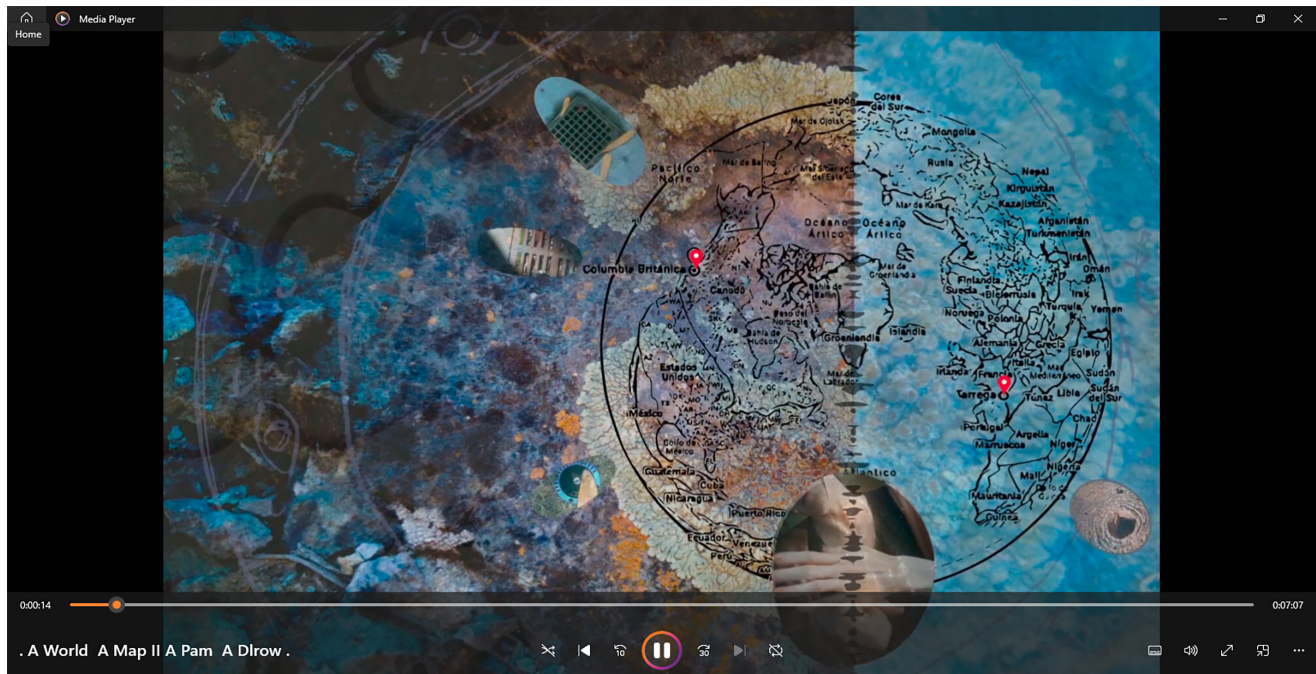


Figure 23. *A World: A Map || A Pam: A Dlow* is a digital media piece created by Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall in the summer of 2023. It is an Aesthetic Response to our written dialogue.

A World: A Map || A Pam: A Dlow was a creative way to reflect on the textures and images that unfolded through our written conversation and to illuminate further themes and subtexts. The work holds inti-mate experiences and feelings that cannot be expressed in words. All images have been shaped by both artists. The title was created by playing with mirror images and words.

In particular, a theme in this piece is artmaking as a way to shape oneself. In the field of Expressive Arts, we call this process *Auto-pioeisis*. Poiesis is etymologically derived from the ancient Greek term ποιεῖν, which means to make (DECEL dictionary). “Poiesis is the creative act and also the act in which we affirm our identity and humanity” (Levine, 2005, back cover). The concept of Auto-pioeisis is the act of responding to one-self, the act of self-creation. This concept was first created by the Chilean biologist and philosopher Humberto Maturana and states that every living being is a closed system that is continually creating itself, so that in turn it is repairing itself, maintaining itself, and modifying itself (Maturana & Varela, 1972).

In the process of writing back and forth in this article, we bolded and adjusted the sizes of key words and phrases as we were writing. This helped us to see the static language of uniform typeface in a word document as visual art. In visual art we can play with intensity and proportion to research and express the heart of our inquiry. It was our intention in the article to orient to typed words not just as communication tools, but as visual marks.

From here, we gathered these words, phrases, and sentences into a new document. We used this as a beginning point for the digital media piece, *A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow*, which was collaboratively created through the program Canva. Canva allowed us to work fluidly with various media files—images, text, drawings, vectors, photos, and videos - together at the same time, while being across the world. In some scenes, the words remained as part of the final composition. In others, the words became less important to the work's expression and were removed and replaced by other media.

A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow is organized into nine 'scenes.' We experience them as a revelation, a type of archetypal journey, an encounter with forces and instincts, and especially with the drives of protection and innocence within us. We hold these forces close as we simultaneously encounter death, rebirth, collective trauma, and loss.

The media is a mix of personal photos and symbols, new drawing/writing/photography/video, documentation of our own prior artistic works, as well as works from the public domain.

Finally, we moved fluidly through the piece brainstorming new words together and installing them in the program in the form of side notes.

Alba then read these notes aloud, improvising on them to create a verbal poem. We overlaid this over the nine scenes of the work to create the completed piece. To close our conversation we share this digital media piece (please click [here](#)).



Figure 24. Still image from the media piece entitled, *A World: A Map || A Pam: A Drow*, Alba Torres Robinat and Alexandra Goodall (2023). Courtesy of the artist. Text reads: "Inside. The Fool. Protect the Innocent".

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Endnotes

- ¹ One of the foundations of our encounter here is a practice of phenomenological inquiry, one that asserts that “the world is first and foremost what is given to me through my senses ...The results of phenomenological inquiry are thus to re-insert the subject into the sensible world and to open up this world as accessible to conscious awareness. Experience, far from being despised as deception, appears now as the foundation for all knowledge” (Levine & Levine, 2005 pp. 22-23).

² Later in this article we include a link to the media piece and a more extensive discussion of our process. The title is derived from playing with words in mirror image. See: <https://vimeo.com/898475934>

³ Performance Art: Definition. [CAT] ART PERFORMANCE: Acte dramàtic en format experimental a partir de material autobiogràfic de l'artista. L'expressió creativa i sensible del propi cos es desplega en una obra d'art efimera, sense "distància de seguretat" a mb el públic. [ENG] PERFORMANCE ART: Dramatic act in an experimental format based on the artist's autobiographical material. The creative and sensitive expression of one's own body unfolds in an ephemeral work of art, without a "safe distance" from and with the audience. This definition has been created by Roser Maestu, a performance artist born in 1951, Spain, and myself (Translation from Spanish to English by Alba Torres Robinat). In November 2022, we came together to discuss the tradition of performance art and our own experiences, and found our definition based on our discussions.

⁴ "Expressive Arts Therapy has been linked to the traditions and cultural precedents of world healing practices because they frequently involve the integration of all the arts (McNiff, 2009) ... Therapists working from an expressive arts therapy or intermodal approach have a variety of theoretical stances ... that guides their understanding and frames the process of therapy ... The basic premise is that expressive arts experiences—visual art, music, dance, and drama—allow people to explore unknown facets of themselves, communicate nonverbally, and achieve insight" (Malchiodi, 2012, p. 130). Some of the theoretical stances drink from psychological traditions. Thus, for example, we have Freudian, Jungian, and Humanistic approaches. ..." (Gysin & Sorín, 2011, p. 27). But it is an open field, and each expressive arts therapist has a different background. However, our common approach is that "Expressive Arts Therapy places the process of art-making and the art work itself at the center" (Knill, 2005, back cover).

⁵ Electro-acoustic sound artist and composer, Danielle Savage (British Columbia, Canada).

⁶ Alba and I spent some time discussing our definition and use of *intergenerational* (as opposed to transgenerational or ancestral etc). We eventually decided to define *Ancestral* as referring to individuals in our genetic family line, and *Intergenerational* as the interaction and relationship between the generations of those ancestors; the memory, information and wisdom that is passed in and between us. I am aware that different disciplines use these terms in different ways. In this article, we are happy defining it in a general context (and sometimes use "intergenerational" and "transgenerational" interchangeably). Thomas Hubl, in speaking about Intergenerational *Trauma*—a topic highly relevant to our conversation here—speaks to this phenomena of intergenerational transmission:

In a general context, intergenerational trauma (also referred to by scholars as transgenerational, multigenerational, or cross-generational trauma) refers to the effects of serious, untreated trauma that has been experienced by one or more members of a family, group, or community and has passed down from one generation to the next through epigenetic factors ... (Hubl, 2020, p. 66)

Whether we understand this communication as an epigenetic phenomenon or from a different paradigm, there is a lived experience of continuity that can be felt with our ancestral line. This is what I am referring to as "intergenerational experience."

⁷ *Soulbody* is the translation of the Spanish word *cuerpalma*. This is the word and concept used in my Expressive Arts Therapy foundation training, at IATBA, Institute of Art-Therapy Barcelona. *Soulbody* is referred in the foundational book of IATBA as follows, by one of the two founders of the school, Mónica Sorín: "... as Ana Isabel Crespo affirms, following Spinoza, strictly speaking we should say *soulbody*. 'Soul and body are a single thing, which is conceived, either under the attribute of thought, or under that of extension' (Spinoza, 2000, p. 98), as Baruch Spinoza told us in his *Ethics demonstrated according to the geometric order*" (Gysin & Sorín, 2011, p. 67). (Translation from Spanish to English by Alba Torres Robinat)

One of the meanings of the word soul in *soulbody* that I refer to is the one defined by Jung as, "the totality of all psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious," from the on-line book Jung Lexicon (Sharp, 1991, website). In *soulbody*, soul, as conscious and unconscious psychological processes, is merged with the vibrant body, as a whole living concept. I would also like to trace this living aspect of the soul related to the body through the following summed up etymological research starting from my mother tongue: Catalan.

In Catalan, the word *soul* is translated as *ànima*, so close to the Latin word *anima*. The etymological meaning of the Latin word *anima*, comes from the greek word *anemos* (ἄνεμος) and it is translated as wind that possibly comes from sanskrit word *anitis* and it is translated as *air*, by renowned Chilean etymology dictionary DECEL (Anders, 2001). Etymologically psyche is related to the verb *psykhein*, that in Latin means to *blow*, to *breath*. In sum, I will sometimes use the word *soulbody* to refer to the totality of all psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious, in a living body, in a breathing body.

⁸ *Spirit technologies* is a concept used by Malidoma Some (Sobonfu's husband) in his book named *Healing wisdom of indigenous Africa*. He refers to it as tools to enable individuals to live more peaceful and empowered lives (Somé, 1999).

⁹ The most famous reference of this "Dead are not dead" concept in West Africa can be found in the poetry of Senegalese poet and story-teller Birogo Diop, who recorded traditional oral folktales of the Wolof people.

¹⁰ Clara Valverde Gefaell's work informed my first performance artwork on transgenerational national trauma from the Spanish civil war. In this work, I addressed how this impacted the two generations before me in my family. She is a Spanish writer who specialized in Biopolitics. In her book "Desenterrar las palabras," which translates to "Dig up the words," she refers to trauma as an unassimilated experience that cannot be symbolized or put into words, an experience that could not have been language and remains encapsulated, inaccessible, within the unconscious of the person, and this creates silence (Valverde, 2014).

¹¹ It is hard for me to go into detail here on how I came to this orientation around creativity and my artwork as the subject is far too large. Certainly, it is influenced by experiences working in galleries, exhibiting, and doing research through a sustained studio practice. In general, I tend to experience my creative impulse as erotic—not sexual—something I call *life erotic*, which is much larger than sexual. Because of this, I turned to the sexology community to understand more regarding how creative process and fundamental creative impulse works. Esther Perel, Belgian Psychotherapist, defines eroticism as "not sex per se, but the qualities of vitality, curiosity, and spontaneity that make us feel alive" (Perel, 2020, para.1), and offers that "the central agent of the erotic act is our creativity, our imagination, or ability to renew, our ability to anticipate" (Perel, 2014, para. 3). American sex therapist, Jack Morin, describes eroticism as having "irrational power ... a contradictory, dual-edged nature" and champions a "paradoxical perspective [that] recognises the joys of eros without denying its intricacies and risks" (Morin, 1995, p. 6).

¹² These thoughts were nagging at me for years. I found language and greater context for them through conversations, between 2020 and 2023, around the responsibilities inherent in various roles within power dynamic structures in kink, and how this relates to creativity and art, with Orpheus Black (Los Angeles, USA), who is a Sex Educator specializing in erotic power dynamics and kink.

¹³ I also wonder if the particular way this plays out from artist to artist is part of a larger **trauma field** or 'collective shadow' surrounding the profession **of the Artist itself**. This perspective regarding professional collective fields comes from body psychotherapist and family constellations teacher, Nir Esterman (Israel). He developed a therapeutic modality called Collective Shadow Constellations drawing on the work of Carl Jung and Bert Hellinger. He believes that professions like therapist, healer, doctor, lawyer, sex worker, labourer (my examples) etc. have their own **professional shadow field** that one enters into when one identifies with that particular profession. This is **absorbed unconsciously from the culture**, family of origin, and through the training/mentorship process and practice itself—the collective field of the profession. He shared the above in a training I attended in 2022 and gave me permission to mention it here. He also added that he was fairly certain he didn't invent the idea, but I was welcome to present his framing of it (above).

¹⁴ Again, Jack Morin's (1995) words come to mind:

Many find it discomfiting to tolerate the ambiguity of the erotic experience, to accept its mixed motivations, or to observe how the erotic mind has a habit of transforming one idea or emotion into another. And yet, if we fail to come to terms with the fundamentally paradoxical nature of eroticism, we set the stage for its negative aspects to appear more frighteningly destructive. (p. 6)

¹⁵ Arthur Rosengarten describes magic as "the excitement and awe one feels in the living presence of mystery, discovery, change and wisdom" (Rosengarten, 2000, p. 107) I would add that I experience it as inherently relational, and co-creative—both with other humans and with All that Is.

¹⁶ I question if *safety* in its purest form is ever possible. Orpheus Black, coming from the perspective of kink and BDSM, says that we can never create true safety, only "Safety Theater." *Safety theater* gets as close as possible to the ideal of safety, while acknowledging that in life—and many of the activities we choose to undertake as part of it—safety can never be guaranteed. We can only create a consensual situation and structure our interactions to come as close to it as possible (From conversations between 2020 and 2023).

¹⁷ Conversation with Dr. Laura Calderon De La Barca (Mexico City, Mexico). I can't possibly remember the year, but I would venture a guess at 12 years ago?

¹⁸ Janet Adler (1995), the founder of Authentic Movement, mentions something similar:

Beneath the 'knowing'... is another subtle knowing. Though direct experience of the numinous happens within my body, causing me to perceive life in a completely new way, it is not about me, It is not mine. My body is a conduit for energy destined for the collective body (p. xiii).

¹⁹ I am thinking of the process groups of Robert Augustus Masters Ph.D. (Ashland, USA) here, which I attended as a therapy client many years ago and were particularly formative for me.

²⁰ A phrase from dance artist and choreographer, Charlie Prince (Montreal, Canada), from a conversation we had regarding his movement piece, *Migration Parade: Helical Song* (2022).

²¹ *Migration Parade* (Goodall & Savage, 2022).

²² In the field of Expressive Arts, *Aesthetic Response* “refers to a distinct response, with a bodily origin, to an occurrence in the imagination, to an artistic act, or to the perception of an artwork” (Knill, Barba & Fuchs 2004, p. 71). It is the act of responding to the experience of an artwork or aesthetic expression with another artwork or aesthetic expression. It is a conversational-response in the language of the arts (Goodall, 2019, p. 14).

²³ Laura Calderon de la Barca (PhD) kindly agreed to work with Danielle and I in the form of zoom sessions.

²⁴ As described by Donna Martin (Hakomi lineage holder) in a mentorship session in Penticton, British Columbia (2022). Hakomi is a body-centred psychotherapy that offers the orientation of ‘mindfully-assisted self-discovery,’ originally developed by Ron Kurtz.

²⁵ Concept from *Playback Theatre*, developed in the 1970’s by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in New York.

²⁶ *Salutogenesis* focuses on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease (pathogenesis). A concept explained in my basic ExA training in IATBA Barcelona, from the teacher, expressive arts therapist and designer of the “Affoltern Model” in Affoltern Hospital (Switzerland) Annina Hess-Cabalazar. She and Christian Hess explain it in her book, “Human Medicine.” In the Spanish version of the book they refer to it saying: “Esto daría lugar no sólo a enfoques terapéuticos contra algo, sino también a enfoques que fomentarían los potenciales “sanadores” de la propia persona enferma,” which in English translates to, “This would give place not only to therapeutic approaches against something, but also to approaches that would foster the “healing” potentials of the sick person themselves” (Hess & Hess-Cabalazar, 2008, p. 28). (Translated from Spanish to English by Alba Torres Robinat)

²⁷ Individuation is defined in Jung Lexicon as “a process of psychological differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality ... Thus individuation involves an increasing awareness of one's unique psychological reality, including personal strengths and limitations, and at the same time a deeper appreciation of humanity in general” (Sharp, 1991, para. 757).

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Borders and Bridges in Virtual Work: Between Real and Imaginary

Valeria Rocío Gonzales González Cueva
Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

Abstract

This article discusses our reflections on how to holistically integrate reality embodied in virtual workspaces—what we perceive within our work and interaction with technology—and highlights the importance of documenting our exploration in times while Artificial Intelligence is developing. Our approach is divided into three parts: the boundaries and bridges between the real and the imaginary, the possibilities of existence and non-existence offered by technology, and the experiences of expressive arts practitioners within virtuality.

Resumen

Este artículo habla de nuestras reflexiones sobre cómo integrar de forma holística la realidad encarnada en los espacios de trabajo virtuales, lo que percibimos dentro de nuestro trabajo e interacción con la tecnología y resaltar la importancia de documentar nuestra exploración en tiempos en los que se desarrolla la Inteligencia Artificial. Nuestra aproximación se divide en tres partes: los límites y puentes entre lo real y lo imaginario, las posibilidades de existencia y no existencia que ofrece la tecnología y experiencias de los profesionales de las artes expresivas dentro de la virtualidad.

Bios

Valeria Rocío Gonzales González Cueva, M.A., Peruvian living in Lille, France. She speaks Spanish, English and French. Valeria is a dancer who dances in unconventional spaces. She is an Expressive Arts Therapist, Coach, Educator, and Dance Researcher. Her experience crosses corporate social responsibility, project management, and human development to facilitate communication within technical teams and intercultural spaces. Currently, she does research on how the concepts of reciprocity, commitment, and complementarity of the "Minka", ancestral knowledge of the Andes, can work for collaborative choreographic creation and education in dance. valeria.gonzalesgc@gmail.com | www.valerigonzales.com

Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi, M.A., is an American-Israeli artist, academic editor, and entrepreneur living in Switzerland and Italy. She is a native English speaker, fluent in Hebrew, proficient in Spanish, and a beginner in German and Italian. In her master's thesis in the Arts, Health, and Society Division of the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, she researched how our embodied-imaginal relationships with objecthood inform our interact-

ions with natural and artificial environments, cultural storytelling and conflicts, theoretical physics and technological invention. She is the founder of ImaginGeist, a nonprofit start-up based in Switzerland launching an interactive platform to explore creative approaches to global issues through participatory arts-based research and content creation. carmiella.zorzi@egs.edu | www.carmiella.com



This article is an *experimental* conversation, a personal approach that plays between time and space, imagination and reality, and weaves together the research realities of both article writers. When we talk about research, we are referring to the reality of our daily work; both of us using virtuality as a working medium, from different approaches. Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi is an artist researcher and entrepreneur. Her work is based on creating virtual and interactive spaces that promote creative approaches to global problems through arts-based dialogue and Valeria Gonzales is an artist researcher and project manager. Her work crosses interdisciplinary virtual and face-to-face spaces through dance education, social responsibility and research on ancestral knowledge of the Americas.

Our interest is to reflect on holistically integrating embodied reality into virtual workspaces for maintaining well-being in the Expressive Arts and Technology (EXA) practices. To show the connections between our interests, we have divided our approach into three parts: borders and bridges between the real and the imaginary, possibilities of existence and non-existence offered by technology, and experiences around EXA.

Part of this article theme emerged during the 2022 European Graduate School (EGS) Alumni Festival that was divided into presentations and working sessions. We gave presentations about their EXA and Technology practices. During the presentations Valeria discussed her findings as a Project Management Professional expert in Interdisciplinarity, especially in her EXA work with the IBM Corporate Service Corps (CSC) program in Perú and Argentina. During the working sessions Carmiella spoke about the evolution of ImaginGeist, a nonprofit start-up based in Switzerland, that she founded in 2020 to launch an interactive platform for exploring creative approaches to global issues through participatory arts-based research and content creation.

This was a hybrid working session co-facilitated by us and we named it: “Bright E-ffective Futures: Art, Technology, and Soulful Virtual Structuring.” The term “E-ffective” was a play on words that associate the EXA concept of “Effective Reality” and “Electronic” as a way of explaining how the presenters interacted with technology and EXA in coaching and education environments. In EXA we say that “Effective reality exists when the surrounding world of 'measurables' interrelates and is fed by our imaginative inner world” (Evers, 2001, p. 81). Effective reality becomes a call to action and “is only effective if it drives you to take on new challenges and transform your environment” (Gonzales Gonzalez Cueva, 2018, p. 45). The idea of the session was to have the opportunity to integrate the presented concepts and practices, to think together and explore how effective reality can be perceived in virtual environments.

During the session, we offered an experience that associated the use of virtual interactive images with writing, along with free movement, to generate a discussion on how virtual content shown on a screen can affect corporeality. The participants had to interact and describe their sensations, and then through gestures they had to create a movement phrase that described how they perceived their interaction with the virtual. They were encouraged to write associations that came freely. Each participant made a brief description of what was easy and/or difficult during the virtual interaction and many of their questions revolved around the following: The boundaries and bridges within the workaround technology; to what extent do our bodies interact with the virtual by choice or necessity; and how this mode of interaction either built or hindered communication and creation.

A year after the EGS Festival, we were invited by one of our colleagues to develop this article about our ideas around EXA and Technology. Despite having started writing together, this article has been written in levels of solitude and collaboration. During our interactions, we looked for nodes of encounter, places of resonance between our separate, parallel art-based research processes, while in faraway living environments: a North American living in Switzerland and a South American living in France, communicating with one another virtually.

We see this article as an experimental conversation. We started the writing process together and we worked through it alone, dealing with the reality of the texts we sent to each other and the actuality of our perception of them. It is a co-writing experience that describes and navigates the experience of virtual environments, our considerations, advantages, concerns, opportunities, and lessons learned using technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and EXA.

We recognized the importance of embracing a certain creative freedom in our writing, allowing us to highlight our unique interventions and perspectives. It is imperative to elucidate the collaborative process behind this piece, forged through shared interests and experiences. Each of us worked independently on virtual components, leaving our individual marks, only to subsequently weave our ideas together within the realms of a virtual document. Within these digital spaces, we delve into our collective experiences surrounding EXA, technology, imagination, and reality.

Across the document, you will notice that the font changes at times represent our voices—the piece of each writer:

I am Carmiella

I am Valeria

We both started writing from our resonances, dissonances, perceptions, and possibilities. However, reality changed what we planned.

At some point, Valeria took a step aside from writing because the pace of her work and research put her mental health at risk. Carmiella continued alone until the first revision of the article, using our previous research as a base, and collecting all the pieces of information that were important to start talking about EXA & Technology: Our personal exploration, the dialogues we wanted to develop, how embodied reality can be integrated into practices around technology, the connections with physics, etc. After this point,

reality played its role again and Carmiella had to step aside for the same reason as me: mental health. Thus, I (Valeria) created the links between the collected pieces and weaved along the interstices until the conclusions. Working this way was like having conversations with Carmiella. I imagined her in a different space-time or a different layer of reality. Making this phenomenological explanation of how we wrote together is part of the description of how virtual environments change the way we live, think, and perceive people, knowledge, and the world.

Ultimately, we sought to generate a conversation about the borders and bridges between imaginary and real, the possibilities of simultaneous existence and non-existence that technology gives us, and the effects we must consider as we continue to work in times of developing AI. Thank you for navigating this story with us.

Borders Between the Imaginary and the Real

In 2020, Carmiella wrote a thesis called “The Curiosities of Object Permanence” based on a very interesting concept from developmental psychology, to refer to when an infant learns that each object is unique and begins to understand that if an object disappears from view, it does not cease to exist.

Jean Piaget introduced to the field of developmental psychology the term sensorimotor stage to describe the first phase of human development when infants reckon with their existence solely through sensual perceptions and bodily movements. According to Piaget and Inhelder (1969), it appears that while newborn babies are pre-lingual, they are not able to conjure symbolic imaginings, only to perceive what literally exists in their external environments. Because their sensory organs are themselves in development, the reality of an infant is “a world without objects, consisting only of shifting and unsubstantial ‘tableaux’ which appear and are then totally reabsorbed, either without returning or reappearing in a modified or analogous form” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, p. 14).

It is through the initial incremental stages of sensorimotor development that an infant constructs its conceptions of the existence of separate objects, space, time, and causality. It is only during Stage 3 of the sensorimotor period which occurs around four and a half months of age where infants exhibit “a sort of magical belief in causality without any material connection” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, p. 10). Piaget and Inhelder (1969) call this conception of causality “magical phenomenalism” because the phenomenal contiguity of two events is sufficient to make them appear causally related and “centered on the action of the subject without consideration of the spatial connection between cause and effect” (p. 18).

Spanish sociologist and expert researcher on the Information Age, Manuel Castells, describes time experienced through these technologies as timeless time, characterized by “a relentless effort to annihilate time, to compress years in seconds, seconds in split seconds... to eliminate sequencing of time, including past, present, and future in the same hypertext, thus eliminating the ‘succession of things’ that... characterizes time, so that without things and their sequential ordering there is no longer time in society” (Castells, 2009, p. 155).

Castells (2009) describes the spatial dimensions of these technologies as a “space of flows” (p. 156) because it is characterized by a global network of interlinked systems across which the flow of information causes simultaneous social experiences to occur regardless of territorial contiguity. If we consider the reconfigurations of time, space, and causality that technology in the Information Age has generated, it is no surprise that

virtual reality has obscured the boundaries between real and imaginary realities we previously took for granted. By interacting with digital objects, the realm of fantasy becomes phenomenologically available to our senses. Imaginary visions once reserved solely for our internal dreamscapes and stationary art objects now can flow endlessly before our eyes on external objects which we can change instantaneously with the touch of a button or the imitation of a button on a touchscreen. In the virtual world of the internet, one can even build whole 'lives' as fake personas and avatars.

Computerized phenomena are so new that we have yet to gain a depth of perspective on how our consciousness is affected by their existence. Social anxiety over what the negative consequences of digital technology could be on human development is thus palpable. Some news reports describe the concern of "nursery teachers who are observing young children able to swipe images on screens but struggling with age-appropriate dexterity tasks like stacking building blocks" (Paton, 2014, para. 9), and the act of giving a young child an iPad is arguably tantamount or compared to child abuse.

The scrambling of the borders of reality caused by the invention of computers and the Internet has precipitated the need for a term to differentiate between the realm behind the screen from the one in front of it. What lives in front of the screen is us, the 'real.' What lives behind the screen, we now call 'virtual reality.' In the era of virtual reality, time and space have had to be redefined, and the concept of object permanence has taken on an entirely new dimension.

This document itself is written on a virtual piece of paper stored by a website. Until it is completed and printed (if we choose to do it), it only exists in virtual space and not in the external world of objects. With each act of typing, deleting, copying, and pasting, we are reminded that we are not interacting with a real piece of paper upon which none of these operations are possible, but rather with a liminal imitation of paper which offers an expanded flexibility of material presence. The document is available when a digital window is open on the screen of a laptop, but when it's closed (the virtual document or my laptop), it is gone from our vicinity in a way that we cannot tell you exactly where it has gone. We can understand theoretically that it is converted into light and energy stored by circuit boards and servers when we cannot see it. However, from our phenomenological experience of it, a digital object is the only object of which we know can dematerialize and rematerialize at will.

Perhaps I am naive, but I am not so much frightened for the development of these infants and children as I am deeply curious if in several decades from now, they will possess brilliant insights about the boundaries of material and immaterial reality precisely because their sensorimotor development involved confronting spatial and temporal liminality in such a direct way. I would like to believe that relating to these technologies will form foundations for ground-breaking understandings that prior generations simply lacked the environmental stimuli to foster. Perhaps this generation will figure out how to actually 'beam' people across space and time or how to overlap multiple objects in the same place at the same time without destroying them. By the time today's infants are my age, the world will undoubtedly be stunningly more liminal than it is now.

After reading the text left by Carmiella, I understood her enthusiasm, while at the same time I thought, I do fear that virtuality suppresses the essential experience of feeling with all our senses. This is because in my work I had already seen the physical and psychic effects of working for a long time in dematerialized spaces. It is interesting that Carmiella starts talking about "object permanence" because it is a concept

that invites us to think about virtuality not only from the immaterial but from the parameters of our physiological evolution. If technology invites us to redefine the parameters of reality, describing our bodily possibilities during interactions with technology is a real necessity for health when we start exploring.

As EXA facilitators, we must get personally involved in the exploration of the medium to safely scale the limits of the alternative and current reality with others. The work of EXA and technology implies we must learn to work with limited sensoriality and the virtual as our new material. For example, videoconferencing can be seen as a material that involves only two senses to be able to create together and involves considering the key aspects of visual, auditive, and spatial-temporal engagement:

Visual:

- The screen defines the visual frame, decreasing range of vision from 180° to about 40° which is what the screen allows, influencing the message conveyed.
- Deliberately excluding elements affects perception and can cause distraction. The screen serves as a unique stage, focusing on individual images and gestures during communication.

Auditive:

- Videoconferencing relies on a single sound channel, necessitating careful consideration of audio transmission.
- Simultaneous sounds may be filtered randomly; muting microphones when not speaking is essential.
- Awareness of the surrounding soundscape, including stage sounds and ambient noise, is crucial.

Time-Space:

- Participants must consciously engage two senses, prioritizing the screen for a limited attention span.
- External stimuli at transmission sites must be filtered to focus on the visual rectangle.

Understanding the dissociation of attention and the constraint on sensorial experience in imaginal work, alongside the factor of distance, is essential to navigate the material effectively and respond to emergent aspects. This is pivotal as the delineation between our actual and imagined existence becomes a relative concept, contingent on partial visual, auditory, and time-space frames of interaction. Virtuality facilitates a more nuanced questioning of our perceptions about imagery by placing our body amidst a realm of 'fluid time' and 'everyday time,' allowing both states to coexist within us.

Possibilities in the Simultaneous Non/Existence Offered through Technology

Quantum physics tells us that multiple objects can exist in the same place at the same time without losing their structural integrity. In the visual arts, optical illusions are a metaphor for what science says: when seeing two objects exist in the same place, the mind knows that both options exist, but our conscious perception can only see "one at a time." As in these examples, virtual reality is a place where dualities previously unknown or unseen meet to raise questions otherwise impossible.

It appears quite evident to me that the human compulsion to invent virtual reality is rooted in the natural design of our developmental processes, which are geared toward a fascination with the laws and limitations of object dynamics and how they relate to our imagination. The digital screen is where the peek-a-boo dreams of our infancy manifest, where the pretend-play worlds of our childhood are given a shared, permanent stage. It is where a global system of instantaneous exchange has become a reality. The more I learn, the more passionate I become to conduct Expressive Arts-based research in the future on how the phenomena of virtual/augmented reality interplay with our imagination to expand our conceptions of how the liminality of object relations provide space for novel, salutogenetic ways of interacting with one another and the environment.

The foundation of EXA theory is an acknowledgment of the simultaneity of distinctions and crossovers between dreams, daydreams, imagination, and the actual world—the intermodal nature of reality itself. The role of an expressive arts practitioner in a therapeutic, educational, coaching, or consulting setting is to provide a safe, inspirational, and supportive environment for clients/students to explore what arises in the liminal boundaries between imagined and actual reality. Without a practice that strengthens one’s imaginal capacities in a salutogenetic way while also sustaining one’s connection with actual reality, the natural human impulse to grasp the ineffable can lead to a diminishing of conscious experience where only that which can be literally understood is valued.

I had many questions when I read these last lines because although I understand where this enchantment for the virtual comes from, I can't help but feel a lot of dissonance as well; dissonances in terms of where and how we relate to technology. As I write these lines, my only interaction with Carmiella is this virtual document. She exists in the memory of our conversations, and I can perceive her in the actuality of her writing, but I'm interacting with her "past" version, so I can't avoid feeling that I'm alone in the river of my perceptions.

If I start describing my dissonances, I have to say that virtual reality is built more like an imitation of nature. I believe that everything it proposes already exists. Nature challenges our imagination because as in science, some laws and parameters exist and we understand them because we interact with their consequences, but these parameters do not exist at a level that our senses can touch or even control. Same in virtual reality; my interaction with technology and others through it is performed on the screen. I do not understand completely the coding, infrastructure, and language that builds it, but do I need to know that for interaction? Not necessarily. However, I do need to know the consequences of my interactions, for me and for my environment.

For me, digital space is like a huge system of ponds where passing birds decide to land to create life, nurture, or rest depending on their direction. Virtual meeting spaces are generators of ideas and intellectual life. However, the data that circulates indiscriminately is not enough to build something by itself. To generate something useful for life it is necessary to group and reflect about what is the purpose of getting together, especially within EXA and technology. If Carmiella and I had not met and talked together to write, the narrative of this article would have been impossible. Even if I decided to just use her art pieces and work on them, the product would be something completely removed from what she envisioned. If I just read the information she left, without any context, I could have talked about several different topics. Without a purposeful encounter, the data pieces of her information would be floating in cyberspace. For

data to become information, data must be put into context (Table 1).

Data	Information
It is not specific	It is specific
Not organized/Processed	It has structure
It can be random	It needs context
Raw material	Product

Table 1: Differences between Data and Information. Based on (Kundu, 2016).

EXA beckons us to deliberate on the specific issues we aim to address and the individuals we collaborate with, urging a genuine confrontation with the complexities we seek to understand. Engaging in the arts, whether virtually or in person, entails cultivating a sense of purpose and introspection. We are prompted to candidly ponder: What would truly benefit this community or individual? What actions can we take from our current position in time and space, bearing in mind that the parameters of creation may be scarce or, at times, deceptive?

The place where I most agree with Carmiella is in the need to find healthy ways of interacting between the human and the non-human. Delving into discussions about the boundaries and connections within virtual work holds promise for spaces where physical presence is unattainable, all while emphasizing the essential preservation of our embodied essence. This physicality is indispensable for maintaining a sacred presence, allowing us to hold space and accompany others in the digital realm, where the solitude of our screens often prevails. This is why it is so important to investigate more and ask us as a community about the best practices to relate to digital technology.

Experiences Around EXA and Technology

As this is a relatively new field of exploration, our experience using digital technologies is the first step to setting boundaries for an online practice. In the following paragraphs, we will describe our experiences and learnings in virtual work. In that sense:

[the] situated knowledge and the subjectivity of the researcher is a useful perspective that uses an autobiographical approach that allows the researcher to experience the place of the researched subject in the figure of 'narrator'; This repositioning allows the researcher to install a 'care' because the researcher performs the same exercise as the other who is researched and allows them to experience how the methodological device, in this case, virtual reality, really affects and involves the subject, favoring that the actions performed from the researcher's place are even more careful ... An autobiographical approach is a qualitative technique that can support the production of knowledge of which we are a part, to reappropriate the notion of objectivity as a parameter of rigor that is not synonymous with neutrality. (Cruz y otros, 2012, p. 256)¹

Carmiella's Experiences

In one of her processes, Carmiella worked with an EXA therapist and designed her own images using

augmented reality. She began to describe her experience in the virtual world:

Here I will experiment with time travel, with time layering, with spatial blurring between dreams and realities, with and between physical and immaterial re-de-pro-constitution, virtual and graspable once-tangible moments recorded once then re-viewed again. Here I experiment with virtualized content that I venture to co-create as a dialogue between my past-present-future space-time of pulsating research into the aesthetic intersections of art historical philosophy, scientific research, and the Expressive Arts methodology. After this aesthetic dialogue, I will share my related findings from past art therapy-based creative healing processes which I experienced as a recipient of Expressive Arts Therapy that are resonant with the living inquiry of this article.

During her explorations, she asked herself questions associated with her feeling of using virtuality in her personal process with a therapist and described:

In our first sessions together, R and I focused on how EXA could help me safely scale the edges of imagined and actual reality without losing myself. Our sessions were over Skype, which triggered the layers of my struggle connected to engaging with virtual technology. I had become painfully aware of the reality of internet surveillance and manipulation and deeply distressed by the unknown dimensions of online communications. While ill, this duress had caused my digital communications with others to become increasingly bizarre and erratic. As I healed, my distress about the object permanence of these communications was overbearing.

During an online session with her therapist, Camiella began to work on a sensitization activity to help her connect with her body and environment by pressing their hands against one another and the stable surfaces around them: *The EXA therapist said a phrase that made me feel warmly accompanied: We are both alone in our physical spaces, but we are together in digital space. She then suggested making a drawing of the sensitization experience (Figure 1).*



Figure 1: Carmiella's sensitization process (2020)

During aesthetic analysis, Carmiella realized she was intrigued by the unintended illusion of depth in the ladder shape she had drawn on the right-hand side: *I noted that though I knew it was only a series of lines, once I saw it as a three-dimensional shape, I couldn't unsee it. Moreover, I was struck by how the ladder could be interpreted as going into or out of the page, but I could only see it as one way or the other at a given moment. In other words, I knew cognitively that it theoretically could be seen in multiple ways at once, but the phenomenon that my eyes interpreted would only allow one perspective at a time.*

In a dialogue with what emerged, she asked an important question: *Should I let technology get under my skin?* Then to better describe her perceptions, she wrote her physical sensations through a poem:

*Illusion of absolute control, fleshy little being,
Disrupting, folding, heavy in on itself
You've never seen this realm, never will as a human
While you're busy measuring the scaffolding,
All is growing, buzzing, quietly tended by you
And cultivated by not you, by who/what/how you will never know
Crystallized, my dear? Reflect again...*

Trying to frame her sensory perceptions, Carmiella wrote: *In this poem, I connected with a wise voice larger than myself which reminded me how particular my perspective is on the layers of reality, digital or not. This viewpoint reminded me how the dynamics of reality are far more complex, interweaving, and conscious than I can understand as one individual human. Martin Heidegger can be insightful here on the work of technology's relation to art where truth is found, "not as the correspondence of a subjective judgment to an objective state of affairs, but as an uncovering, a taking out of concealment of that which has been hidden or obscured" (Levine, 2005, p. 28). He saw a work of art as manifesting truth through its fundamental tension between concealing and revealing meaning, between its material and immaterial components.*

It is undeniable the impact technology has on our daily life and like the arts, it gives us the possibility to imagine our reality differently. Carmiella's art and writing pieces in this virtual medium are material and immaterial components of this article (Figure 2). As I read, I can connect with my exploration of the possibilities and limitations that technology gives to our understanding and physicality.

Valeria's Experience

Some time ago, I worked alone using online software to modify and develop images that helped me deepen and anchor my learnings on the exploration process in technology. At that time, I scanned a drawing I made by hand that I had titled "The Knife Woman." I did it to crystallize a movement exploration process, where I was working on the theme of Limitations. The scanning process took away the intensity of the original image and to make it look closer to the analog version, I decided to intervene digitally (Figure 3).

From that moment on, the intervention was almost never-ending. I realized that the digital medium captured and unfolded many of the ephemeral sensations I had within the dance and created other ones that were very interesting in many ways. Each modification of the image had a hypnotizing effect, although not always pleasant. The ease with which the software moved from one version to another was absorbing and a bit overwhelming, as the modification parameters were faster than I could process.



Figure 2. Print of “up” cycled intaglio-collagraph-printmaking-plate; Digital drawing with a physical tablet onto a virtual scan of the original physical print virtually animated in a 1 minute stop-motion by Carmiella Zorzi in 2021. See link: <https://vimeo.com/904959780>

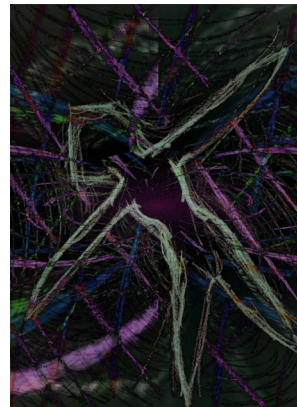
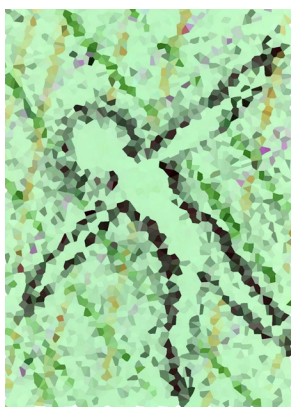
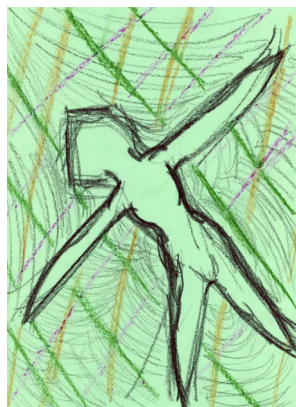


Figure 3. Selection of 3 out of the original 12 from "The Knife Woman" series by V. Gonzales (2018)

Somehow, that digital intervention spoke of my feelings in the movement process. Technology allowed me to unveil information that I could recognize, but which opened in many ways. If I had made those drawings manually, the process would have been much slower, and the information would have come at a different speed. Not being able to reproduce all those images manually in a short time was a limitation that protected me from the overload of information, but technology put on my screen, without a filter, many facets of myself and the theme of exploration.

I decided to write by hand about the ones that stood out the most and gave them names and phenomenological descriptions. Describing them in words made me realize that many of the images produced were versions of the same thing and little by little, I kept the ones that seemed to follow an evolution of the original theme. While I had a lot of information through the images, the exploration of limitations was the border that acted as a beacon in the vastness of possibilities that virtual reality offered me.

Following the thread of my topic gave me the opportunity to weave a specific narrative, from which I could generate some learnings. "Information is not the same as knowledge, yet they are often confused. Knowledge, like information, does not remain static. Both knowledge and information are only directly relevant if the recipient can propose and reuse what is known. However, information is of little use if we do not have the knowledge to know what to do with it" (Prior, 2018, p. 7).

Sentipensar

Working at the intersection between art and the virtual can offer a series of interesting benefits and opportunities. On the one hand, there is the retraining of our perception within virtuality as in Carmiella's experience, where through writing she anchored her learning. On the other hand, there are the possibilities that AI gives us to generate information at high speed as in my experience. Within both, the need to establish learning milestones and findings was a form of anchoring.

Setting milestones in EXA is an act of care and part of our aesthetic responsibility as practitioners. The writing was a way of grounding what the mind put in limbo. The physical experience of putting oneself in motion, even if it's a tiny one, is for me the most powerful way to re-embody our senses and something I didn't have the chance to talk to Carmiella about. In some of her texts, she explains how "the bridge between the antimatter of my imagination and the matter of my body was dance," and I would have liked to talk more about whether corporeality functioned as a bridge for her.

As a South American, the importance of anchoring in the body is intimately associated with the experience of thinking of myself and others in the world. I believe this influences my EXA and technology practice. My body is my territory of refuge, the place where my feeling and my thinking are unequivocally united, and it is this "Sentipensar" that leads me to ponder the parameters of physicality that we must consider for a safe practice in virtuality.

"Sentipensar" is a term from decolonial thought that seems appropriate to describe what brings up the liminal work within art and technology, a term for the non-separation of body and mind: "sentipensar" (which we could translate as "feelthink"; hereafter, keep its original name). The term

was coined by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, who developed this concept after working with coastal Afro-Colombian communities, starting from the original proposal of "sentipensamiento." What is united is precisely that which has been separated: Thought (logic) from feeling (emotions and affections). "Sentipensar" with the ontologies proper to our territories of origin would imply having the will to enter the depths of knowledge, cosmovision's, and much more complex forms of interweaving the non-human with the human and thus privilege the communitarian in the broadest sense over the individual. (Ramos, 2020, p. 116)²

When space and place are transformed, the ultimate territory of refuge is the body, a space that houses who I am, what "we" I belong to, where I am, and where I am located; the body contains itself and what passes through the place. The territory within the virtual and AI contains a series of shifting, timeless, and sometimes unclear narratives.

The lack of tangibility of the data transmitted in cyberspace makes it difficult to delimit virtual territory and to make sense of the pieces and do something as a community; returning to the body, what it carries, and what it believes is naturally grounding. The variety of topics and questions that can appear "at the same time" can certainly exceed our capacity for physical and mental understanding. It is therefore necessary to know how we react to technology and what our leverage points are when faced with a changing reality. Working in the virtual world raises questions about our way of relating to our nature, to our parameters of mental health.

The work of the EXA community with technology makes evident something that our artwork claims every day: There is no mind-body separation. It is necessary to think of our humanity and its interactions as whole beings. Technology, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence are changing our way of seeing the outside world. However, our inner world is still woven according to very personal and cultural strings. Technology is highlighting the subject-self-reason concept, a reductionist Eurocentric construction that does not think of humanity as nature and therefore excludes what is evident in the arts: we are integrated beings, our ability to feel is what maintains the health of our existence. Thus, the concept of object permanence becomes relevant. It is curious that through technology, somehow, our natures have found a way to bring to light that body and mind are not separate mechanical objects. Through fragmentation, discomfort, and uncertainty, it highlights that we are beings with a desire for uniqueness and revelation. The experiences of art and technology are leading us to live an experience of chaotic fragmentation, however, it is necessary to live it to find new ways of living. Entering into technological exploration is a challenge on several levels, but also a necessity of our times, not only to adapt ourselves but also because "it is necessary to inhabit science poetically in order to revisit the foundations of reality" (Barrau, 2023, p. 43).³

The technology industry would especially benefit from the expertise that expressive arts specialists have. According to Prior (2018), there has been an awakening of understanding that has led to the acceptance of embodied knowledge, situated knowledge, and represented knowledge, which offers artist-researchers more useful insights than could be gained through scientific experimentation. Working through the senses gives us a wealth of tools to reach out to others through image, writing, voice, and gesture; it is through these that we can create clear frameworks (play) for people who cannot physically see each other. For this to happen expressive arts specialists have a duty to

train in new technologies and explore them as a new field of work, as a new art-based research involving the alliance of *Techne & Poiesis*. (Gonzales Gonzalez Cueva, 2018, p. 120)

It is important that as EXA practitioners, we build bridges of thinking that reflect the technological environment, our corporeality and needs for the world we inhabit, from our places, spaces, and territories.

Conclusions and Thoughts About Expressive Arts and Technology

In conclusion, the intersection of EXA and technology opens up a realm of possibilities that profoundly influence our understanding of creativity, consciousness, and interconnectedness. The symbiotic relationship between art, the body, territory, and technology provides metaphors that help us envision diverse scenarios and needs. The analogy of technology creating a "space of flows," akin to the water cycle, emphasizes the continuous circulation of memories and residues that remind us of the intricate timescales of the Earth.

As EXA facilitators, there's a call to personally immerse in the exploration of these mediums, recognizing the necessity to redefine the parameters of reality and physiological evolution. As technology continues to evolve, we grapple with its impact on consciousness and explore these effects phenomenologically through trial and error. Virtuality, AI, and related technologies hint at the existence of multiple dimensions simultaneously, challenging our bodies, seemingly designed to perceive one perspective at a time. This unfolding exploration suggests that we may be on the cusp of a new developmental stage that we are just beginning to articulate.

The imperative to maintain a digital archive of artwork emerges as essential in this digital age, not merely to preserve physical creations but to digitize images that allow for experimentation and play. Technology facilitates the capture of various artistic forms through photos, videos, and audio, triggering sensations and perceptions in our memories. The act of documentation, as highlighted by Prior (2018), becomes a tool for artists to monitor their creative processes, make informed decisions, and embark on a journey of self-reference and self-discovery.

EXA and technology collaboratively mitigate knowledge limitations and enhance collaboration within working groups. This symbiosis demands a blend of divergent and convergent thinking, coupled with imagination and embodiment. Our bodies-territories, with their remarkable capacity for feeling, serve as indicators of health and sources of *sentipensar*—a mode of thinking and feeling. This approach not only addresses technical aspects but delves into profound human and emotional dimensions.

In the fluid and changeable landscape of virtual space, the body-territory becomes our refuge and navigational reference. Delimiting the territories in which we recognize ourselves becomes a necessity for both EXA and technology. Asking fundamental questions about perception in art-technology research enables us to accompany others into their interests and truths. Clear parameters are crucial to guide our work, especially when assisting individuals in describing their physical conditions using limited sensory and virtual resources, underpinned by hope. Collaboration and virtual reality material break the perception of loneliness, providing expansive spaces for community creation and the pursuit of dreams and

interests. This, perhaps, is the most significant source of hope arising from the utilization of technology—its capacity to connect, inspire, and foster new ways of living.

Carmiella and I had a significant encounter in face-to-face life and in the virtual world. To honor the work we did together in the virtual space, I have had to name her again and again, to manifest her presence, so as not to turn her work into random data in non-existence. If through the waves of virtuality, you find this article and think you have found a resting place for your questions, please contact us, you don't have to continue alone through oceans of data. Perhaps we can build bridges to make virtuality a safer space for the bodies-territory that navigate it. Perhaps virtuality is just an excuse to create encounters.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Spanish to English translation by Valeria Gonzales.
- ² Translation Spanish to English by Valeria Gonzales.
- ³ Translated from French into English by Valeria Gonzales.

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Teaching Philosophy as a Pedagogic Practice-ing: Are you the Type of Person that Says, “Everything Happens for a Reason”?

Valerie Oved Giovanini

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss a classroom activity that was intended to create an environment attentive enough for students to scrutinize whether their touted beliefs matched their implicit assumptions. Drawing upon Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of the face-to-face relation, Carol A. Taylor’s posthuman orientations for pedagogical practice-ings, and Bickel’s and Fisher’s emergent theory of art-care, I explore my pedagogical approach in teaching philosophy to explain how affective encounters in *communitas* between teacher and learners can expand personal understandings and imagine new meaningful possibilities together. These affective encounters serve an ethic of concern where each is capable of a unique response and where each intra-action matters in the process of co-poiesis. For me, these pedagogical practice-ings helped to understand the use of creative imagination and illustrate an approach that was implicit in the classroom activity chosen for reflection.

Bio

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. valerie.giovanini@egs.edu | <http://www.academia.edu/ValerieGiovanini>



The extra-credit assignment for a reflective essay was due in our next class meeting for three points. An evening before it was due, I received an email from a student. They would like to submit the assignment but didn't feel safe printing the reflection at home. The content was too sensitive. Would I mind still accepting the reflection that was due for points? Of course. Of course, I would print it myself and accept it for credit. The student received a printed copy with my notes during our next class. A final note included one of gratitude for a reflection that made them so vulnerable.

Another student shared in class that they did not expect to hold a theistic worldview. It was a surprise to them, as much as it made sense to say in times of distress that "everything happens for a reason." And after some reflection, it made sense that this would imply the need for something to order those parts, those accidents, those incidents in our lives to an ultimate purpose. Learners in the class appreciated the insight into themselves and mentioned it in most classes thereafter. Every other realization we had together in the class, those two learners would say, was never as bad as the realization from our first day. At the end of the semester, learners were asked to choose two authors from our syllabus and a contemporary moral dilemma to create an imaginative set and scene with dialogue between the two opposing authors. Creating the scene provided students the space to synthesize the course's material with their spontaneous responses from the beginning of the semester and to continue unfolding their own creative possibilities.

I. My Implicit Orienting Pedagogical Practice-ings

Our deliberations and readings about ontological approaches where pedagogy is seen as relational and ethical informs our work. More particularly, we consider how an affirmative and response-able pedagogy might be enacted—one which shifts beyond distancing and critique, with an openness towards new possibilities through relational responses of becoming-with and rendering each other capable. (Haraway, 2016, p. 20)

In preparation for my class titled, "Philosophy: Human Nature and the Meaning of Life," I knew I had to go big or go home. Everyone expects to take a class with such a title and leave moved, enriched, and hopefully even dumbfounded. In a classroom deep in the city, the class consists mostly of first-generation learners and is shared among many who transfer from inner-city communities. They have ambitiously worked hard to get into this State University, and I often see a lot of effort put in for how to study, how to focus, and how to engage. For their success, I try to meet them where they are and provide tools that match their pace. I also aim to wow them in our first meeting.

They needed to see that they signed up for more than just a dump of information that goes into their brain and culminates with a few tests, memorizing names on a timeline, and a final grade. They should be moved by the questions we explore—to see how they've probably asked themselves age-old questions about why we are here, where we are going as a people, and what our responsibilities are as individuals.

Learners in the classroom have probably asked the same questions that Socrates, Aristotle, Nietzsche, and John Lennon asked before them. Often, we have our own answers to these questions. Are the answers that we tell ourselves consistent? Do they hide biases? Would they be changed if critically viewed?

In the following paper, I closely examine a class activity and final project as a practice that integrates the arts in an interdisciplinary way with philosophical questions to enhance the quality of these learner's lives (Eberhart & Atkins, 2014). These learners' spontaneous responses and culminating creative projects are also viewed through the lens of Carol A. Taylor's (2018) orientations for a posthuman relational ethic. To better understand the process of becoming alongside others in a spontaneous and formative relation between teacher and learners, we practiced imaginative creativity alongside intellectual exploration. Through the lens of art-care theory, which Barbara Bickel and Michael A. Fisher (2023) describe as a processes of *co-poiesis* in *communitas* with others, I will discuss how students alongside myself moved through these processes towards discovering new creative phases with one another.

I started with this: spontaneous response and self-critique. The room on our first day commenced with wonder. Take out two half-sheets of paper and simply write yes or no in response to this question: Are you the type of person who says, "Everything happens for a reason?" I collected one sheet of paper with their answer as a symbolic form of accountability. Learners kept the other paper as a reminder about the position with which they started the class. Some took more time than others to write a response, and that was OK. I told them their responses would not be graded, but that I was working on their philosophical "intuition pump." Learners would soon discover for themselves whether they were oriented to believe in a God, higher power, or as the philosophers call it, an intelligent designer.¹ Individually or socially, we may find meanings and reasons for the events of our lives, but my question meant to probe for a possible critique into whether learners in the classroom assumed that events have an inherent purpose beyond what individuals or societies assign.

Most students' explicit claims were aligned with their implicit belief. If their answer was "no" they weren't the type of person to say that everything happens for a reason, then they most likely didn't believe in an intelligent designer who imbues the world with meaning, or as the ancient Greeks called it the *teleological ends* of nature.² Those who answered "yes" seemed comfortable with the idea that yes, the philosopher's intelligent designer that we call "God" exists. These students often come from religious homes or are inclined to believe in things like Karma, reincarnation, or moral retribution for events in a world full of apparent grievances. They would argue that one day these grievances would be reconciled by that which set forth these seemingly disparate pieces, namely by the intelligent designer who put them all together. A very generative discussion followed over the semester about what the nature of God might be, whether this was the only way to conceive of God, and whether these two options had to remain an either/or bifurcation. It was important for me, however, that they know at this initial stage of their learning their basic orientation in the question. It was exciting for students to understand that such a seemingly trivial utterance could have larger implications for their implicit beliefs. The exercise became interesting, and started to ignite sparks of curiosity when what a student wrote did not align with the belief they usually espouse.

One student came from a religious household but wrote "no" on their sheet of paper. They are not the type of person that would say everything happens for a reason. Here was a case where one's beliefs might

change after a critical evaluation. Is this a betrayal? A heresy? A mistake? What went wrong? Did they do the assignment wrong? Maybe they didn't understand the question. My role as facilitator of this exercise, and my use of what I would later come to understand as an attentive and response-able pedagogical tool, was to reassure them that they did the exercise exactly right. My goal was to create a space to become-with-the-other for the possibility of something new to happen (Haraway, 2008). For some, something new did happen in the *poiesis* of their spontaneous response. *Poiesis* in Greek means to come to know by creating in a process that is reciprocal and interdependent (Levine, 1997, 2019). One learner became aware of themselves in an apparent contradiction, and I was there to imagine new creative possibilities alongside them.

Another learner with contradictory views would often proclaim themselves an atheist. They were clearly familiar with post-structural theory and the idea that most norms are social constructs. They wrote "yes" on their sheet of paper. Everything that happens has an inherent meaning or purpose. Of course, the division between atheist and theist isn't so binary as this exercise would make it seem. In our generative discussions during and after the exercise, we clarified that these "reasons" can be attributed by an individual trying to make sense of an event in their past, or by society to find reason in a local tragedy and yield some benefit (i.e., to work towards better gun laws after a school shooting). As represented in various religions and spiritual beliefs, there is the reason, order, meaning, and fulfillment that an im/personal being as such is understood to possess and imbue within existence. There is admittedly a lot of gray area to cover, which we would explore over the course of the term. The exercise, however, means to decenter each participant from their explicit views into an unexpected liminal space in imaginative intuition for a response, to come back with a new awareness of themselves and the consistency of their beliefs (Atkins & Snyder, 2018). Their critical reflections over the semester and final culminating projects to stage a scene between opposing authors in a contemporary moral dilemma, such as the war between Ukraine and Russia (2022) or the overturning of abortion rights in the U.S.A. (2022), through storytelling, drama, visual-arts, and imagery provided the creative grounds to move between entrenched positions.

As one learner told me during that session, they didn't sign up to a class with this title to be taught by rote. They were looking for depth, to be moved, and they were lucky because that was my exact goal. I wanted them to experience the bewilderment that a question about the meaning of life can make us feel. I intended to establish a space for the kind of spontaneous inspiration that can lead to artmaking, and to initiate their curiosity about the answers that other great minds provided to these same questions. If I was lucky then maybe, just maybe, they would feel the conflict in our all-too-human answers for a curiosity that could never be quelled. Our continued reflection through the term on the question of meaning, and exploration of the paradoxical answers was a pleasure in the class overall. We began with St. Thomas as Aquinas' *Five Arguments for the Existence of God* and moved through Descartes' enlightened subject whose ideas touch the infinite, only to make our way toward existentialism and the absurd meaning of life imagined in the post-enlightenment era.

Through these authors' texts over the course of the semester, learners were able to understand different positions in parameters that were relevant to the context of their lives. Even if they didn't agree with the authors' positions, they chose to embody them in the scene of their final project and were responsible to at least understand them. Additionally, the scene enabled them to process moral dilemmas that touched their lives since each group had the freedom to pick which authors, and which moral dilemma they

would use. In this process, they entered creative liminal spaces to imagine how these authors would dialogue in the contemporary world. These presentations spanned from humorous, to dramatic, and poetic at times. In one presentation, Snow White was put to trial for her relationship and impregnation by one of the seven dwarfs. In another, Albert Camus' absurdist position spoke directly to Aristotle on virtue while the war in Ukraine waged outside the coffee shop where they spoke. They set pictures as background images and played sounds such as bombs exploding in the distance. Some came in wardrobes and costumes. Audience members laughed, or cried, and burst into applause when significant moments were felt. Finally, after their imagination was nurtured and activated through the scene to envision new ways of being, they were asked to reflect on the process as part of the assignment. If art results from the demarcation of an experience as special, as Suzi Gablik argues (1995), then the spontaneous responses of the art-making process that began at the start of the term culminated with the scripts that we created together. Learner and writer Brianna Darlene who began the term with religious beliefs submitted a poem for reflection on existentialism at the end of the term:

What struck me most regarding Sartre's philosophy was his opposition to socially imposed expectations and norms. This encourages us to infinitely question the world, and its structures we function within. Reflecting on this aspect of Sartre's philosophy left me to pen this poem. It's meant as a reflection on humanity's [*sic*] authoritative agency to shape society, and the world around us. Existentialism:

Incorporeal thoughts supersede the artifice of sense.
Executions blade begets Hydra's kin.
Born of a singular thought condemned,
By the individual collective—devoted to self-interest.
Authors of the cosmological compass, guiding our existential ethics.
The value of a thought, a word, a sound.
Encapsulated within our self-circumscribed holy ground.³

By the end of the course, my hope is that those who tout themselves as atheists would be able to imagine and understand the legitimacy of a position that finds order, harmony, and the matching of actions with their ends. At the same time, theists could also start to better imagine and understand why others may not see the harmony that they take for granted. Every position between these could be negotiated through the scenes they imagined and created to go off-script. They could become enlarged in this process, and I've come to understand that it was my role and responsibility as facilitator to harness their dis/comfort in this very vulnerable and liminal space so that, like Hydra, more heads could prevail to experience and creatively think through new possibilities. Let me explain my pedagogical approach and practice-ings.

II. Theoretical Ground for My Pedagogical Practice-ings

On the ethical plane, the matrixial accessibility to the other implies becoming vulnerable in the Levinasian sense: being exposed to the other, to the point where the Other becomes traumatizing to me. But in the matrixial sphere, what this vulnerability implies is not a sacrifice of myself in a disappearing for the sake of the Other, but rather a partial disappearing to allow jointness. (Ettinger, 2006, p. 144)

Ettinger's (2006) emphasis on *matrixial accessibility* illuminates an elemental connectedness to relate to another that originates in the womb and that facilitates this difficult relation. While parts of us are lost in these self-shattering or traumatizing encounters, another's attentiveness in this joint process recalls a curative possibility. Also inspired by the work of Emmanuel Levinas, my way of being in this world and relating in the classroom begins with ethical responsibility that closely aligns with a response-ability, that is my ethical ability to see and respond to the face of the other, which is a "manifestation of the face over and beyond form [...] To give meaning to one's presence is an event irreducible to evidence. It does not enter into an intuition; it is a presence more direct than visible manifestation, and at the same time a remote presence—that of the other. This presence dominates him who welcomes it, comes from the heights, unforeseen, and consequently teaches its very novelty" (Levinas, 1961, p. 66). The focus here addresses affects often involuntarily received from others and recasts moral responsibility from impersonal calculations to my response in the here and now, on a particular occasion.

Levinas's phenomenology prioritizes that which does not appear and urges us to apprehend the vulnerability, needs, and concerns of the other who we face before we even notice any other empirical features, such as the color of their eyes. In a pre-intuitive and pre-philosophical orientation that comes closer to artistic expression, Levinas continues to give credit to the eye as another mouth with its own form of expression. He writes, "The eyes break through the mask—the language of the eyes, impossible to dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks. The alternative of truth and lying, of sincerity and dissimulation, is the prerogative of him who abides in the relation of absolute frankness, in the absolute frankness which cannot hide itself" (Levinas, 1961, p. 66). When I come to that classroom with the multitude of learners, who themselves come with their own masks and histories, I try to remember this teaching. To listen through their eyes which do not only see but speak. The plastic form of the face will not show anyone's inner world, but if I am attentive enough, I might be able to relate, access, or attune to the unforeseen, that which is indubitably present in its remote presence. Sally Atkins (2018) explains that our ability to respond through care and give form to sensory and imaginative experiences of the world together affirms the complications of our lives and moves them toward an aesthetic responsibility that embraces their beauty. A creative moment can emerge between two in an ethical relation, only the markings of this art are made in the new forms of ourselves.

The ethical response-ability that I have is not to fix, answer, or clarify the concerns that I encounter as a paternalistic morality would, but instead to allow another to speak and to practice my listening in a destabilizing encounter. How do I articulate this kind of relation if it cannot be articulated in language or empirical knowledge? I have often asked myself this question as an instructor, and as someone who is sensitive to a Levinasian ethic. Though these encounters make us vulnerable, they also enlarge and transform our sense of self alongside others. In my case, vulnerability and transformation was implicit in my encounters with these learners. I received glimpses and traces of a learner's household so dogmatic that it was threatened by a reflection printed on a piece of paper. Though the view is not so foreign to my own traditional upbringing, a real threat emerged and reverberated personally for me.

Here was an extreme threat I never personally experienced, but now had to sit-with alongside another in the class. Carol A. Taylor is instructive with five orienting practices that can help instructors attune and respond to these kinds of events in the classroom. In her article, *Each Intra-Action Matters: Towards a Posthuman Ethics for Enlarging Response-Ability in Higher Education Pedagogic Practice-ings*, Taylor

(2018) provides a methodology and specific tools to engage classrooms in a way that makes both instructor and learners quite vulnerable with the goal to create a sense of jointness. Before I show how Taylor's pedagogic practice illuminates important aspects of the exercise in my classroom, I want to turn to bell hooks on the revolutionary ways we can engage in *critical (critique) education* that reminds us of the high stakes involved.

In hooks' (1995) call to raise awareness in black subjectivity against the introjected colonized self and the forces of domination, she argues that programs of critical education must be created. To exercise freedom, the imagination must be set free so that "we begin to understand the need for promoting and celebrating creative expression" (hooks, 1995, p. 4). Critical education does not end with the inclusion of minority voices from those who have endured in the margins of history's grand narratives. What resources did these peoples and populations possess to sustain their creative power despite oppressive conditions? Symbols and archaic resonances in art-images initiate processes of unlearning and relearning as a political act of resistance to those colonial and imperial narratives, as well as social imaginaries. Our exercise began with a spontaneous response to a re-orienting question, which like the art-image can provide room for the imagination to dig beyond known versions of ourselves that are often touted unreflectively. If integrating the imagination in an interdisciplinary way with philosophy enhances the quality of life and provides a site to create as well as disrupt toxic cultural habits, then these spontaneous responses provided us a ground to imagine ourselves anew together. As Barbara Bickel and R. Michael Fisher (2023) suggest, a site to "gestate" (p. 33) new ideas could be formed and nurtured in the classroom so that implicit beliefs could match explicit claims, or at least reflected-on for further thoughtful development.

Within the space in my classroom, learners could begin to re-learn and unlearn themselves as part of a world that often gives too much currency to declarative proclamations parroted from dominant narratives, and which are often made without reflection. The activity above may be considered critical education in that traditional pedagogy does not wish to engage spaces that promote unlearning or to engage the imagination in disciplines where the method and material is traditionally prescribed. Philosophy is one of these disciplines, originating in Plato who wished to exile the poets for their free and irresponsible use of language and imagery. The work of poets may usher "mixed" ideas and for that reason they are immoral. Platonic ideals have dictated from the beginning of Western civilization that truth and true forms behind empirical reality are to be recollected using reason. hooks' revolution calls to refashion what is considered knowledge and I chose to proceed through imaginative reflection.

Traditional pedagogical approaches do not promote one to unlearn what has been taught and developed, but to further sharpen and focus the use of reasoned knowledge for that which can be known.⁴ There is little negotiation in those fixed truths. On the other hand, and closer to hooks' call for critical education, in what Bickel and Fisher call *pedagogies of unlearning*,⁵ the learner and facilitator often experience discomfort, vulnerability, and disorientation "as it requires a letting go of past knowledge that serves to secure the ego, and superego of social status. Our preference for a pedagogy of unlearning and discomfort equally gives care to the learner in their disorientation" (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. 135). The process moves from aesthetic creation to an ethical encounter, which makes possible political forms of resistance to traditional pedagogical methodologies. Bickel and Fisher characterize the facilitator in this process as one who would like to access the imagination to create new social norms (imaginaries) and stimulate

co-inquiry, which I do in the domain of teaching philosophy. The type of wonder engaged in philosophical questions is not only used to teach a discipline and its history, but to orient curiosity for new creative possibilities about one's life. My role isn't only to teach facts and content, but to use these age-old questions as a site to unlearn automatic responses and calm a learner's allergic reaction to the other's ideas. I'd like for them to create new imaginaries and if I can make these processes conscious and affectively experienced in the classroom, then it can be the site of a person's "new birth" (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. 135). Posthumanist critiques, such as those offered by Carol A. Taylor that I review next, helped me to understand the conceptual contours of traditional pedagogies in order to begin new practices. Bickel's and Fisher's approach to creativity, art-care, *co-poiesis*, and *carriance* further guided me to illustrate how the activity for a spontaneous response and staging a scene opens novel imaginaries for a new tradition.⁶

III. New Pedagogical Practice-ings

In an ethic that is posthuman for its critique of humanism's focus on the rational capacity of human beings, Taylor (2018) emphasizes the process of intra-actions in the classroom that enlarge pedagogical practice-ings into a response-ability, where the ability to respond is formed in entangled relations between oneself, instructor, and learner. She writes, "the posthuman/new material feminist ethical frames I draw on emphasize a need to focus on actual, material practice—or, rather, what I think of as practice-ings, because all practice occurs as an unfinished unfolding" (Taylor, p. 82). In other words, we become affectively inspired to effectively alter who we consider ourselves, or parts of ourselves, and the norms we traditionally abide. Those in the class who answered contrary to the view they possess of themselves felt the pangs of this birth most acutely. Ethical relations were then activated and materialized in the instructor's ability as facilitator to attune and instantiate the other's concerns.

Taylor's (2018) orientations are considered posthumanist because they offer a harsh critique of the Enlightened tradition of humanism that pivots on the exceptionalism of human reason as the center, source, and authority of ethical reasoning; one charged with at best over-powering parts of ourselves that are "irrational," and at worst puts any non-rational capacity "exiled" and at the disposal of reason (pp. 83-84). Renewed accountability and commitment can be activated for those who have traditionally been othered by the rational human, such as women, differently abled bodies, indigenous cultures, animals, and the natural world. Artistic and imaginative insights could also be valued in the learning process even if they are "other" to reason. Useful for learners in my class was to take accountability for parts of ourselves that may stand in contradiction or tension with other parts, and to explore them with imaginative creativity. In a discussion worth attention about how the liberal and rational ideals fall short but leaving it out in the interest of space, I turn to Taylor's (2018) posthumanist new materialist ethics that replaces the abstract rationality for the messiness of life, where "instead of a dis-engaged ethic of use it proposes an entangled ethics of relation" (p. 86). An orientation that affirms and respects every part of ourselves in a logic of entanglement is useful because we can now articulate concrete practices for instructors who prioritize elements such as unlearning, uncovering, and re-shaping knowledge through non-rational and affective relations.

My understanding of Levinas's encounter of the face has guided my pedagogical practice-ings to go beyond empirical knowledge, and continually leads me to wonder: Ok, so how do I practice this with learners in the classroom? Is there a method to best utilize my position, or remain sensitive to the partic-

ularities of individuals that I encounter? It was helpful then to learn that there are better and worse ways to arrange exercises in my class to pump a pre-philosophical intuition and a spontaneous response. For example, Taylor's first orientation is to affirm the respect and value of all bodies, which ultimately asks us to enlarge our sense of self. Not only should I avoid acting as a *sage on the stage*, but I should dismantle the notion of a self altogether, let alone as a sage to be present on a stage. In the posthuman ethical frame, "all bodies, not just human bodies, matter and count and it is this more expansive and inclusive orbit that can begin to undo the problem of selfishness and self-centered individualism that humanism has wedded 'us' to for so long" (Taylor, 2018, p. 86). With an enlarged sense of interconnection between me and others, I can empathize and sympathize with different parts of everyone. As someone who is both atheist and theist, at different moments, I can find language, concern, wish, and wonder both for God as intelligent designer, and for the absurdly free subject who exists without it.⁷ After a learner's baseline assumptions were brought out, evaluated, and critiqued, fluidity between antithetical positions for paradoxical conjunctions was encouraged in our conversations over the course's material. Learners in my classroom longed to understand themselves as they encountered these different positions. With an enlarged sense of self, it was easier to discern where on this spectrum their concerns fell and the authors that they would like to stage with dialogue in a contemporary scene for their final projects.

After the spontaneous responses from our first class, learners relinquished the idea of themselves as a siloed object that exists before its relations. It became possible to appreciate the process of becoming with and through our relations with others in the classroom. In what Taylor (2018) calls a logic of entanglement, every encounter contributed to oneself in a dynamic and ongoing process that was done together, in a process that allowed what mattered to emerge. Will these learners envision a way to defend or augment Aristotle's concept of virtue in one's (siloed) character toward a relational sense of self while bombs drop outside the coffee shop where he is placed to dialogue with Albert Camus? In an echo to hooks, and Bickel and Fisher who do not separate art expression and creative acts from pedagogical and political revolution, here I am reminded of Taylor's (2018) words:

There can be no separation of ethics from epistemology and ontology; instead, there can only be 'ethico-onto-epistemology' in which, contra *Descartes* (who inculcated distinctions of mind/body, subject/object, reason/senses) knowledge is knowing-and-becoming-in-relation' to/with matter and meaning ... Ethics is an ongoing act of accountability in an ongoing relational process of 'worlding' which works outside dualist understandings of ethics. (p. 87)⁸

Put succinctly, what matters to us ends up carrying physical matter in the world. While our "self" is enlarged to account for any matter that is reflective of our meaning, so can our attention become attuned and attentive to what each person uniquely demands. An implicit step is of course to include other species and ecological concerns in what matters. As facilitator of this class, I was tasked with the question: What do those whom I stand in relation to right now demand from this place that I occupy here, even if it makes me feel a threat or discomfort as it did with the learner who wouldn't print the reflection?⁹ To hear these demands that non-verbally emanate from the other in a relational ethic is to accept an affective power (Taylor, 2018).

Affective theory provides possibilities to the skeptic of Levinas's notion of a non-empirical face and for instructors like me who wonder how to implement it. How do I come to know, or think through those with whom I stand in a relation that does not default to rational or empirical knowledge? Am I capable

of witnessing their processes, assisting, or diverting elsewhere the calls that I heed from learners? Taylor (2018) pulls on Baruch Spinoza's notion of affect as "power, passion, desire and action" (p. 88) that is more than simply an emotion localized in an individual separate from me. We come to "know" the other's vulnerability through an understanding of affect as a vitalist power, or force, that is multiple, and which binds our bodies together. We can affectively communicate through our incarnate relations (Taylor, 2018, p. 88). In a move that dismantles Descartes' enlightened mind as traditionally distinguished from its body, an "ethics powered by an affective politics figures bodies as porous, as open to each other; as bodies experiencing other bodies in encounters and relations" (Taylor, 2018, p. 88). Honestly, the re-integration of mind and body is so invigorating. My body breathes new life with these ideas. They re-integrate my body and mind that have been kept in strait jackets. I feel I can now accept the breath of another. New modes of ethical becoming-with and doing-with-each-of-our-others emerged for us. In and after sharing the space of our classroom, we imagined new potentialities that uniquely formed and later informed what we were to become.

Bickel and Fisher, like Taylor, provide guidance for how to stand in relation to another that does not default to empirical or rational ways of knowing and the ethical implications of such a relation. Aesthetic imagination and creative art defined as relational and arational utilizes affective domains of healing and transformation for political revision (Bickel & Fisher, 2023). Creativity and the practice of art-care is described as forming an arational relation in co-poiesis with another, where each is provided with "gifts that incorporate but are not limited to sensory perception, intuition, imagination, dreaming, affective knowing, magic, and mythic consciousness, the numinous, and altered states of consciousness" (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. 28). If space can be held in this process to gestate the other's concerns for a compassionate relation, then a form of *wit(h)nessing* occurs.¹⁰ Transformation with another through creative means can move non-conscious aesthetic and ethical engagements through these liminal and arational modalities, initially through non-verbal communication, and into the possibility of communal creative action. We created a community in these intimate relationships with others when we imagined, rearranged, and transformed the text, ideas, images and symbols, which is what I hoped to initiate with spontaneous responses and then with the invitation to create a dialogue between opposing authors in the context of a contemporary moral dilemma.

Rather than stay in a discourse and pedagogical approach that values rational calculations of individuated persons, the ethic of concern and art-care focus on the moral-weight each being possesses and demands from my response-ability. All bodies in a classroom become entangled when we attend to their unique capacities, to their affective flows, and to the shifts these produce in our relational, creative, and ethical response-abilities. How a particular learner enables me as an instructor to flourish in a class can feel vastly different from the other sitting right beside them, given each of their histories, their concerns, and how those resonate with my own histories and concerns. Taylor with the help of Karen Barad writes about this enlarged ethical sense-ability and response-ability and how it "recasts ethical agency as an enactment-in-relations amongst all bodies, and not as a 'thing' possessed by a sovereign and bounded human subject which can be deployed 'on' or 'towards' 'others' as if 'they' were somehow 'outside' the self ... (it) is about materializing in the minutiae of our ongoing relations 'an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly with the world's becoming' (Barad, 2007, p. 178 as cited in Taylor, 2018, p. 90).¹¹ A new form of time opens between my particular history and others when I call on each individual learner to dig into their past, beliefs, and cultural imaginaries. The process acknowledges the life altering affects and effects that occur in our classrooms.

Bickel and Fisher (2023) similarly speak about the time-space of transformative co-becoming with an unknown other through copoiesis. They cite Ettinger who holds that creativity can move us to create a “work of art to open the world apart in order to embrace new meaning and to transform the world’s frontiers into thresholds” (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. 33).¹² For both Taylor, Bickel and Fisher, responsiveness or creativity-in-communion with others are considered life affirming practices spread across space and time that enfold our past to produce future possibilities. In a community, instructors and learners are affected and creatively activated to allow new matter/s to take hold. Often after these kinds of exchanges, I leave the classroom space in a daze, or with amnesia about what exactly happened, but physically charged from our conversations that in somewhat of a delay lead to innovative ideas.

Taylor’s orienting practices challenge traditional discourses about the self, morality, and the pedagogical tools available in institutions of higher learning. They also offer a positive account of ontology, epistemology, and an ethical worldview that more successfully addresses these types of imaginative and affective encounters borne in the classroom. The need to respect and value all bodies that encounter each other in a logic of entanglement, and who are each powered by an affective politics, serve an ethic of concern where each is capable of a unique response and where each intra-action matters. These orientations were helpful for me to understand a pedagogical approach that was implicit in the activity chosen for my reflection here. Of course, it is not the case that I lead an activity to create a bond at the beginning of every class or every term. One might even ask if it is possible at every moment, or every term, to create this environment. It seems apt to call it a matrixial (Ettinger, 2006) bond after we have allowed parts of ourselves the vulnerability to explore and emerge anew in these decentering encounters. It is also entirely possible that decentering encounters are often used implicitly as guiding principles for interactions in the classroom, and that the experience is common, but no language has been developed to describe them. Indeed, most people have stories of *that* teacher who inspired us or of *that* class which managed to broaden our imagination, and upon reflection inspire broader political and social actions as hooks, Bickel and Fisher highlighted. The novelty offered through this conceptual analysis is the vocabulary given to instructors’ actions with others in the classroom, and what is presumed to be true about learners, individuals, humans, and posthumans who are more relational, affected, and imaginatively in-formed than traditional discourses would have us believe.

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Endnotes

¹ The Argument from Design or The Teleological Argument (and parts of the Cosmological Argument) for the existence of God moves from the experiential premise that because the world exhibits order and harmony there must therefore be an intelligent designer to have put order to those parts. The argument can be read in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as the 'Prime Mover' or 'First Cause,' Thomas Aquinas' 5 Arguments, William Paley's watchmaker analogy, and the inherent meaning or purpose which Friedrich Nietzsche leaves us without when he declares the death of God.

² See Book 1, Chapter 1 of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³ Used with Brianna Darlene's permission.

⁴ In a series of postcards arguably written to another, an other, or even possibly The Other, Jacques Derrida repeatedly offers his interpretation of an image of Socrates and Plato found on a postcard that was later used as the front cover for his book *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1987). In reference to Plato's written works based on "Socrates' dialogues," Plato stands behind Socrates as he seems to dictate to his teacher. The image leads us to wonder whether it was Socrates, or Plato his student, that wanted to systematize knowledge in absolute forms and ideals. After all, Socrates was famous for pushing Athenians to be critically minded and to find that real wisdom resides in not-knowing. (See Plato's *The Apology for the Oracle* at Delphi's message to Socrates that his wisdom comes from grasping the limits of knowledge, and his execution for corrupting the youth with this message.) In the image Derrida chose, there is neither a face-to-face relation between Socrates and Plato nor a conversation, but a relation of projection and imposition. Response-ability is absent in the way these characters are positioned, only dictation in what seems to characterize a tradition that begins with Plato and ends with Sigmund Freud. Platonic ideals occluded Socrates' main imperative: to remain open to those questions that cannot have answers (i.e., questions about truth and the meaning of life). The image of these two figures offers an excellent illustration of the shortcomings of traditional philosophy and the Western approach to knowledge that stutters, blocks, or writes one-sidedly. Derrida leads us to question whether it is even possible to break out of this tradition of non-reciprocity and the constraints of abstract, formulaic knowledge. Derrida illustrated the problem of traditional pedagogy and its ethical orientations so acutely for me with this image.

⁵ Bickel and Fisher base processes of unlearning on Deborah Britzman's novel approach to education.

⁶ Italicized words are attributed to Bracha L. Ettinger's work.

⁷ In the interest of space, I'll only state that the whole course was meant to problematize the traditional bifurcated responses of aligning purpose with an intelligent designer, the self, and/or the community.

⁸ Parenthes is added.

⁹ Find similar philosophical foundations of expressive arts therapy in the works of Paolo J. Knill, Ellen G. Levine, and Stephen K. Levine.

¹⁰ Wit(h)nessing is an important and expansive ethical concept in Ettinger's *Matrixial Aesthetics* (2006), as well as in Bickel's and Fisher's art-care practices (2023).

¹¹ Parenthesis added.

¹² Ettinger is cited from Griselda Pollack's (2020) work, *Bracha L. Ettinger: Matrixial Subjectivity, Aesthetics, Ethics, Volume 1 1990-2000* (p. 407).

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Harvesting a Blessing

Alba Torres Robinat
Katrina Plato
Alexandra Katherine Goodall
Valerie Oved Giovanini
Sinem Lanaci

Abstract

The process of collectively writing the Artizein articles in this issue has come to an end. In this video you can see how we harvested the gifts of our writing collaboration. Each of us made a visual artwork that we shaped as a creative digestion of our work together. The group responded to each members' art through written words and movement. Each member then gave a final message that gathered what emerged and touched her from the group, the blessing.

Bios

Alba Torres Robinat, M.A., is from Spain (Catalonia) and works as a multimodal artist focused on performance art; her last artwork focused on dreamwork. She is also an expressive arts therapist working in several Spanish public mental health services and a private psychiatric hospital.

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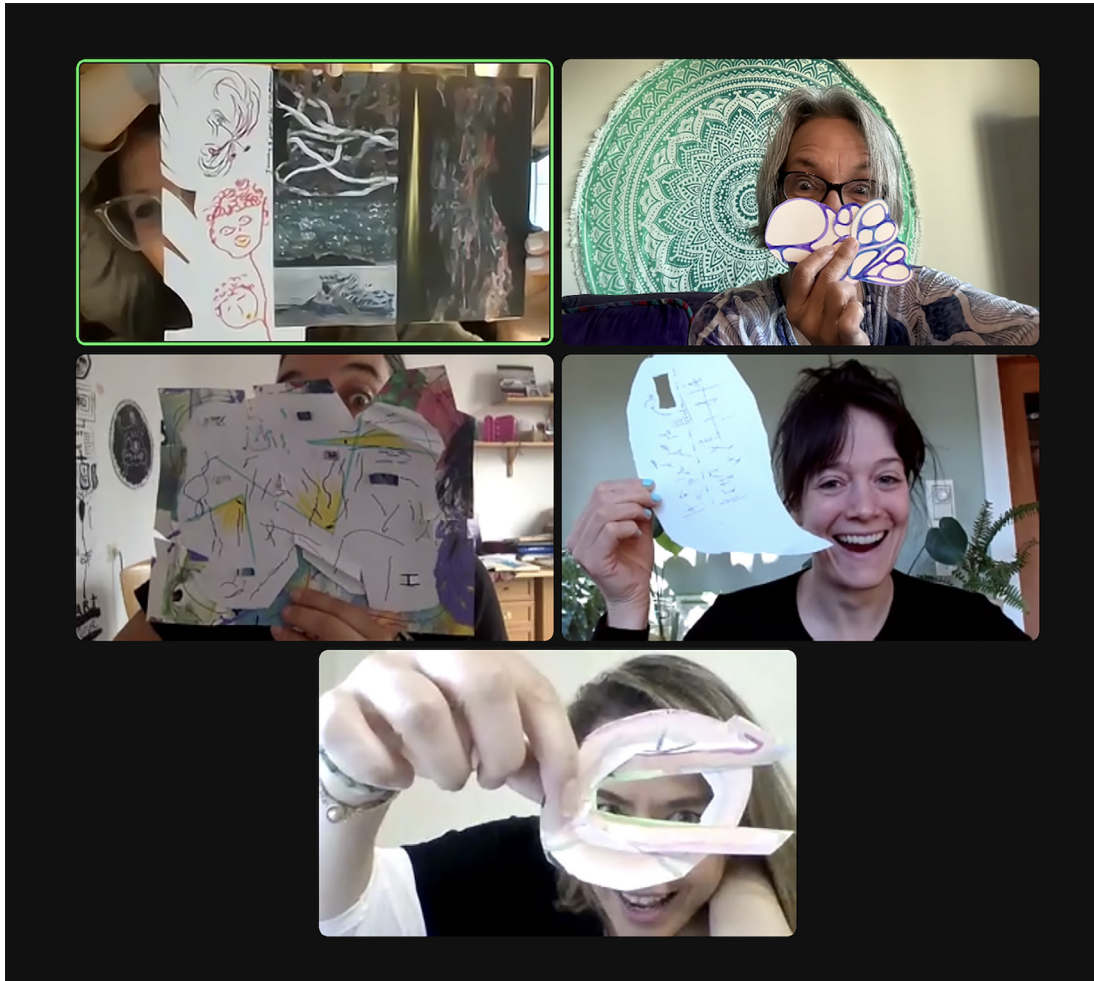
Sinem Lanaci, Ph.D., is an intermodal expressive arts coach, facilitator, lecture and artist from Istanbul, Turkey. She designs, implements, facilitates and coaches companies for international cultural transformation projects, implementing intermodal expressive arts to their business processes, to their employees for developing skills, and trains their coaches for cascading down intermodal expressive arts to the entire organizations.
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The following video illustrates a group of collaborators' artistic responses to a yearlong venture to write together. It shows how art can be used to digest a shared experience and illuminate layers of the journey with play, humor, and laughter as an important part of the research and unpacking process of collective writing. The video shows each member with their visual artwork that was shaped as a creative digestion of working together. The group then responded to each members' art through written words and movement. Finally, each member offered a message about what emerged and touched her from the group, the blessing. Expressive Artists can find inspiration on how to create a group piece around the topic of "Harvesting a Blessing" after an extended collaboration that begins with the facilitation of one group member and then moves into co-facilitation that is improvised by all group members.

It was a shared aesthetic choice to use the raw written material of our creative process, with its written mistakes and typos in the video. The text was transcribed by a person in the group who was typing while others spoke spontaneous words in response to the artwork that appeared from another group member. Gestures from others in the group followed as seen in the video. The raw words are as much a part of the process as the images, gestures, sounds, and affective reactions. The words provide meaning to the abstract impressions, and feelings that each experienced in response to another's visual artwork. Words have become part of the raw materials that appear in the video, with all the mistakes of *typing* in the way. There is no need to read all the text, there is no time to do so, and no clarity needs to be grasped. Even the color of the words eventually fades away. We invite you to let your eyes fish for new written expressions, or to become enriched by the sounds and gestures in front of you.

You are invited to play along with us.

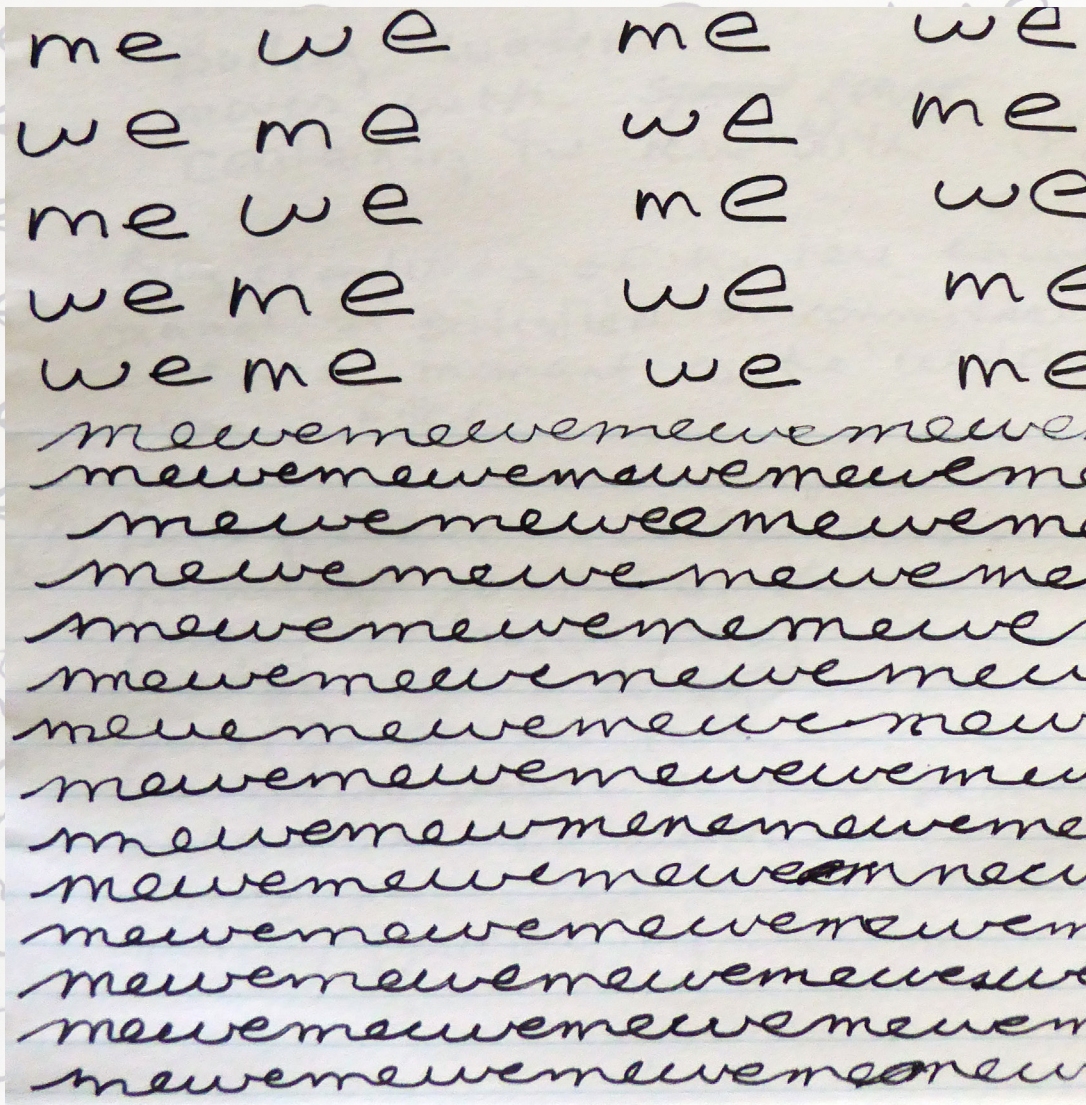


<https://vimeo.com/897003431>

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank all the participants for their collaboration and engagement in making this final clip. Special thanks to Alba Torres Robinat for making it the beautiful art piece that it is today.

Book Reviews



Barbara's automatic writing. Spontaneous Creation. Digital photo. Bickel & Fisher 2023 book *Art-Care Practices for Restoring the Communal: Education, Co-Inquiry, and Healing*, p. 98. ©Barbara Bickel.

The Yes of Soul

Book Review for
*Poetry in Expressive Arts:
Supporting Resilience through Poetic Writing*
by Margo Fuchs Knill & Sally S. Atkins
Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers (2021)

Reviewed by Katrina Plato & Lucien Zell

Bios

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Lucien Zell was born in Los Angeles, raised in Seattle, and lives in Prague. An acclaimed singer-songwriter, photographer, and actor, he's published five collections of poetry, one novel-in-stories, and will soon release his novel *The Rabbi of Auschwitz*.
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This book is intended to awaken, empower, and inspire the creative poetic capacity that exists within each person . . . [W]e explore how poetry offers soul nourishment and connects us to resilience, wonder, amazement, and the magic of creation . . . that stirs curiosity and the courage to tell our stories. (Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 28)

Mirroring the authors of the book, this review is written in partnership. Creative writing teacher and author Lucien Zell begins the review with a reflection on the book's theme of resilience. Expressive arts professional Katrina Plato continues the review, highlighting some of the prompts in the book with her own poetry, the poetry of Japanese analytical music therapist Dan Komiya, and her expressive arts clients' engagement.

There Comes a Yes | Lucien Zell

E.E. Cummings (1938) reminds us: "Always a more beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question." As a dedicated literary citizen, I offer weekly online writing workshops to poetry students from around the world, and host a bi-monthly online podcast, *Poetry Junkies*. I always do my best to ask beautiful questions:

We'd reached the end of the interview. The Zoom screen displaced Brendan's face, toggling from user to user, searching for the least-silent speaker. After a beat, I unleashed my question: "The poet Wallace Stevens wrote 'After the final no there comes a yes / And on this yes the future world depends.' Brendan, what's your 'yes'?" The poet Brendan Constantine's face reappeared as he released a sigh. All of us, a baker's dozen or so in the virtual room of Poetry Junkies watched Brendan wriggle and think. It was his longest silence of the night. "Id . . . Id . . ." He paused again. "I guess I'd have to say . . . to do no harm."

While we all struggle, in various ways, to find our 'yes,' Margo Fuchs Knill and Sally S. Atkins, with their latest book *Poetry in Expressive Arts*, have composed a powerful yes. A yes that not only 'does no harm'—it does much good.

Ranging from vignettes of case studies to muscular, and practical, writing suggestions (with insight-sparkles flickering in-between), Knill and Atkins weave a bright and significant tapestry of ideas. Ideas about poetry. Ideas about therapy. And, ultimately, ideas about words themselves. Anyone who's been in a heated argument (i.e., everyone who's ever lived) knows that words can lash and misconstrue and provoke rupture. One of the most magical powers of words, and what this book most conscientiously affirms, talking about words *with* words, is their power to caress and teach and conjure reconciliation. Examples of both authors' poetic work is generously sprinkled throughout.

When Knill writes, citing her own work, "I shall lose my mind to claim the poem," (p. 85) it's clear that what she means by losing her mind is closer to finding not only her own heart but the heart of the world. A world-heart that is hurting, but (not yet) broken beyond repair.

The ancient Japanese art of *kintsugi*, wherein broken ceramics are put back together with sap and gold filament, thus rendering the restored pieces even more beautiful than their pristine originals, feels apropos to mention in this context. "The heart breaks to get bigger." This deep/simple notion, one I coined about a decade ago, continues to reverberate in my life. Sometimes you do not hear your own thoughts until someone else says them. Poetry in *Expressive Arts* echoes this sentiment, using other words to express the very same thing. It too urges us, when encountering a friend, or stranger, with a broken heart, to encourage them to (en)courage their own hearts to grow bigger. Not to buckle and breakdown but to bustle and breakthrough.

As I consistently aim to do in my own poetic work, Knill and Atkins offer concrete tools to ensure the *kintsugi*-like potential that resides in each of us emerges triumphant. In chapter four, for instance, drawing upon the life and work of Holocaust-era poet Hilde Domin—and her stimulating concept of 'nevertheless'—the book keys in on Domin's myriad, and marvelous, life lessons:

The nevertheless hope speaks as a voice of encouragement. Do not fear. Why do we not need to fear? No matter what, spring—a world in bloom—comes back every year. When there is an outer spring, a sense of spring inside can exist too. And what we left behind is impacted by spring and is blossoming. Nature is mercilessly merciful. (p. 104)

Exiled from Germany for nearly three decades, Domin considered herself a poet of return. “When we stand still and let the landscape pass,” Domin wrote, “leaving at one point changes into arriving” (p. 99). She called this radical shift of perspective ‘second paradise’ (Domin, 2006). As an American poet exiled home to the second paradise of Prague, I register her meaning and find strength in it. “Poetry can carry a lot,” insist the authors: “What might become too much to endure in real life can be held in poetry” (Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 99).

Steeped in the art of poetry therapy, the authors introduce us to Domin’s idea, again in her words, that we are all “washed with the water of the deluge” (Domin, 1999, p. 11, translated by Knill) while simultaneously encouraging us to: “gently hold out our hand” to the miracle (Domin, 1996, p. 61, translated by Knill, as cited in Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 126). If we do, they imply, we might all be blessed with a deluge of miracles.

And not just Hollywood’s tinselly, orchestra-backed miracles. No. More Leonard Cohen’s “cold and broken Hallelujahs,” miracles small (and real) enough to give us room to grow. As the authors emphasize, “As long as we do the work, there is always something not yet there or missing, or, when we look at it in a reconciled way, we can say there is always something that is still on the way” (Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 107).

Still on the way to a yes. The yes of beautiful questions, and the answers they imply. Read this book, revel in it, and as Katrina demonstrates next, practice it, and it may help you find—or, better yet, redefine—what constitutes your yes.

Soul Nourishment | Katrina Plato

Soul nourishment is my ‘yes.’ I am nurtured witnessing transformation through the healing arts.

As an intermodal expressive arts professional, I lead group therapy sessions with youth and adults in one of the fastest growing online intensive outpatient programs in the United States. The authors remind us that intermodal expressive arts work is a profession that integrates various arts, eloquently stating, “Poetry speaks not only in words but also in motion (movement), metaphors (imagery), and actions (theatre).” They also speak to the expansion of intermodal expressive arts bringing “sustainable positive change” (Knill & Atkins, 2021, pp. 49-50).

Like my fellow reviewer Lucien, I too felt a kintsugi-like connection in *Poetry in Expressive Arts*. In the introduction, the authors emphasize “expressive arts poetry as a liberating and rescuing force that stirs curiosity and the courage to tell our stories” (Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 28). This reference reminded me of a therapeutic curriculum I facilitate based on kintsugi which combines drawing and poetry. During a group therapy activity, I invite clients to imagine their personal story in metaphor as a clay vessel. First, they draw an image of themselves as a broken vessel in the process of repair, and then write a haiku or free-form poem.

To protect confidentiality, I cannot share their images or poetry, but I can share their story. but I will reflect on their metaphors. Vessels take on different forms as pouring emotions, holding memories,

or moving statues. Cracks might represent trauma, deaths, or growth marks. The glue takes on meaning such as artistic expression, self-respect, and family.

As clients write, they often talk about writing poetry as a daily practice, an idea shared by the authors. One client explained they had a series of poems they referred to as mini diary entries, but in poem form (personal communication, 2023). Clients' haikus described fragility, crumbling, glistening with gold cracks, silence, or forms of resilience such as rising again the next morning. .

In the third chapter 'Writing, Reading, and Sharing Poetry in Expressive Arts,' the authors define expressive arts professionals as "caring professionals" such as "teachers, therapists, coaches, consultants, team leaders, and crisis workers," who, "use the expressive arts with persons of all ages and in many different professional settings in the world including clinical work, education, organizational development, and crisis situations" (Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 65). Some attributes of caring expressive arts professionals that the authors include are the importance of reflecting on their own relationship with words through their use of speech, metaphor, and a conscientiously evolving vocabulary.

We are encouraged to listen, "with all our senses" (Knill & Atkins, p. 68), and find a special space and time of day to write. I recently had the great fortune of attending a Sensory Awareness retreat on Cortes Island in British Columbia, Canada where I played with one of the wealth of prompts listed in the book to use with individuals or groups.

Word walk: Walk outside and observe the natural world. Collect words—not just nouns, but also adjectives, adverbs, and, especially, verbs (Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 75).

Here's an excerpt from my word walk:

The rising sun's reflection
dances like fire around round rocks
in the water lapping forward
as the tide pulls out.

Seagulls land on a rock cairn
with high-pitched squawks
startling a blue heron who lifts its heavy body
and glides along the surface of the water
seeking a new perch.

At the Sensory Awareness retreat, several of the participants were from Japan. One of the women from Japan, Hiromi Uchida, is a music therapist. I attempted to share the idea of the sound poems as described in the section on "Playing with Sounds" in *Poetry in Expressive Arts*, creating poems from, "an exploration beyond words" (Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 70). Inspired, Hiromi shared the idea with a colleague, Dan Komiya. I communicated with Dan regarding a poetry process that the sensory awareness retreat inspired: to compose a response to what the authors described as "opening our senses to the environment"

(Knill & Atkins, 2021, p. 71). Hearing this description, he responded with a ‘yes’ in his daily life, creating a poem made of sounds from a walk. Dan (personal communication, 2023) explained:

I created a new sound poem this morning and recorded it on the spot. I took a short walk in my neighborhood where there is a housing complex. I grew up in a small town like this one and I always have a nostalgic feeling whenever I see a housing complex. There was also a kindergarten and I heard the sound of children singing and playing music when I created this poem. You can probably hear a little bit of the sound of children in the background in the sound clip. I tried to let the sound arise from my belly, not from my head. The rhythms of these phrases were more like an ancient Japanese poem (tanka: 5/7/5/7/7 or haiku: 5/7/5) with the transliteration of sounds:

あまつときのなか
Amatsutokinonaka

わがまんごうらいのむんなかのえん
Wagamangolainomunnakanoen

まみいっときのまごだっちょう
Mamiittokinomagodachou

ちゃちゃいのちゃいのちゃいにて
Chachainochainochainite

むくむんもうのあんげんぜんをあげつ
Mukumunmounoangenzenwoagetsu

たまおしばのみかえしつ
Tamaoshibanomikaesitsu

くもなぎはっこうのむぶのもん
Kumonagihakkounomubunomon

You can hear the sound clip from the link [here](#)

A final poem using the rich poetry prompts given in the book was inspired by Lucien. After reading the section on writing poetry in expressive arts, he set me the challenge of using three of the prompts from the book (Knill & Atkins, 2021, pp. 74-75) for a single poem. The prompts were:

Found words: Circle words on a page in a book, magazine, or a newspaper. Black out everything else. Turn the words into a poem.

Bowl of words: Fill a large bowl with printed words: adjectives, adverbs, nouns, and verbs. Take a handful and use them as inspiration to create a poem.

Experiment with metaphor: Compare an abstract word with a concrete image, e.g. “Fear is like . . .” “Courage is . . .”

I gleaned found words from a used copy of *The Four-Fold Way* by Angeles Arrien (1993), plucked the word ‘breathe’ from my bowl of words, and adapted the metaphor ‘Wisdom is . . .’ to create this poem:

The Unclaimed Warrior

Roots of the pattern,
being fully seen
in areas where we are
talented.

Wisdom is like
that distant oak
reflecting the greater being
that you are.
The inner healer.

Shaman’s rhythmic drumming
multiple beats per minute
accelerates shifts.
Breathe in
energized personal leadership.

The Soul of Yes | Katrina & Lucien

A poem is a brainbow, when the rain of feelings is pierced by the sunlight of intellect.
—Lucien Zell

If we have traversed the ritual well, we will be successful in bringing forth new insights on the questions that live within us.
—Katrina Plato

This book astutely asserts the inherent braiding of heart and mind that poetry makes possible. Stories and poems illuminate each page of this book with concrete examples of how to liberally and literally apply the theory of expressive arts. Rarely does a book, especially one ostensibly devoted to therapy, attempt to marry both linguistic music and empirical accuracy; this one does. We encourage readers to explore the embodiment of this book’s ideas in their personal and professional lives. Not only to find a yes, but to ensure that yes is heard by others.

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Tikkun Olam as Cosmic Repair

Book Review for
*Art-Care Practices for Restoring the Communal:
Education, Co-Inquiry, and Healing*
by Barbara A. Bickel & R. Michael Fisher
Published by Routledge (2023)

Reviewed by Valerie Oved Giovanini

Bio

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.
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The compassionate observations about art and *communitas* written down in the pages of this book are meant to re-enchant and even become an oracle song—a sacred message received and co-composed from the experience. It is a gift shared for the purpose of a collective guidance for the future. (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. 182)

What do you do about a problem that you find in the modern art world, where art has been separated from the space of sacred or communal work? Barbara A. Bickel and R. Michael Fisher together wrote a book: *Art-Care Practices for Restoring the Communal: Education, Co-Inquiry, and Healing* to expand the imaginaries of artists, researchers, and teachers with the goal that they too facilitate their own creative communal practices. Bickel and Fisher make good on their offer of a sacred message that is meant to re-enchant the community with a “spiritual feminist perspective on art and the creating of art ... (as) an ethically centered relational process” (p. xxxvii) (parenthesis added). With in-depth theoretical reflection and practical tools for their method of *Spontaneous Creation-Making* (SCM), the authors provide practitioners and facilitators with a praxis that aims for personal and communal transformation. Various techniques to practice SCM that align with Bracha L. Ettinger’s paradigm of *matrixial borderspaces* are impressive in the number of methods offered and in their depth of insight into what can feel like an uneasy process. The book also provides an encyclopedic resource for arts-based researchers, facilitators, practitioners, as well as for teachers of various fields who serve these feminist concerns. Together Bickel and Fisher have over 30 years of experience facilitating numerous creation labs that combine culture, arts, and healing. The latest is their Restorative Lab Project that began in 2020 and it so clearly informs the methodologies, theories, and content developed for this book.

Art-Care Practices includes three main parts, which I will address respectively. The first part is titled “Communitreaming on Theory” and provides a rich resource, background, and ground for the use of art in communal healing. The reader is offered an imaginative landscape to spontaneously create an *otherwise*.¹ I use the word *otherwise* because the theoretical backbone of this book stands in proximity to Bracha L. Ettinger’s matrixial aesthetics that values the service of *artworking*. An encounter with what is other, or otherwise-than-what is-known, is needed so that we can birth new creations “to sacredly restore and reunite us aesthetically with universal maternal place-ness on the Earth and healing” (Bickel & Fisher, p. 124). Emphasis in art creation here sheds light on psychic cracks and traumas, on personal fragmentation, and the possibility for co-regulation with past, present, and future others. Art as spiritual activism neither focuses on technical skill, nor seeks to harmonize reality; this art does not focus on aesthetic pleasure. Instead, art-caring calls for radical trust and openness to engage in a practice that is produced in “*communitas*,” a process of copoiesis with others who are working toward a common goal (Bickel & Fisher, pp. 84-85). They draw from Marrie-Dominique Garnier’s notion of *placenterre* as the mediating place from which new life gestates and invites each person to birth new creations through art. Through an exercise facilitated by Bickel and Fisher in the book’s “Turnabout Postscript,” the readers are recruited to create for themselves what is *otherwise*.

The authors provide many examples from their group facilitations of art-making from before and during the Covid-19 lockdown that were made virtually or in-person and the affects will continue to ripple through time in their readers’ engagement. Through different modalities such as dance, painting, poetry, audio-mixing, and photo collage, the authors illustrate how the ethical injunction of care arises through different art-making processes if it comes from a place of relationality that originates for all of us in the womb. One example they provided is in the spontaneous creation of a snow labyrinth for others in the community to walk (Bickel & Fisher, 2003, p. 6). The spiral-art created an unexpected encounter with un-homed residents from the neighborhood and generated a heartfelt exchange, which in the book precedes the authors’ insightful explanation of the theoretical value of their use of public space to engage the borders of their own levels of comfort.

An *arational* approach to what is m/othered, processes of unlearning, and worlding-with-others similarly helped facilitate new creative possibilities for 22 participants of the Restorative Lab whose creations are featured heavily throughout the book, and honestly, they offer an amount of relief to the reader in the very process of wit(h)nessing them. For me personally, the first Covid lockdown in March 2020 coincided with the birth of my first child on March 31, 2020. I often joke that the world shutdown as my partner and I went into hibernation-mode from sleep deprivation, prioritizing new diapers and feeding routines, and the constant care of a new human being. Memories of my first-born child, like their first smile, are bittersweet since they are accompanied by a world that was shut down from the possibility of community.

However, even to read retroactively about this group of “22 spontaneous creators,” who came together to co-create through various art practices, such as poetry, image manipulation, dance, and cooking, prove to me that interconnectivity persisted during such an isolated, but beautiful, time in my life (Bickel & Fisher, p. 11). Diane’s story about cooking mushrooms from a delivery that arrived just before their first online “Happening” was particularly moving for me (Barbara & Fisher, pp. 32-33). She offered a manipulated image of the meal she cooked to the group as part of her creative art-making. An image of the meal

is offered in the book to the reader, and it brought tears to my eyes. Meals and breaking bread still happened in our isolation. Even if I didn't know about this group or the first online "Happening" in March of 2020, the sense of community I felt helped to re-signify the isolation I often project back to that time. The authors' offer of art-care is still generating interconnectivity within a *communitas* of readers now who seek to heal from the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the most enriching experience with the first part of Bickel's and Fisher's book on theory, an acquaintance with Ettinger's book *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006) would be helpful. Particularly the first chapter titled "The Maternal Gaze" develops key concepts that are generative for Bickel's and Fisher's art-care practices, such as how co-origination in a *matrixial* womb activates art and art-making processes. According to these insights, the ethical burden in art-creation and copoiesis that enables the therapeutic potential to see and have one's trauma wit(h)nessed, calls for a safe context to hold another with empathy and compassion (Bickel & Fisher, 2023). Advice is offered on how to create this holding space as a facilitator of SCM. To be clear, Bickel's and Fisher's book provides a glossary of key terms, relevant quotes, and sufficient context for those unfamiliar with Ettinger's work, but it was a unique delight to read them side-by-side. It is noteworthy that Ettinger endorsed *Art-Care Practices* both with her art which is featured as the book's cover, by writing a touching Foreword, and through her participation in an event for the book's launch. Bickel's and Fisher's book is where Ettinger's revolutionary ideas gain legs and walks into art as a healing practice.

The second part is titled "Spontaneous Creating on Practice" and focuses on how to put into practice Ettinger's matrixial insights. Rich details are provided on how to use ritual and grounding exercises to create a sacred space for art-making and healing. Detailed instructions and scripts, guidelines and examples illustrate how to practice and facilitate SCM sessions. While never overlooking feelings of vulnerability and fear that this process inspires, steps to gestate and transform them illustrate how aesthetics are the foundation of the ethical encounter for these co-authors. In addition to SCM, thirteen *Matrixial Aesthetic Practices* (MAPs) are introduced in Chapter 2 and fully explained in Appendix 1. These MAPs aim to foster creative encounters in community with others and each one offers a unique imaginary to re-enter a field of care through art-making. A few notable MAPs that move aesthetics into ethics and politics include the hospitable welcoming of the other (MAP #1), forming and accessing caring fields with ancestral lines and allies (MAP #2), following *arational* threads in intuition and dreams (MAP #6), and art-inquiry into the unknown for a living encounter-event (MAP #7). The book's form puts into practice MAP #12 that asks to commit to a field of maternal care. The authors have not trademarked their SCM method. The book's foundation in gift-giving arrests my curiosity about how the authors will measure and quantify the ways these methods are used for collective healing. But therein lies the way this book presses on its reader in its thoughtful form to challenge the economic exchange of value for a matrixial one. The rest will follow.

"Gestating on Service" is the third and concluding part of the book that really puts into practice the idea of a matrixial paradigm. The gift is the authors' careful and meticulous development of art-care as a communal service. In a relation that is asymmetrical between authors and readers, Bickel and Fisher provide sample posters from their workshops, exercise examples, and email templates for SCM practitioners and facilitators. Without the expectation of monetary payment in the traditional spirit of an "exchange econ-

onomy,” these materials are all gifted to readers without the expectation of a fair return (Bickel & Fisher, 2023, p. xxxix, p. 106). Through and through the message of ethical relationality and art-making for curative possibilities is enacted. From the images and exercises that worked on me just by reading them, to the groups of people that can facilitate more SCM workshops, and the scholars and teachers who can now ground their research in a paradigm that challenges Western colonial practices (Bickel & Fisher, 2023), I can say that this invaluable book in content and form offers an amount of Tikkun Olam that aims to repair the cosmos through communal and personal acts of healing.²

Note: To see a video of the book launch and conversation between the book authors and Bracha L. Ettinger and others go to <https://studiom.space/books/>

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Endnotes

- ¹ Levinas, E. (2009). *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Duquesne University Press.
- ² See Isaac Luria’s teachings in Gershom Scholem’s book *Kabbalah* (1974).

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Spacious Theories of Object Relativity & Objective Reality

Book Review for
Seven Brief Lessons on Physics
by Carlo Rovelli
Published by Riverhead Books

Reviewed by Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

Bio

Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi MA, is an American-Israeli artist, academic editor, and entrepreneur living in Switzerland and Italy. She is the founder of *ImaginGeist*, a nonprofit start-up based in Switzerland launching an interactive platform to explore creative approaches to global issues through participatory arts-based research and content creation. carmiella.zorzi@egs.edu | www.carmiella.com



When we talk about the big bang or the fabric of space, what we are doing is not a continuation of the free and fantastic stories that humans have told nightly around campfires for hundreds of thousands of years. It is the continuation of something else: of the glaze of those same men in the first light of day looking at tracks left by antelope in the dust of the savannah - scrutinizing and deducting from the details of reality in order to pursue something that we can't see directly but can follow traces of. In the awareness that we can always be wrong, and therefore ready at any moment to change direction if a new track appears; but knowing also that if we are good enough we will get it right and will find what we are seeking. This is the nature of science.

The confusion between these two diverse activities - inventing stories and following traces in order to find something - is the origin of the incomprehension and distrust of science shown by a significant part of our contemporary culture. The separation is a subtle one: the antelope hunted at dawn is not far removed from the antelope deity in that night's storytelling. The border is porous. Myths nourish science, and science nourishes myth. But the value of knowledge remains. (Rovelli, 2016, pp. 68-69)

The following is an Arts-based Book Review of Carlo Rovelli's book, (2016) *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* and incorporates original artworks by me, the book reviewer. The first two physical-digital illustrations (Figures 1-2) were inspired by *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, among other books, for the introduction to a Master's Thesis written at the European Graduate School, Arts Health and Society Division, in 2020. This article concludes with the harvesting of an Expressive Arts Academic Consultation session that was informed by this work of Carlo Rovelli, among many other great creative thinkers in physics.



Figure 1. Art by Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi



Figure 2. Art by Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

Carlo Rovelli's book is an accessible, short, and poetic doorway into the surprising findings and theories of physics for curious art-based researchers and Expressive Arts professionals who have an appreciation for math and science without a zest for solving equations or remembering many complex terms. To understand how scientists have arrived at and move forward from within modern theories of physics, and what their imaginative implications are, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* provides a poetic history of how the research of physics has evolved over time, as well as simple thought experiments that drive home the wild conclusions to which these findings and theories lead. Expressive Arts (EXA) facilitators may find this book especially meaningful as they guide others through creative processes without a clear map into and out of the realms of imagination. When in the process of the abstraction of the arts, this book helps ground the imagination to the limits and potentials of the predictable-yet-unpredictably-ever-strange underlying structures of physics upon which our shared reality is structured.

Rovelli's insights about the liminality of time, the relativity of each individual's unique experience, and how scientific research can salutogenically decenter ourselves to form fascinating new relationships with others in physical spaces are what particularly ignites my sensibilities as an art-based researcher and Expressive Arts professional. My relationships with *time* while in art-based research settings repeatedly reveal surprising, even shocking, insights into the relativity of time, perspective, and even the experience of a mutual relationship. In an art-based research experience/EXA session, insights can emerge out of co-creative simultaneous inter-actions at a near-far distance, in parallel-unparallel processes that we enact as separate yet interconnected beings. There is no way to track time unless one can observe the change of multiple objects when they are in relation to one another. Thus, without relationships, there is not time. As Rovelli emphasizes, physicists no longer use the terms *true* or *absolute* to describe time but instead describe individual times told by separate clocks/entities as their own proper time. Through illuminating simple thought experiments, especially those of Einstein, Rovelli unravels insights into the nature of time and space. These thought experiments invite endless new entry points for imaginative inquiries about physics scenarios that can be incorporated into EXA-based research in a myriad of fields.

The following are questions that emerged for me as an artist researcher/EXA professional in response to this book: What can be learned by engaging the multiplicity of our individual and collective times while co-creatively inter-acting through artistic embodiment? How can art-based research serve to support those who are in pursuit of a "Theory of Everything" of mathematical understanding which bridges the gaps between quantum mechanics and classical physics? How can we explore the liminality or solidity of physical-metaphysical realities which exist as yet-imperceivable 'objects' between the 'particle and wave' duality? Since we now know through quantum mechanics that the 'inanimate' components of reality respond to us based on how we observe/interact with them, what new interactive techniques can we explore to enable surprising science fiction-esque scenarios? How can EXA-inspired art-based research serve to attune us to nature's musicality of real and imagined object formation, deconstruction, reconstruction, materialization, dematerialization, rematerialization, and lastly otherwise fascinating co-creative evolution?

I invite the reader to join me in exploring Rovelli's work through the following EXA session with a physics student to consider how each issue that faces us, be it environmental, humanitarian, technological, extraterrestrial, or intergalactic has vital relevance to our *experiences with physics*.

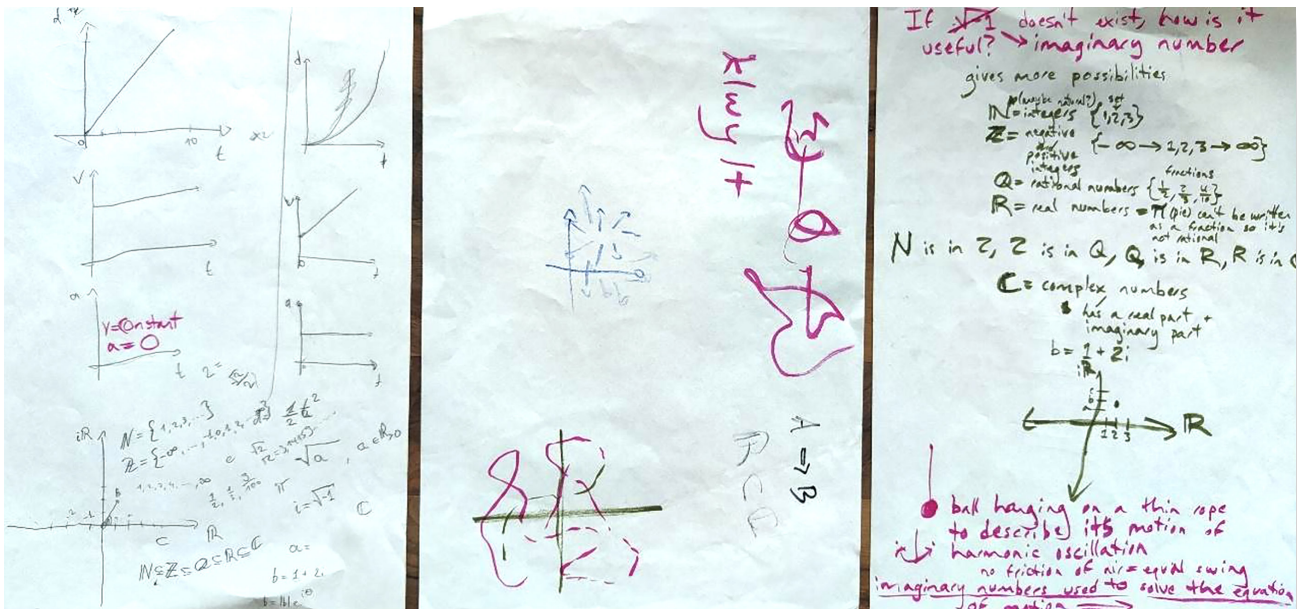


Figure 3. Expressive Arts Academic consultation session with undergraduate physics student, H (shared with permission) 2020. Photo by Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

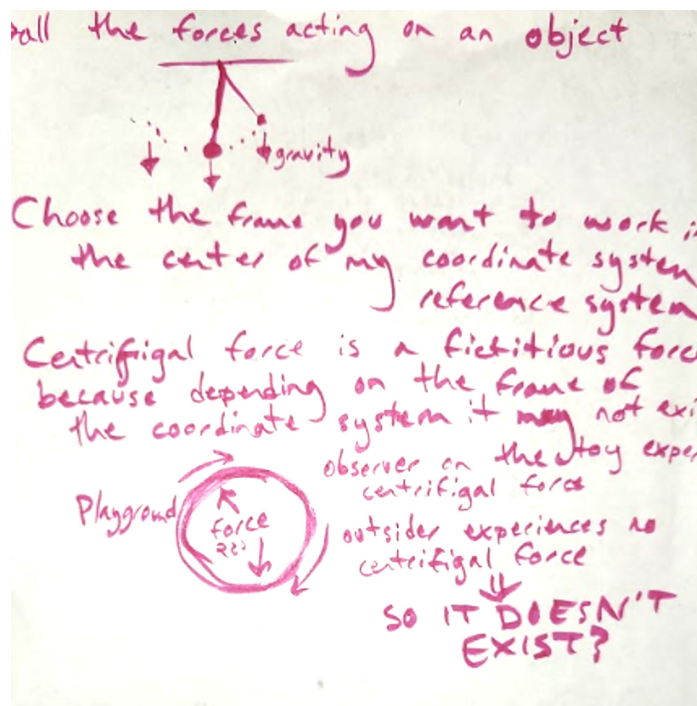


Figure 4. Notes by Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

In the mystifying village of Saas-Fee in 2020, I was lucky to encounter a young physics student from the University of Zürich who was open to doing an EXA Academic Consultation session with me. I will call him H. H told me he was studying the mathematics of real and imaginary numbers, which I felt would be a fascinating subject to explore through Expressive Arts. My session with H was the only one during the time of my master's degree that I conducted in person rather than online. I began the session by having H teach me a bit about the relationship between real and imaginary numbers from what he had learned so far in his course. He drew the following graphs while he spoke (Figure 3), and I took my own notes (Figure 4) about what he said. H was learning what the 'meaning' of an imaginary number is in mathematics and why it is useful. I decided that that should be the question around which the session would be centered.

I led H through a *sensitization* process by beginning with jumping and shaking while watching how the objects in the room moved in relation to one another as he moved, mainly on the vertical axis of his body in space. I then asked him to stop and hold his hands over his eyes as I read a writing piece I had prepared about how within the darkness of his closed eyes, the only proof he had of a world outside of his own mind were the phenomena of his physical sensations: touch, sound, taste. Yet in the dark of his closed eyes, what proof did he have otherwise that these sensorial phenomena weren't scrambled in that moment? That he may physically be entirely *other*, otherwise... We then shifted into an artistic *exploration* of a 'graph' of real and imaginary numbers. I suggested that H draw onto the graph with either (a) a marker to signify *real*, or with (b) paint to signify *imaginary*. I meanwhile, as the EXA Academic Consultant, drew particles/objects around the graph in marker and/or paint which he could interact with or avoid. The following image emerged (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Artistic exploration between Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi and H

I observed that H began the activity by only drawing and painting on the axis lines; I was very curious as to why. He then painted a red line that moved around my little green object in the top left quadrant, followed by a green bridge between the axes in both paint and marker. Next, he drew a web which connected each of my particles, first in marker and then in paint. H then enacted a beautiful phenomenological metaphor when his brush eventually ran out of paint; he continued his strokes around the paper without a permanent mark being made.

H told me that he started by staying on the axes because he felt that was the only place where imaginary and real numbers could feasibly coexist mathematically. He said that he then saw in one of my particles that I had used both marker and paint, and it made him curious to consider how everything in between the axes could be both imaginary and real. He then moved into connecting all of the particles, perhaps to mean that “everything is connected”. He painted and drew a large dot over the intersection of the x and y axis to consider what the “origin” is, wondering what “null” really means—how it could be the source of everything.

I shared with H how I was intrigued by the moment his strokes became mark-less, when he smiled as his hand lilted across the page enjoying that neither *marker* nor *paint* marked their memory.... how to me, in this moment, he was alluding to another level of imagination: enacting an interactive movement with the brush and paper which was *real* and *remembered* by both of us in our imaginations but *invisible* now and thus nonexistent to anyone else who looks at the work we made. I then, in our Expressive Arts Academic Consultation session, suggested that we co-create a responsive poem with the title, *In the Nodes Where Imaginary and Real Meet*. Figure 6 is an image of that poem, with my words in purple and H’s in green.

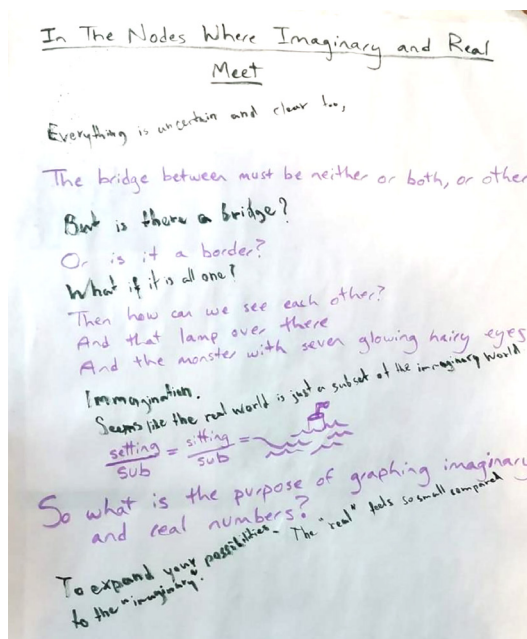


Figure 6. Co-created responsive poem by H and Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

In the Nodes where Imaginary and Real Meet

Everything is uncertain and clear too,

The bridge between must be neither or both, or other

But is there a bridge?

Or is it a border?

What if it is all one?

Then how can we see each other?

And that lamp over there

And the monster with seven glowing hairy eyes

Immagination.

Seems like the real world is just a subset of the imaginary world

setting = sitting = [image: line drawn waves with a submarine
sub sub periscope looking right]

So what is the purpose of graphing imaginary
and real numbers?

To expand your possibilities - The “real” feels so small compared
to the “imaginary”.

We discussed the part of the poem where H wrote that the real world was a “subset” of the imaginary. I didn’t understand what he meant when he wrote it, so I used his words to create an abstract fraction, where “sub” went under the setting. I then associated “setting” with the word “sitting”, and finally I felt compelled to make a further abstracted fraction where the dividing line became the water waves around a submarine. For me, this drawing denoted a submersion into the subconscious where the line between imaginary and real is completely fluid. H reflected that he didn’t understand what I meant when I wrote/drew this, because he had used the mathematical word “subset” to describe a concept of mathematical logic. He said that a “subset” is something which is contained by a larger set but *not* in reverse, such as “if it rains the streets are wet, but if the streets are wet then it is not necessarily because there was rain.” He said that, mathematically, real numbers are a subset of imaginary numbers, and not the other way around.

I responded by asking, “So without the imaginary, there is no real?” He responded with a question about imagination in general, wondering whether one can imagine something that doesn’t have some direct link to their actual experience. He pointed to the line in the poem where I described a monster with glowing hairy eyes saying, “Sure, we have never seen such a monster, but we have seen glowing things, hair, and eyes, so our imagination can just mash together those images”. I responded that I wondered if this was a limitation of verbal description. I asked what would have happened if I had used the English alphabet to write gibberish words or had drawn gibberish letters—would that tap into imagination devoid of *real* influences? From there we were inspired to discuss how we have learned that our spoken languages do not accurately describe subatomic phenomena because there are no equivalents of it in the macroscopic realm. Our harvest concluded with crystallizing how, on or off a mathematical graph, it is immensely challenging to determine the boundaries between imaginary and real.

Through the evolution of my master’s thesis research with the help of Rovelli’s work alongside EXA consultations like this one with H, I developed new perspectives on the terms *relationship* and *interaction*. I have come to see *relationship* as inextricable from *interaction* but not the other way around. In other words, interaction is a subset of relationship. I define ‘interaction’ as the juncture when separate entities meet and affect one another through their presence, while ‘relationship’ describes the connection between entities even when they are not in immediate contact. *Relationship* thus describes an immaterial quality of object dynamics that *interaction* does not. Thus, I arrive at a new understanding, upon reflection of my original session with H. My essential harvest, my personal meaning-making and takeaway from our session is this:

Interaction = Real subset *Relationship* = Imaginary

Through harvesting this EXA session, I have deepened my insight and passion that utilizing Expressive Arts in relationship to scientific research serves to salutogenically decenter and transform the ways we interact and/or form relationships with others. Rovelli’s work provided me with clear terminology and the possibility to think through and utilize simple thought experiments with H and explore the boundary between real and imaginary objects. The junction of EXA, art-based research, and physics helps us imagine a wildly fascinating range of potential realities for ‘objects’ in known and unknown-yet physics.

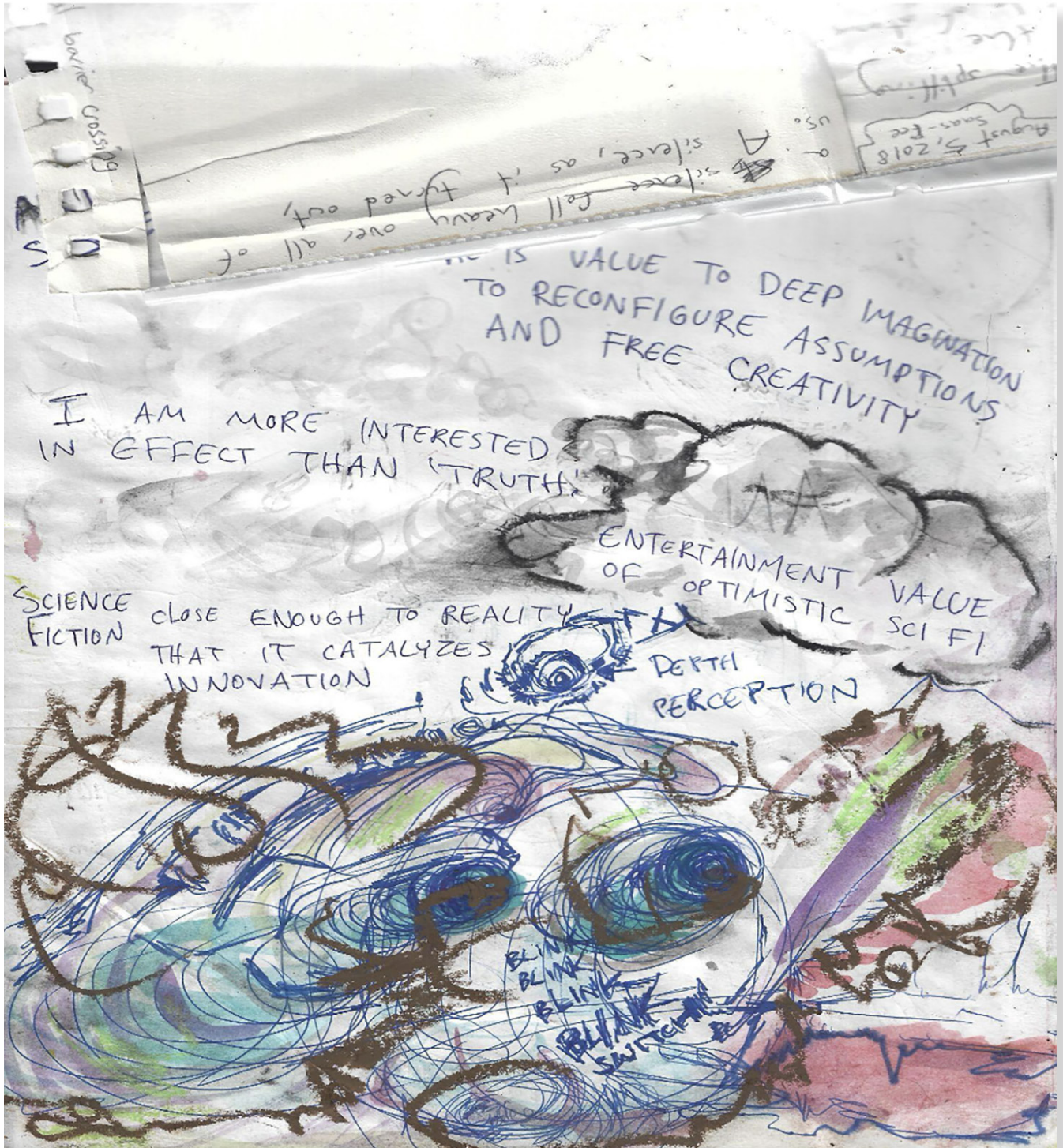


Figure 7. Evolving Research by Carmiella Salzberg Zorzi

The artwork Figure 7 is an excerpt from my evolving PhD research, which shows the continued inspiration I endlessly draw from *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*.

As one of the founders of Loop Quantum Gravity Theory, Carlo Rovelli, has become a bestselling author in the field of physics internationally. Originally from Italy,

...the essays in ‘Seven Brief Lessons on Physics’ arrive like shots of espresso, which you can consume the way the Italians do, quickly and while standing up... His book politely suggests that anyone who is not interested in modern physics cannot be an entirely serious human being... as Mr. Rovelli puts it, ‘space is granular, time does not exist, and things are nowhere.’ This information shouldn’t be estranging, he writes. It should jump-start curiosity. (Garner, 2016, n.p.)

Carlo Rovelli is now, as the director of the quantum gravity group at the Centre de Physique Theorique of Aix-Marseille University in Provence, undoubtedly continuing his enduring work, and his powerfully, sensitively, and sensibly aesthetic probing into the natures of *Dasein*. I recommend this book and all of his books to all humans and entities who are entirely serious about being a human or otherwise physics-bound being.

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The real feels so small compared to the imaginary

