



The arts of making sense

Deborah Green

with Naomi Pears-Scown, Mary Weir, Istvan Csata, Rosa Heney, Mary McGeever, Rei Lambert, Kathrin Marks, Ingrid Wang

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Introduction

Arts-Based Research through Autoethnography (ABR + A) makes sense of arts therapy by inviting heart/head/body/soul/context/theory into creative conversations. Researchers engage physical senses, implicit soul- or felt-senses, and/or heart- and head-led senses to chart a new sense of direction. I'm Deborah Green, and I teach at Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design (New Zealand). Today I'm joined by seven Arts Therapy Masters students – Naomi, Mary, Istvan, Rosa, Mary, Rei and Kathrin; and one who couldn't be in Melbourne in person, Ingrid. We will weave together a cartographic bricolage of creatively storied vignettes detailing our expeditions through the terrain of ABR + A. We will explore pre-journey jitters and joys, traverse topographic highs and lows, and gaze back at emergent map/s only visible at the journey's end.

Let's begin by getting in touch with ABR + A in a practical way. Take a deep breath and settle. Take time to come to your senses – notice the weight of your body and the sensations on your skin; pay attention to what you can smell and taste; become aware of what you can see and hear... and now listen even more deeply to your own breathing and heartbeat. Ask these inner sounds to take you to the heart of your researcher-self. Settle here and be attentive – you are not judging, you are welcoming and curious. Notice the colours and shapes, the smells and sounds, the tastes and textures of your researcher-self. Once you have a sense of this self/s, join us as we share our research experiences...

Beginning our ABR+A journey

Naomi Pears-Scown

Noticing the hues of my research environment

My precious hands you know where to go. Feeling your way over this map, over this landscape spread before you.

My precious fingers, you absorb the colours around you.

They are the hues surrounding my hilltop home, the hues of the dusty blue mountains rolling and overlapping in the distance, and the dense, layered, uncultivated native bush in the foreground, rising on the hill opposite me.

Down in the deeper, darker parts of the valley, my eyes drift south to the ocean. Deep, rich blues and greys, ripples of windswept waves just visible in the harbour. And above, the ever-changing, fast-moving clouds pass through the valley. Mostly they are monochromatic tones of grey, a neutral backdrop for the vibrant greens. But, sometimes, the depths of the blue sky take my breath away. On mornings when I wake up to total stillness, and my eyes are drawn further and further back into the mountain

range, I think I can almost detect the grains of earth and rock on the colourful slopes.

My environment, my topography, my landscape, my map grounds me. It provides me with a point of reference. And from here, I begin to put words to my research wonderings. This place holds me. How can I hold it? I am part of it, and I desire for it to be more a part of me.

The hues of my environment guide my research process.

I wonder about what my art-making will look like in my research journey, and I wonder about what my footsteps will look like too. I wonder about the earth under me, that which will hold me, and I wonder about my hands, my tools.

My story of walking feels most appropriately told through an arts-based, autoethnographic lens. I sense it is the most genuine and authentic way to explore questions that are so integral to who I am as a person, and who I want to become as an arts

therapist. My questions come from deep inside of me, from a place where they have been silently and steadily growing for many years. Seeds planted, nurtured, and grounded in the earth of my soul. When I speak of these seedlings, my words bounce and resonate off the hills opposite me, and flow down into the valley, to be washed out into the churning sea. But now, instead of just words, these seedlings are coming into view. My little seedlings are birthing themselves into the world, and their forms are catching me by surprise. For so long they have been deep within me, silently germinating and being nourished by ideas and thoughts and private actions. But now, now they are pushing their way into the light, showing themselves more clearly to myself, and to those around me.

Their cellular structure, perfectly balanced, their root system, perfectly anchored. I am drawn to them, and seek to nourish them over the coming year. But I am also willing to let them be nourished and impacted by the world around them. There will be sunshine, allowing them to soak up and engage in the photosynthetic process of regeneration, and there will be rain, allowing them to be drenched and overwhelmed and strengthened and hydrated. There will be wind, allowing them to become flexible and stretched and bent to near-breaking point. And there

will be moments of stillness and rest, and silence and peace. I'm trusting that all of these processes will happen in their right moments.

My map is the autoethnographic arts-based framework I am using. It will guide me, provide me with insight and direction, and most importantly, purpose. The map is the key which will help me unlock discoveries that are integral to who I am and who I am becoming.

I chart the beginning of a pathway, knowing that I am a pioneer in this land, but also knowing that I am not alone in this. I look at my feet, noticing the impact they have on the ground beneath me, the imprint of my soles on the earth.

The many layers of myself anchor me, the sedimentary foundations that tell me my multifaceted story will be my foundation point. And from this foundation, I step, drawing myself closer to the earth, trusting it to guide me and provide direction for my research.

Through my art and my story, I will honour my terrain and my landscape. Through my art and my story, I will honour my map, my way-markers, and my community. Through my art and my story, I will honour my soul, my beliefs, my voice, and my worldview.



Figure 1. Naomi Pears-Scown, *Finger-painted colours of my environment, over a metaphorical research map*, 2017, acrylic paint on paper map. Artist's private collection.



Figure 2. Naomi Pears-Scown, *Populating the research map with topographical contour lines of poetry*, 2017, acrylic paint on paper map. Artist's private collection.

Deborah Green

Thinning my skin to begin

Our practice of arts therapy is sens/e-based, multifaceted, paradoxical and frequently open-ended. This calls for a research approach that honours this. Arts-Based Research through Autoethnography/ABR + A privileges experiential, kinaesthetic, open, creative, lived, sensual means of gathering and analysing data.

I personally have a life-long preference for visceral, lived, trial-and-error ways of coming-to-know... so I will speak of research beginnings by recounting a tale from my South African childhood.

This story involves me as a wee thing – maybe five or six (coinciding with my mother’s first cancer wrangle) – and the vacant plot next to our house.

In this wilderness of weeds, dirt-hummocks and deep mysterious puddles, I adventured – sometimes alone, sometimes with friends, and other times tagging after my older brother. His exploits were grand including bombs concocted from stolen swimming-pool chemicals and wondrous forts with plastic-sheeting roofs and pee-tubes (lengths of pool-hose suited to little boy-willies, but into which it was impossible for me to pee without anointing my feet).

During our African summers, immense morning heat built lofty cumulonimbus clouds in the heavy sky, which, as afternoon dragged in, cracked open with deafening shouts of thunder and torrential hot rain. These storms quickly filled the dusty dips and hollows and the frogs – that creaked and groaned and unhinged like rusty doors through the hot-velvet-evenings – festooned these puddles with slimy eggs. I carefully gathered quantities of this jelly-like tapioca and it bobbed in glass jars on my window ledge... until one magical day when it began to hatch. I was soon proud adoptive mother to hundreds of small animated tadpoles, each bearing faintly discernible camouflage patterns in varying shades of black on its back and a tiny coil of labyrinthine viscera in its belly.

I was mesmerised...

...and I yearned for these little busy creatures to share my bath! I squirmed in delight as I imagined sharing the water with them, their little shiny eyes and budding limbs and whipping tails dancing against my slippery skin. I presented this idea with great excitement to my fragile mother...

...who quickly banned it.

(I can’t remember if she explained why she had crushed my hopes.)

But I wasn’t to be denied. So, surreptitiously locking myself in my parent’s bathroom, I filled the purple bathtub and happily added two large jars of wiggling tadpoles...

...rapidly transforming these little creatures from live tadpoles into dead tadpoles...

...inverted, their small grey-white labyrinthine bellies bobbing forlornly on the surface of my bathwater.

For, even though my bath was tepid, frogs and their spawn are deeply sensitive, with their wee bodies housed in porous mucus-membranes that offer little protection to environmental changes.

I was horrified. I’d murdered my wee clan. Every last one of them.

I was also ashamed. I’d been told expressly, “Don’t put the tadpoles in the bath!” I’d disobeyed and now they were dead. And not only was I disobedient, but I’d displayed my ignorance – something even more shameful for me. I knew as they hit the water and popped up, galvanised for a few frantic thrashing moments, I’d made a mistake and they couldn’t tolerate the heat.

I couldn’t own this direct disobedience and stupidity. Although never harshly punished, I hated being thought less of. So I breathlessly gathered the limp bodies and began feeding them down the overflow slot of the purple sink in the bathroom vanity. Handfuls of small fishy bodies slid down the pipe below the counter holding my mother’s night-cream and father’s razor. I imagine now catching glimpses of my pale and earnest little face crowned with raggedy self-cut hair as I went about my grim task.

Finally done, I cleaned the bath and told no one.

I don’t remember if I was asked about the sudden absence of my brood. I imagine providing some imaginative lie.

The story doesn’t end there, however. I wore my secret shame and intellectual humiliation for some time as the shades of the murdered tadpoles returned to haunt me. Soon a dreadful aroma began permeating my parent’s bathroom. Initially oiling around the olfactory edges but disappearing if directly sought, this changed as the summer heat amassed and the countless small bodies wedged one-upon-another down the overflow-pipe began to putrefy. My parents, faces contracted, pumped plungers up and down over the sink plughole while I strenuously avoided the bathroom.

Eventually the stench diminished and the ugly purple bathroom was reclaimed by my parents, as the tadpole corpses lost their tenuous grip on the sides of the outlet pipe and their small half-fish/half-frog skeletons sank down into the murky depths of the septic tank.

These wee amphibious creatures are a compelling symbol for the complex and potentially wayward kinaesthetic arts-based ways of knowing at the heart of ABR + A. Their fragile skin, sensitivity to environmental factors, transformation from egg to tadpole to frog, and their fairytale

association with hope resonate for us as artists/researchers/therapists. In order to embark upon an ABR + A journey that will be transformatory and have integrity, we thin our skin and risk boiling ourselves...

Mary Weir

Moving from fear to creativity and creativity to fear

I think maybe I'm not sure how to begin... my eyes are strained from squeezing tight against all-seeing. I've finally asked myself to look... right here. Not in a fuzzy, warm light, kind of way. But a close ultraviolet examination of the blotches and burst vessels. The developing lines and discoloration in the whites of my eyes. The grey hairs, half-long, from being plucked by that lover who thought they wouldn't align with his age. I am bare to a fluorescence and I don't want to begin. I am afraid of what I will see. The damage and the aggression... I am afraid I am too broken, or perhaps not broken enough. No, I am afraid there might be nothing at all there to see. That the lights might shine right through and expose a hologram, a particulate reflection of someone else's image.

I think maybe this is unusual, even indulgent... to look into the self. But this is as much an illusion as anything else at play. Really, this research began at birth... a gradual realisation of the only subject I could ever really know, the only telescope I will ever peer through, the only dissertation I will ever truly author. It is only as indulgent as refusing to look. To not look, not know one's tools, one's weapons, maybe to have scissors for hands... at least this way I might learn to be a surgeon as well. Yes, I would rather practice on myself, be my own vivisection. Let this skin be the wrinkled orange for the buzz buzz buzz of an apprentice tattoo gun. We leave marks. There is no way around it, so let me come to know what it means to both inscribe, and be inscribed upon, simultaneously. Let me know some of the subjectivity of my own privilege in this world.

I think maybe this is an impossible task... to tell you a story about myself, and allow being changed by the telling. I have been moving for centuries, from fear to creativity and creativity to fear, so I fall back into the smaller boxes and simpler numbers of an analytic self – here are the facts are the facts are the facts... Forget the grey areas, forget the wrinkled crevices that fold back upon themselves and make a character etched with callous and scar. Make it clean, make it from pressed white pages, with lines and dots and zeros and ones of ink, and don't let it

run away. Don't let the fat drops of rainstorm meet a word; where it might blot and smear into some Rorschach splatter of a dancing girl. Don't go dance in the rain – you won't learn anything from that.

I think maybe I was taught wrong... I think maybe I see something in that pumpkin-dicing scar on my thumb. I think maybe you remember your own quivering plump little hands as they held a sharp knife for the first time. Pressed against chopping board, I hoped to help granny make soup in the most grown-up sort of way. But your scars look different, and as we hold up two bony digits against one another they form a funny elliptical space-between. A window we both look through, to notice some distant terrain which had never been framed before. In pressing our very own bodies together we made an eye to see something new. Yet it is not what we see that is the great discovery, but the space we've made from which to see it.

I think maybe I will display this space, between the words: the tabs and the returns... Split particles on page and screen, delete all semiotic form, and lean into the place of source and urge. If I am to channel transformation, then I must live with-and-in the midst of the transforming. To describe how we have been transformed, would be to fix the results, delineate the goal, affix myself to a certainty; represent 'the great experiment' without its variability.

If this space is shifting, pressing up against your skin, pulling and tugging at the visceral through biographical words, that is true re-search, a circus-round new ways of knowing, being. We are changing here together in unquantifiable, fractious kinds of ways. We are changing here together. And that is the result. We are transforming... Being changing, my only qualifiable channel for its expression is in my changing being. It may not be a precise mirror to your experience, but when you're dancing with its telling, these moving spaces become the invocation of our experience between the certainties of shape and form.

En route

Rosa Heney

Overlapping imbrications

Listening... I hear tea cups on tinkling saucers, multiple conversations happening simultaneously, I am both inside and outside, the sound of my own footsteps. Now there is gravel underfoot, rhythmic, walking, I hear my own heartbeat mimicked in these footfalls. Somewhere in the distance someone is bashing out text on a typewriter!?! I hear these

sounds intermingled, overlapping... imbrications... I want to take a closer look... but I can't quite see what I hear. I place another pair of glasses on, over top. Maybe more sets of eyes are better than one 'all the better to see you with, my dear' set? ... after set, tinkle, crunch, tinkle, crunch, footfalls of insight, like a heart-beat-inking... toward the forest...



Figure 3. Rosa Heney, *Multiple views?!?* 2017, photograph variable size. Artist's private collection.

Figure 4. Anonymous, *Flying in all directions with love*, 2017, drawing on paper, 110 x 45mm. Artist's private collection.

More curious than afraid, I play... sharing with others my sense of play and playfulness. There is content flying in all directions. These metaphorical and elusory maps of thought and feeling dart and crisscross the space... sometimes falling short (the headwind makes the going tough), sometimes landing in, or going beyond the audience, but in this ludic space there is possibility, a chance to encounter the between, you and me, and a beautiful reminder of a flight of the senses... at play

As a researcher, within and outside of my senses, there are maps and tools which I can use to navigate this terrain... but these kinds of things tend to name the now's, and I wonder... about what is liminal? the peripatetic (wandering) and hauntological

(temporal)? There are differences here, dialectic tensions embodied and felt within me. Each has its own elusory qualities that cannot exist in mutually exclusive relationships. There is something beautiful and captivating about this, best represented through a kind of simplicity... somewhere a teacup tinkles on a saucer... heartfelt and vital footfalls... an awareness of my own breath...

I try to find synesthetic ways of seeing the quality of these perplexitous and ghostly relationships. My curious ABRA researcher-self uses rhizoanalytic tools to layer the data and begins to form new meanings... moment after moment, of named now's, layered and compressed, with time, toward a kind of ontological sense-making...

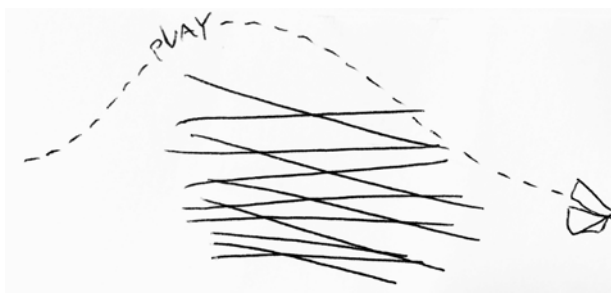


Figure 5. Anonymous, *Flight in Pplay*, 2017, pen on paper, 45 x 90mm. Artist's private collection.

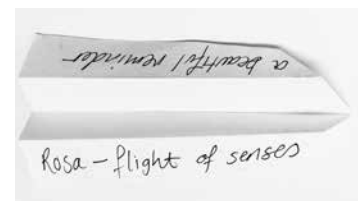


Figure 6. Rosa Heney, *Mapping flight*, 2017, folded paper, 110 x 260mm. Artist's private collection.

Figure 7. Anonymous, *Flight of senses*, 2017, pen on paper, 110 x 260mm. ANZATA/ACATA conference presentation response artwork. Artist's private collection.

In a darkroom of ABRATIC thought and action, these overlapping imbrications form and create unexpected surprises, change and shape my perspectives... and I notice that these reflective and reflexive processes represent ecological tensions, between named now's and that which is in a process of constantly becoming...

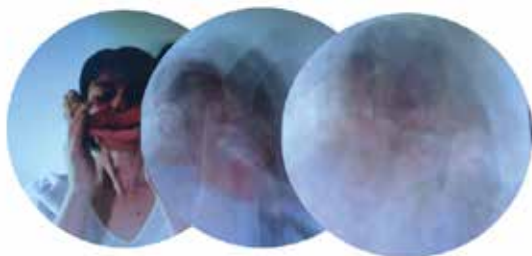


Figure 8. Rosa Heney, *After Jason Schulman*, 2017, photographic prints, size variable. Artist's private collection.

*The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination and all compact...
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth
to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.*
William Shakespeare –
A Midsummer Night's Dream (5.1)

Istvan Csata

Through the wormhole – testing my autoethnographic voice –

I'm taking a music stand to the 'stage' for my reading. During the presentation I'm putting on a Gandalf hat (GH), or a pair of sunglasses (S).

GH: *Can art-based research validate my findings? Is it 'serious'? Do my clients who have intellectual disabilities behave 'seriously' when they create art? They cannot tell, as they cannot speak but they look soooo excited every Friday when I strike the 'art gong'...*

S: A friend of mine asks me to contribute to a public event, requests I perform something 'short and quick'. Well I'm not a 'performer' (I'm a man-father-husband-teacher-and-occasionally?-an artist), however I was always drawn to these sorts of challenges (why? why!)... After digesting the idea for two days, I eventually reply to his email, giving my hesitant yes. Then I kind of forget (or suppress) the whole thing, until a only couple of days left to the show.

GH: *Standing in the kitchen late at night, looking at my drawing, the scariest parts of it are the tiny black holes, the space seems to be punched, and I'm floating among various unidentifiable objects as a 'Leaf Man', who wears a protective suit, but the galactic wind blows him wherever it wants, he looks vulnerable...*

Two days later, in the evening, I start to feel panic; my baby daughter is finally in bed, all the chores are done, our home is quietly breathing. I quickly grab my guitar and begin to hammer out at least three songs. It goes slowly, I want to play something captivating, with a catchy melody in the middle; something which also represents me as a unique individual.

GH: *I think if my research deeply touches me that might be a good indication that it would be meaningful for others as well. This seems to be clear, however artworks always carry ambiguities... How to deal with this messiness? How can I trust?*

S: On top of everything, just a day before the gig, my boss whom I also count as a friend, decides to come and see the event. Well, I will have to be reeelly good on Saturday!

On the day, my anxiety stays on a moderate level, until I reach the place where the gig is happening. My heart is thumping in my ears whilst I'm unpacking my gears; it turns out that one of my cables is broken; feeling stupid. Bad start man! The cable is quickly replaced, and I'm told that there are only a couple of minutes left before the start. No time for a sound check!

GH: *I find it challenging to create an artwork that relates to 'failure'. I made a couple of art responses to explore this topic, but neither of them could embody the psychic complexity of how it feels to fail.*

S: I'm trying to do a quick tuning but there is big noise from the stage. Dancers are moving in a circle, their beautifully painted faces are glowing in front of the dark background. Ok then, I will trust my guitar, and leave it as it is... My friend, who asked me to play, senses that I'm nervous, and lets me stay half covered by a stage prop whilst I'm making music.

GH: *I'm hoping that by using the autoethnographic lens, my reader will feel and understand that my mask is taken away, and*

we will meet person-to-person in a cognitive and emotional terrain.

S: Then comes my moment, I'm striking the first chord. The guitar makes random sounds; the music comes somehow from very far. I have never heard this before! It sounds like bells echoing through wormholes. The guitar is absolutely out of tune!

In panic, I skip the first piece, and begin to play the next one, which has looser structure anyway, then, 'from my muscles', improvise a third song with the feeling of a lost battle. My chest is heavy, and I've got a headache.

GH: *It would be important to know how to build things up from mistakes. I actually made a mistake, and that took me into a wormhole; I truly did not know where I was heading to, so I felt fragile. I'm not sure why I'm looking for these situations like being vulnerable, honestly, I do not know...*

Gazing back on our journey

Rei Lambert

Breathing ABR+A

I wrote the following two journal entries when trying to articulate how arts-based research through autoethnography guided my research.

The felt sense plays a significant part in this process, which I refer to as the whale. She is an intuitive feeling that guides me towards/away from a purpose. You will see a voice that was born during the creation of this presentation which attempts to interpret the whale's song, and communicates with the author through text shown in italics.

8 October 2017

I'm not sure how to begin this. I feel an open, bare unknowing before an idea comes to fruition. The film *Adaptation*, written by Charlie Kaufman (2002) comes to mind. My research began as something different to what it became – a self-referring, layered rhizome of a therapeutic journey, where both the data gathering and the analysis became research, therapy and art. I'm crying now because I know, through this process, I touched something so deep within me. I honoured my fluctuating, multiple selves, whilst moving in and out of the fourth wall. Never sitting still in the storytelling, I followed the felt sense to make sense of my complex childhood trauma.

You're heading into your research. Don't get stuck Rei... focus on the ABRA experience, not on your findings. Let's explain the process.

– The Whale's (Felt Sense) Interpreter

S: At the very end, I just do not know what I'm doing, and I'm playing some haphazard notes on the synthesiser; the machine does the job for a while, then silence. People are clapping, my friend is smiling at me; my boss comes to me and tells me how much I surprised the audience with the synthesiser finale – "It sounded like the fire alarm," he says. I'm absolutely exhausted, sitting in a bell jar...

At home I feel the urge to play again. I want to restore my self-image that I can impress people with my sounds. My fingers are running on the frets but just making dead music; I give up.

Then I find an inspiring tune on GarageBand played on an erhu, the Chinese violin; it sounds so otherworldly, simple and carries dignity. I'm playing along and against it.

GH: *Can my research be based on the heart?*

I have a terrible memory, and struggle to recall conversations, thoughts and feelings I've had in the past. This can lead to awkward conversations with people who know me by name, and often know rather personal information, yet I whose face I can barely remember. It also is the perfect recipe for the continuation of unhealthy behaviours. Or one would think. To function, I follow the felt sense readily, seeking out intuitive knowing, which maps out where I have been and where to go next. Art-making follows the same method of unconscious birthing.

Nope nope nope. This is madness. This is you writing your stream of ridiculous consciousness down because you have no ideas. You are empty. They'll all just presume you're nuts and have nothing intelligent to offer. Show some art.

– The Whale's (Felt Sense) Interpreter

Last week I had peer supervision with a fellow student in my cohort about a client who was stuck. She suggested using ink and blowing through straws as a new medium to open up the relationship, and so I tested it out before bringing it to the session. I can see my experience with arts-based research reflected here. The generous dripping of expression/data (ink) followed by a cognitive pushing for meaning (blowing through the straw). The expressions begin to bleed into one another (themes forming), sometimes swimming away from me, blending, dirtying into new colour.

You're getting lost in the metaphor now. It doesn't have to fit exactly. Perhaps time is needed before you can understand this one. Maybe tomorrow will be clearer.

– The Whale's (Felt Sense) Interpreter

12 October 2017

Ok let's try this again.

ABR + A, for me, was breathing life into the research process. It was a sliding spectrum; a constantly evolving and moving entity that teased and gently massaged meaning like a wave breaking on the beach. A dipping in and out of sense-making, letting the dust settle before breathing it in again. This image (Figure 9) reminds me of that process. Intentionally pushing for something fixed and tangible, yet also being prepared for direction to change (crystallisation). My process was a dialogue with myself; the parts that were cognitive spoke to the parts that were not, and vice versa. I saw it as soul work, as the deeper parts of myself that were unspoken could be held in art-making, where their meaning didn't need to be black and white – they were all the liminal shades in between. I could hold contradicting meaning simultaneously, and be my complicated, multiple and deep selves without needing to settle in on blinkered and reductionist viewing.

Lovely poetic imagery there. But let's go back a second to the wave metaphor. You made a piece about that at the beginning of your research journey. Maybe it could be added to flesh this metaphor out some more.

– The Whale's (Felt Sense) Interpreter

What began as a koru (a Māori symbol for new life), turned into a menacing vortex during creation. I was, at the time, anxious about stepping into my research process, where I would follow the felt-sense to better know myself. Once I wrote up this creative experience, I saw it as a wave; unfurling out to touch the edges of land and reeling back in for protection. It wasn't static; I was less afraid.

During the research process, it grew to represent a void/vortex within me that manifested in depressive symptoms. As I delved further into this void, the metaphor changed to become a volcano as I came to terms with my childhood abuse. At the end of the research, the metaphor settled as a pair of hands, cupped for holding the pain, and permitting new growth to come from it. The metaphor reflected where I was with this healing journey before I had a chance to cognitively declare it.

Now undip your toe from the content of your research. How did it end?

– The Whale's (Felt Sense) Interpreter

The process could have kept on going forever as each metaphor grew other metaphors, and each began to blend into the others like a rhizomatic tapestry. I was no longer just me, but a web of many-me(s), all aching to grow and stretch and expand out. The research, however, needed to conclude, and so I wrapped up my stories with bookends, framing the journey whilst hinting that there was more to come, with a final “to be continued...” to round it off. I've been opened up by this and can't unsee what I've learnt. The only option is to continue getting bigger, which I'll do by continuing the art-making and journaling/reflecting.



Figure 9. Rei Lambert, *Untitled*, 2017, ink on paper. Artist's private collection.



Figure 10. Rei Lambert, *The Void*, 2016, paint on paper. Artist's private collection.



Figure 11. Rei Lambert, *The Wave*, 2016, paint on paper. Artist's private collection.



Figure 12. Rei Lambert, *The Volcano*, 2017, construction materials. Artist's private collection.



Figure 13. Rei Lambert, *Holding Fluidity*, 2016, collage. Artist's private collection.

Mary McGeever

Glimpses of my journey through autoethnography...

waves of self-doubt
uncertainty
frustration

I feel the waves
I ride the waves...
Sometimes there are waves of wonder
From which I sense truth

beauty
and mystery

I divaricate...
my ideas grow at wide angles towards other ideas
branching, connecting, g r o w i n g, through and
past (& past)

one might see a tangled mess...

but I see interlacing of my truths –
the small bright, verdant leaves and
the crystal clear raindrops that cling



Figure 14. Mary McGeever, *Ebb and flow*, 2017, photograph, Artist's private collection.



Figure 15. Mary McGeever, *Divaricating plant*, 2017, photograph, Artist's private collection.

Kathrin Marks

A journey to soul

Let me take you on a journey.
Imagine a vast, gigantic, arctic desert.
This is where my ABR + A emerged, where it continually shape-shifted.
All I could see was endless, white, frozen night.
Howling wind reached into my body, threatening to kill me.
This place held my darkest fears and deepest hopes.
I was scared. So so scared.
And yet, the arctic desert held the calling of my soul, singing Nana's song.
Nana was waiting. And so was my soul.

*She is walking. Walking through her arctic desert. Walking through pain, fear, sorrow.
She feels like giving up, giving in. She cries, screams, experiencing her grief all over again.
The old becomes new, hitting her deep deep down, piercing the essence of her soul.
What had she done... She wanted to go home...*

As I re/researched, I felt the surge of panic, of my own fucking inadequacy.
I embarked on this journey,
searching for Nana's soul, my soul, our beautiful vulnerable strong bond.
I contemplated stories.
My story, Nana's story, intertwined, slowly transforming into an old-new story.
I contemplated my passionate fiery rebel,
desperately yearning for deep connections yet fiercely rejecting them,
fearing that if people would see her, unmasked,
they would leave her behind in the arctic desert, forcing her to fend for herself once more.

*She has been here before, she is 'from' this place.
And yet, this place... It's not home.
She is scared to death that people will rip apart her brittle sense of being, of her-self.
The rebel, so fierce, so wild, is desperately afraid.
She yearns to find 'her' place, her 'home' so she can finally stay.
Sinking to the icy ground, she cries.
Sitting there in the snow, transforming tears into soul-pictures,
she knows she needs Nana to help heal her soul.*

Wandering the arctic desert, I was...
Holding... myself... Holding... Nana... Holding...
Panic... taunted me
I... cried, lashed out
Why the fuck should I be able to tell my story?
How could I make sense, heal?
I allowed my felt sense, my soul, Nana to lead the way.
I reached for art materials,
creating soul-pictures, soul-stories, soul-moments.
The arts held me, embraced my tears, my wound, my core.

*"The wound is part of a passage, not the end in itself.
It can rattle, scream and shout, but there has to be a tacit blessing, or gift, at its core."
As she remembers these words, the rebel breathes deeply.
She hopes. Because hope is all she's got.
But it's a very fragile hope, hardly unfurling its wings, threatening to break any moment.
So... she walks on. Through the arctic desert, this scary, foreign-familiar place.
Tentatively. Crying. Screaming.
Putting one foot in front of the other. And another. And another.
She holds on to her fragile thread of hope, gently, so it won't crumble beneath her fingers.
This journey had been waiting for her. And yet, now that she's finally walking,
the questions, the fears, the doubts come back, one by one, overwhelming her.*

I allowed myself to panic.
To... feel/be/observe
Panicking, I kept walking/writing/researching...
And found myself...
hoping...
holding...
healing.
I realised that my journey couldn't be walked alone.
I needed others, walking alongside me.
I couldn't do this on my own.
I needed to be held.
I needed fellow souls holding my soul.

*Her arctic desert. So dark and yet full of promises.
She cradles her soul-pictures, her soul-stories, her soul-moments.
Embraced by their warmth, she walks through the desert.
Next to her, sometimes visible, sometimes hidden in the shade, are her Companions.
They see her, hold her, bearing witness to her journey, her struggle, her healing.
And as she walks, the landscape changes, gently transforming into Spring.
She sits down,
amongst glittery waterfalls, at a clear lake, in a forest clearing,
playing with colours, re/creating her-self.
The arts sit there with her, creating bridges, holding, hope.
She has found Nana. She has found home.*

And now, I am on the other side, gently holding both my arctic desert and my Spring.
I find myself struggling to explain how this happened.
Words are my gift, stories are my gift and yet this time,
they are failing me, unable to fully express my journey.
My ABRA led me into my soul as I journeyed towards and with Nana.
And the arts, the soul-pictures soul-stories soul-moments I created throughout...
They held me.
In walking through my arctic desert into Spring I have learned that I can trust the process.
Trust my soul, my felt-sense, asking questions I didn't know I had.
Finding answers that surprise and amaze me.
This re/search asked me to bring to it all my vulnerable courage
as I opened my soul to those who witnessed my journey.
It was hard rewarding terrifying beautiful exhausting magical.
It was soul-re/search.
And now, I shall leave my words, my images, with you as you embark on your own journey,
leading you closer to your soul.

Ingrid Wang

Renew a voice

Art-making created a space for me to process what I experienced during my session with a deaf client. After that session, there was a sensation in my hands that I could not identify. I suspected I was manifesting anxiety I had felt between my client and me. Later in my studio, by dipping my fingers in ink, I started to relax, to feel the ink, and let the ink talk to me. I remembered watching the fluent 'conversation' between the interpreter and the client before the session, and I had felt I needed to do something with my hands. Watching the interpreter's and client's hands, I tried to learn something. I noticed I started to move my hands a bit more when I was talking to the client. By the second half of the session, I was able to use simple sign language to express 'very good', 'beautiful', 'perfect'. I found my client looked at my hands, and my exaggerated face expressions also helped our communication. When finally we could smile and laugh together, I felt warmth and comfort in my heart.

In my studio, I tried to recapture these warm feelings in my art-making. I closed my eyes and

let my fingers feel the coldness of the ink. Soon, I started to smell something pleasant and familiar – the smell of ink. When I was a child, I learnt Chinese calligraphy and brush painting; a key part of calligraphy is that every calligraphist and artist makes Chinese ink to their preferred thickness according to time spent grinding the ink stick and stone. I hadn't touched Chinese ink for years and only returned to it about a year ago when I was studying arts therapy. Now, in that moment, I had a strong desire to use it again.

Spotting an unfinished oil painting in my studio from a while ago, I put it on the ground. Purely to explore the Chinese ink, I started moving my inky hands on the surface of the oil painting. Chinese ink is water-based, and it did not stay on the surface well but I kept adding more. I wanted to fight the resistance of the oil painting surface and I wanted the ink to stay there. Outside my studio the air was hot and dry. I was sweating and thirsty but I could not stop. With the dry air, the Chinese ink became more and more sticky and on some areas of the painting it dried solid. The oil and ink stick were

together finally. I sat down with my totally 'black' hands, with a victorious smile on my face.

In my early immigrant years in New Zealand, I at times felt ashamed of my accent. I dreamed of having perfect Kiwi English. I even wished I had never learned Chinese in the first place so no one would laugh at my accent. I tried hard and studied hard but my accent stayed and I only became more frustrated. By being with my deaf client and immersing myself into the liminal spaces betwixt-and-between us, my deep feelings of shame and frustration around my own accent came to the surface. I imagine my deaf client once also dreamed of being able to speak loudly, and that she had moments of frustration and embarrassment. I think the feeling of my hands when I finished the session was like the feeling of my tongue when I was not able to speak with a local accent. By dipping my hands into Chinese ink, I combined the feeling of my hands and my tongue. By using Chinese ink for the art-making and to fight the resistance of the oil painting I felt a sense of victory and acceptance. The Western oil finally accepted the Chinese ink.

During this art-making process, art materials became an important element which allowed me to switch between my linguistic-impacted identities. Working with ink not only revealed my suppressed feelings of frustration and anger around being an English-as-second-language-speaker, but also contacted formative memories of my root culture. Working through the struggles between using ink and oil paint allowed me to express my desire to let the confident and talkative Chinese-speaking self converse with the traumatised and reserved English-speaking self. At the end of my creative expression, when the ink and oil paint finally compromised with one another, my two linguistic-impacted identities came to rest in a liminal state where I accepted my lack of confidence in speaking English, and nourished my pride in speaking Chinese. By immersing myself in the liminal space shared with my deaf client, I gained personal growth as an English-as-second-language speaker.



Figure 16. Ingrid Wang, *still image of Review a voice*, 2017, ink on canvas. Artist's private collection.

Figure 17. Ingrid Wang, *still image of Review a voice*, 2017, ink on canvas. Artist's private collection.

Figure 18. Ingrid Wang, *Western oil and Chinese ink*, 2017, ink and oil paint on canvas. Artist's private collection.

A stopping point...

Deborah Green

... and thus new paths are made by walking

It's Christmas time and I'm just finishing being 5 years old. I'm about to move into Big School and my swan-song to Kindy takes the form of being cast in the only speaking role in the school Nativity play. As a loquacious and confident wee scrap of a thing, I've been gifted the singular honour of playing the Angel Gabriel who proclaims "And behold unto you a child is born blah blah," or something similar. My recall of this momentous event comes not directly from my own memory banks but from my mother's frequent and rather proud retellings. Dressed in the ubiquitous white sheet and tinsel halo, I stood proudly erect as my moment arrived. I paused for effect... a purposeful dramatic interlude aimed to build anticipation... that my mother most unfortunately misinterpreted as me freezing because I had lost my lines. So she hisses them to me from the front row. Indignant at the theft of my thunder, I growl, "I know!" before hitching up my sheet and proclaiming said lines with great resonance.

Gazing back over this past year and the extraordinary privilege I've had in teaching, mentoring, supervising and witnessing these and other students find their own voices, I have found myself having to open interesting and sometimes stern conversations with my own 'inner mother' as she has wanted to hiss directions into the pauses, the reorientations, the fracturings and failures, the instabilities and disruptions, the hibernations and incubations, the moments of silent immersion and reverie and meandering. But these liminalities are the path. They are the thresholds and twilights and not-knowings that feed and guide arts-based research through autoethnography.

And now, having stilled my hisses sometimes successfully and sometimes not so, I can, like my proud mother, stand and cry "Bravo!" to these brave travellers who are crafting new maps for the land of ABR + A.

Let's close by using an ABR + A process to reconnect with our researcher-selves – to see if they have shifted in any way in response to what they have experienced as we presented. So, once again take a deep breath and settle. Take time to come to your senses – notice the weight of your body and the sensations on your skin; pay attention to what you can smell and taste; become aware of what you can see and hear... and now listen even more deeply to your own breathing and heartbeat. Ask these inner sounds to take you to the heart of your researcher-self. Settle here and be attentive – you are not judging, you are welcoming and curious. Notice the colours and shapes, the smells and sounds, the tastes and textures and smells of your researcher-self. Once you have a sense of this self/s, allow yourself to wonder what this self needs from you now...



Figure 19. Audrey Tromp, *Debi as Angel Gabriel*, 1973, photograph. Artist's private collection.

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