

# The Body of Work as a legitimate form of Independent Scholarship

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## Introduction

This chapter will outline key principles that underpin the use of creativity within final-year projects of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It will set forth a rationale for directing students towards using a particular form of arts-based research that aids critical thinking and reflexivity whilst engaging in art practice. The programmes referenced in this chapter are delivered at the University of Derby. The undergraduate programme – Creative Expressive Therapies – is outlined in detail within other chapters of this book. The post-graduate programmes include Art Therapy, Dramatherapy and Dance and Movement Psychotherapy. Those postgraduate programmes are regulated by various professional bodies and lead to students being able to practice in their chosen field. What those programmes share is the placing of creativity, art-making and performance at the heart of their pedagogic philosophy and practice. What they also share is a focus upon the therapeutic use of creativity and the therapeutic use of self. Whilst the undergraduate programmes are positioned within an arts in health and arts in education paradigm, the post-graduate programmes are broadly psychotherapeutic in their approach to creativity and therapeutic relationships. Either way, a better understanding of the role of the therapeutic use of creativity and self is enhanced by embedding both into the process of independent scholarship.

The chapter has two components. The first component outlines how the body of work within independent scholarship is defined and operated within the context of specific programmes. That first component also provides an outline of those ideas that stem from arts-based research that have informed the way in which the body of work approach to independent scholarship has been shaped within specific programmes. Within that consideration of what defines arts-based research, imagination and embodiment are presented as two defining features, both of which have important roles to play within the body of work. The second element provides examples from past students work, along with comments by those past students about their experience of engaging with the body of work within independent scholarship. Those examples and accompanying commentary are used to identify the benefits and challenges of adopting a body of work approach to independent scholarship.

In the interests of transparency it is important to note how this chapter was written. The initial draft and theoretical elements were written by Jamie Bird who is a male senior lecturer and researcher at

the University of Derby. Alessandra Wellan and Mary Stephanou are two former female students who contributed their reflections and evaluation of engaging with the body of work process. All three then worked together on refining the final version of the chapter.

## Context

To provide context, the learning outcomes of the two independent scholarship modules that this chapter relates to are described. The learning outcomes for the undergraduate independent scholarship ask that students demonstrate the following:

- *Worked independently on an investigative study of a chosen area in a way that shows the capacity to develop an analytical understanding of it through the application of an appropriate method of inquiry.*
- *Produce a detailed and critical literature review of sources that have underpinned her/his study*
- *Produce, from a given range of optional media, a piece of work that formulates an argument based in evidence and critical reflection.*

In this undergraduate module students are given the option to produce a traditional word-based dissertation, that might include the conducting of a research project, or they can elect to produce a body of work.

The post graduate module is more prescriptive in that students must produce a body of work. The learning outcomes for that module state that students need to demonstrate that they are able to:

- *Work independently and ethically through the mounting of an exhibition, or performance which can include video or installation and focuses upon a specific area of clinical interest.*
- *Critically argue, analyse and reflect upon the produced body of work through a viva which makes links to the impact of their scholarship on their arts therapy practice.*
- *Demonstrate a clearly articulated rationale for the chosen methodology employed.*
- *Evidence a depth of critical reflection upon the end-product as a mirror of self and identity integrating the research findings into the chosen arts therapy practice.*

The post-graduate specifications include an explicit focus upon the student's professional development as an arts-therapist at this level. This reflects the nature of the training required to become an arts therapist, whereby an enhanced self-awareness of one's own emotional process and professional practice is a crucial element. What also sets the post-graduate body of work apart from the undergraduate version

is that post-graduate students are required to stage an exhibition or performance as part of the assessment process. The use of public exhibition and performance reflects the greater expectation within post-graduate programmes for students to be able to disseminate their ideas with authority and conviction.

### What is a body of work?

The body of work, as it is defined above, involves students using their art form to both investigate an aspect of the creative or arts therapies and to present their response to that investigation. For example, a dancer might use movement to examine their somatic and embodied relationship to different environmental spaces and then produce a piece of choreographed dance to present a summary of their findings to an audience. Similarly, a visual artist might use photography to document their process of creating a painting and then display both the painting and the photographs as part of an exhibition. An actor might use performance to show an audience what she encountered working as a trainee dramatherapist within a prison environment, having used drama techniques as a way of examining her feelings about that work. In all cases, the artistic enquires, presentations and performance are supported by the written word in the form of a written critique. That critique includes reference to literature, an outline of the methodology and the placing of findings within a wider context. Crucially, a body of work allows performance, exhibition and words to complement each other. This appreciation of different forms of expression aligns with arts-based researcher Ehprat Huss' assertion that 'we must learn to wear multiple glasses' (2013, p.52) when using creative methods of enquiry within research.

Not only is the student asked to approach pre-existing knowledge in a critical way, they are also asked to value their own ideas both in a spirit of acceptance and openness and then later in a way that applies the same level of scrutiny they would apply to pre-existing knowledge. To assist this, students are introduced to the ideas of Clark Moustakas (1990). Moustakas developed a heuristic research method within which the learners own experience becomes a valid source of knowledge and insight. Through the stages of engagement, immersion, incubation and illumination students work through their ideas and experiences in a way that allows students to put trust in their own personal processes and to engage with their research question with passion and curiosity. In reading the contributions of former students below it will become evident how important those ideas are to gaining fully from the body of work approach to independent scholarship.

To better appreciate the place of the body of work as a form of enquiry within the spectrum of what constitutes arts-based research a brief outline of contemporary forms of arts-based research is

presented below, followed by an outline of why imagination and embodiment are considered key components of the body-of-work.

### Arts-based research

There has been a range of developments within arts-based methods within recent times. These have included: the incorporation of sensory narratives within ethnographic and biographic research (Pink, 2009); arts-based enquiry as political activism (Finley, 2005); and the synthesis of art therapy, social action and arts-based research (Huss, 2013; Kaplan, 2007; Pink, Hogan and Bird, 2011). Arts-based research is now used extensively within the social science and that development has been covered extensively by various writers (Spencer 2011; MacDougall, 2006; Prosser, 1998). In particular arts-based methods have gained increasing value within the fields of ethnography and anthropology following a period of doubt about its legitimacy. Ethnographer Sarah Pink (2007a) identifies how the use of visual data within ethnography has moved from a position of controversy, where its subjectivity was questioned, to a position where it is possible to write that '[t]he challenge for visual anthropology as it re-establishes itself in the twenty first century is no longer the question of whether it will be accepted by the mainstream, but of how to connect with and contribute to mainstream anthropological debates' (p.12). Because of such developments, the use of artistic and creative methods of engaging with research topics, and of disseminating research outputs, has documented value and legitimacy.

There is a spectrum within arts-based research regarding the relationship between researcher, participants and the production and contemplation of artistic works. The distinctions to be drawn are primarily to do with who makes the images, or enacts artistic performances. At one end of this spectrum is research that involves the investigation of pre-existing images or performances; what is more commonly referred to as visual sociology, visual ethnography or visual studies (Rose, 2012; Spencer, 2011; Stanczak, 2007). These pre-existing artefacts might be used to elicit responses from participants, with research about women viewers' responses to representations of violence against women, as conducted by Schlesinger *et al* (1992), falling into this category. Moving along the spectrum is research where images are employed as documentary evidence; photography and video, for example. This might segue into researchers employing more interpretative forms of documentation; drawing for example, either using their own abilities or that of a trained artist (Afonso & Ramos, 2004). Dawn Mannay's (2013) use of poetry to represent women's spoken words about their sense of safety and danger is an example of the researcher using art to interpret experiences that are related to domestic violence. Such documentation might be informed and directed by research participants, and forms the kind of research conducted by Pink, where she uses walking interviews and video to document a participant's sense of place (Pink,

2007b). Moving further along the spectrum is found that research where research participants create arts-based documentary or interpretive evidence for themselves; evidence which might contribute to the elicitation of spoken or written responses. Photo-elicitation techniques (Frohmann, 2005) would sit within this category. Occasionally, such research might involve participants collaborating with trained artists to create images or performances. Finally, researchers may choose to engage more fully with artistic expressions so that they use their own art-making to explore their imaginative, embodied and felt responses to whatever it is they are researching. This researcher-made art is close to the idea of reflexivity, that art therapist and arts-based researcher Shaun McNiff (2012) classes as one of the defining features of arts-based research because it shows that the researcher truly values the worth of art within their own engagement with research. It is this last example that most closely resembles the body of work. Students becomes researchers and artistic forms are used to investigate their own experiences and processes. This aspect of arts-based research also aligns with those heuristic methods outlined by Moustakas (1990).

### Imagination and embodiment

A strong theme that emerges within arts-based research, and research that attempts to engage participants and audiences within the production of knowledge, is the place of imagination. Denzin (2000) writes about the potential of qualitative research texts to imagine different futures, whilst Finley (2003) when thinking through the evaluation of arts-based research writes that '[p]erformance requires some sort of imaginative interpretation of events and the contexts of their occurrence' (p.287). Imagination appears as part of a clearly stated process of inquiry when generating presentational knowledge, such as images and objects that are made as a response to experiential knowledge (Seeley & Reason, 2008). It is suggested that researchers suspend quick intellectual responses and instead invite 'imaginative impulses to express themselves through the media of our bodies without our intellects throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique' (p.33). For bell hooks (1995) imagination is used as a way of countering restricted critical readings of works of art; readings that she considers overemphasise direct experience in the formation of works of art. For example, in her consideration of the representation of the history of black artists, and the way in which art made by black artists is often only interpreted by critics as representing an actual lived 'black' experience, she makes a powerful argument for focusing upon and valuing the appearance of imagination within works of art: of what is mysterious and mythic and of what has not been personally experienced but collectively imagined. Thus, the myths of the community and the family contribute to the work of art as much as direct experience or reason. Imagination is therefore a legitimate way within which to engage

with research; particularly research that has any element of transformation and emancipation as part of its purpose. It can be argued that all artistic forms have a natural affinity with imagination, allowing as it does an ability to play with possibilities and to enable the occupation of an “as if” position or liminal space between points in time and between states of being and belonging.

As well as imagination being a defining feature of arts-based research and the body of work, the notion of embodiment is also a key component of both, and it can be argued is intimately related to imagination. This is particularly so where a methodology and pedagogy is being employed that is attempting, in its valuing of multiple ways of knowing, to challenge the dichotomies of objective-subjective or mind-body that define more epistemological approaches to the generation of knowledge (Leavy, 2009). Leavy is interested in feminist theory and art-based methods and the way in which they both offer other ways of understanding experiences that are situated within political and social contexts. Whilst not referencing arts-based methods, Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis (2002), in their examination of the role of imagination within feminist thought, draw upon 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza’s challenge to mind-body dualism who ‘conceives of the mind not as an entity distinct from and opposed to the body, but as *the body’s self-awareness*’ (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p.323, original emphasis). Within Spinoza’s philosophy, imagination plays an important role in the mediation of the senses to that self-awareness, and also acts as the link between the corporeal awareness of the individual and the awareness of other beings, whom together share the material space that forms his concept of community and political society. This attention to the notion of the relationship between body and mind aligns with Leavy’s (2009) suggestion concerning the challenge made by feminist thought upon mind-body dualism, and helps to consider how imagination and the body are related. Furthermore, it has been argued that the corporeal quality of imagination, as understood by Spinoza, is its defining feature, and that ‘imagination involves awareness of other bodies at the same time as our own. Our bodies retain traces of the changes brought about in them by the impinging of other bodies’ (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p.23). From this perspective imagination and embodiment become important ways through which to explore relationships and inter-subjective experiences, and whilst the body-of-work is not presented as being explicitly feminist in approach, its valuing of imagination and embodiment means that it is a methodology that lends itself to enquiries that can be considered of interest to feminist thought. For example, the majority of the students on both programmes are female and a common area of enquiry will be about identity and gender within the context of social and cultural norms. In such cases a method of enquiry that values imagination and embodiment appears very important.

## Two examples

In order to provide an example of how the body of work is implemented, Alessandra Wellen and Mary Stephanou, two former students of the Masters in Art Therapy programme recount their experiences of the engaging with the process, including what they found beneficial and challenging about that engagement. Their accounts are followed by a broader consideration of the benefits and the challenges of the body of work approach to independent scholarship that their accounts bring to light.

### Alessandra's response

My experience of engaging with the body of work element of the independent scholarship enabled me to develop my self-awareness and, evolve and establish my professional identity and practice as an art therapist; shifting my personal experience into a professional context. I completed this research project as part of the MA Art Therapy postgraduate course, held at the University of Derby.



Figure 1: 'Shame'

My IS was titled *The Cupboard of Shame and I*, this heuristic research study explored the significance of retaining or disposing of objects, from both a personal and professional perspective and was framed within the context of art therapy. The independent scholarship body of work element was produced

through the act of data gathering, facilitated through engaging in personal art making, which took the form of video, imagery and sculpture. I immersed myself in impulsive art making and reflection, exploring materials such as plaster, threads and found objects. I created boxes (Figure 1) and containers, spontaneously self-disclosing through the form of written notes, secrets and confessions that were placed within my artifacts, which acted as containers for my thoughts and feelings. Through my study I contemplated themes such as *Disposal and Endings*, *Loss* and *Shame* and my relationship with these subjects, as well as a deeper consideration of how they related within the broader context of art therapy theory and practice.

In my experience the most beneficial and successful element of the body of work approach to the independent scholarship was the emphasis upon art making and the associated opportunity to engage in a variety of creative processes. This approach in conjunction with the heuristic research methodology enabled me to place art making at the heart of my research. The creative processes became a key method of investigation, intrinsic to my experience, enhancing my capacity to engage with the subject and further enabling me to integrate my findings into my overall learning and development.

As I considered my research topic through the manipulation of plaster, wax and pigment, my creative process served to guide and inform. This enabled me to engage in the intrinsic nature of art making, which facilitated the emergence of my imaginative thinking, promoted understanding and assisted the unknown to become visible. My experience offered me the chance for authentic and spontaneous encounters with my research, providing form to my discoveries. Visible representation of my thoughts and feelings emerged, enabling me to gain insight into their symbolisation and to establish a personal symbolic language. Creative methods inherently drew parallels with therapeutic processes, enhancing my inquiry and allowing me to explore my research with greater imagination, engagement, depth and clarification; harnessing what was previously unknown and developing it into a tool for learning and personal growth.

Using art to make thoughts visible involved a need to stick with the unknown and trust the process. The act of creating allowed me to engage in self-dialogue and self-analysis; as a result, my capacity for self-exploration and critical thinking evolved. I contemplated difficulties with and emotional responses to my relationship with themes such as *shame* and *loss*; my personal struggles were then transformed into learning opportunities, knowledge and strength. In the light of these experiences my understanding of personal processes evolved and my self-awareness expanded, thus my professional consciousness and competency developed and in turn my identity as a therapist was further established. My experience enabled me to gain a perspective as both the client and therapist, the subject of research



and the researcher; framing my findings in a way that held significance both personally and professionally, whilst also being relevant within the broader environment of art therapy. In turn I gained a first-hand understanding of the potential use of art making within a therapeutic context and this further enhanced my trust and appreciation in its application, thus gaining personal experience that was professionally relevant and transferable.

In addition to the emergence of a clearer sense of my professional identity, a connection with my identity as an artist also materialized. Having used methods of self-expression during my research, which were familiar to me, in this case art making in the form of sculpture, I found the independent scholarship experience to be enjoyable, exciting and complementary to the way I understood and interacted with the world. This experience further established my capacity to be creative and put form to my ideas and thoughts. I developed a greater connection with my artistic and creative self, which continues to inform me within my role as a therapist. Art making enriches my life and offers me an opportunity for continual self-discovery, self-expression, and a means of self-care; which all have been essential components to my overall wellbeing as an Art Therapist.

Overall, I found the body of work practice to be beneficial, engaging, enriching and successful; it enabled me to get the most from my study whilst also assisting me to meet the learning outcomes of the independent scholarship module. When I reflect upon the challenges that the body of work approach may have posed, I felt that they were akin to some of the potential encounters one may face when engaging in or facilitating any therapeutic experience; thus, they again posed valuable learning opportunities relevant to my professional practice. I found that the creative element of the body of work facilitated a great depth of personal exploration and self-discovery throughout my research process; its primary function being to facilitate the emergence of relevant personal themes, data and findings within the parameters of my inquiry. The independent scholarship existed within an educational framework and would ultimately be graded and shared with peers and the public via an exhibition; it served primarily as a piece of research, not as an account of or substitute for personal therapy.

Despite the educational framework to my independent scholarship there was always an element of the unknown and risk with regard to what may arise for me personally through my research process, bringing an aspect of vulnerability into my study. In the light of this, by having a clear understanding of the boundaries and limitations of this experience, whilst adopting processes to support me during my involvement, I was able to immerse, invest and engage fully in this experience, whilst maintaining a sense of security, safety and overall wellbeing. Mandatory independent scholarship supervision, personal therapy and peer support were valuable containers for my findings. In addition, I found the body of work

itself functioned as a container and safety net, my sculptures offered me protection, allowing me to use art making to engage with the spontaneous, in-depth and authentic nature of my research. My sculptures and materials became tools for self-discovery and reflection, adopting the role of witness and offering containment; thus, enabling me to maintain a level of depth and discovery, yet offering confidentiality, concealment and privacy so I could consider my findings and manage my discoveries at my own pace, while choosing what to share as part of my research and what to keep to myself and process within personal therapy.

My interaction with the body of work mirrored various therapeutic processes and gave me valuable professional knowledge, such as the importance of offering safety and a sense of containment within the therapeutic relationship and the importance of enabling clients to go at their own pace; the role and significance of the image within art therapy practice was also reinforced. In addition, I understood the necessity of personally adopting various support networks to manage my clinical work and role as a therapist, including the importance of maintaining a connection with my own personal art making outside of my professional practice.

The body of work element of the independent scholarship helped me to develop and reinforce my personal and professional knowledge and identity as an art therapist. It provided me with a fruitful and engaging research process, which enhanced my educational experience. I feel that this experience was a crucial element of my training, which was both rewarding and challenging; ultimately it enhanced and complimented my learning and ongoing experience as an art therapist.

### Mary's response

The experience of creating a body of work for my art therapy MA independent scholarship propelled a practice that continues to inform my clinical work. My need to reflect through images (created or witnessed), whether in clinical supervision or surreptitiously through my own art practice, remains a constant thread of discovery, re-learning and consciousness. The body of work I created as part of my Independent Scholarship aimed to creatively explore the dialectics between memory and (safe) spaces in the context of working with people living with dementia (PWD). Through a heuristic methodology framework, I used image making to investigate how reflecting on my own memories in relation to safe places could potentially parallel experiences, emotions and internal processes of PWD. In doing so, I could 'step into their shoes', in such a way that text-based learning could not facilitate alone. As such, it has strengthened my current art therapy practice; emphasizing empathy over theory and connection over 'professionalism'. As dementia pioneer Tom Kitwood wrote; *"feeling the shape and weight of things,*

*knowing them in action rather than in reflection*" (Kitwood, 1994, P.13) creates powerful routes to understanding the experience of people living with dementia.

An example of moving from reflection to action, surfaced in the period of initial engagement (Moustakas, 1990). I wondered what space a person with dementia would need in art therapy to feel safe; what would this look like and how would it feel?

The first process image I created spontaneously (Figure 2); using black material filled with sand



*Figure 2 - Process images from left to right: 'The Weight is hard to Bear', 'Lightness' and 'Sensory Holding'*

and hand

stitched together. When I held the finished piece in my hands I was shocked by the weight of it: it was heavy, dark and uncomfortable. The role of the art therapist is to be calm, soothing and supportive, due to the likelihood that a client with dementia may no longer be able to self-soothe in the moment (Ehresman, 2014). I wondered if the art object represented the metaphorical 'weight' an art therapist would need to hold for clients living with dementia. The process of creating images instinctively allowed me to begin to 'feel the weight' of living with dementia, as Kitwood suggested. This led me to think more critically about what I was able to offer as an art therapist and aided me in creating two further art objects. The final object (as pictured above) was created with deliberate care: I had been reflecting on the safe spaces I had inhabited, namely my maternal grandparent's home.

With care, I chose fabric that was reminiscent of that time, filling it with Micro-beads (which are almost weightless) and attentively stitched it together. The finished piece felt light, soft and soothing. In infancy the child will internalize the safety of its mother through holding, soothing and gaze, which physically relaxes the child, forming an inner and outer world of safety. When working with PWD, loss becomes a pivotal theme, and with this comes the loss of the 'good object', hence the older person loses their sense of safety in their world (Malloy, 2009). Interestingly, Kitwood (1997) noted that physically rubbing one's hands or clothing can be the last way to self-soothe and remained connected to the external

world, which can no longer provide safety for people with severe dementia. In essence, I wondered whether I had created an object that facilitated memories of love, warmth and safety. I learnt that as an art therapist I would need to ‘hold’ and ‘soothe’ clients who may no longer have that capacity as dementia progresses. By creating process images as part of my body of work, I had started to connect my own experiences of safety and begin to make sense of the arising themes and complex experiences that PWD might face. In learning to understand myself, I became better equipped to empathizing and respectfully exploring the internal worlds of people living with dementia.

The initial engagement phase gave context to the type of research I wanted to engage in; a process that would allow me to subjectively immerse myself into feeling, whilst simultaneously critically reflect on the wider social, political, and psycho-social climate that surrounds PWD. As Emmison and Smith expressed: *“Objects operate as indicators of wider socio-cultural processes and therefore serve as tools for a theoretically informed exploration of social life”* (Emmison & Smith, 2000, P.109). This led me to creating my main body of work for the Independent Scholarship. I was inspired to create a physical representation of my internal world, one that could exist physically in a space, but could also act as a



Figure 3: 'Allestree Landscape'

transitional object (Davar, 2001; Schaverien, 1999). I spent four months, designing, building and painting my 'boards' that were made from three, 6ft sheets of plywood, which I then hand painted 'wallpaper' on to (Figure 3). They were made in such a way that they could stand freely or be folded and transported. The process of creating the wallpaper was inspired by my initial process images. Using both my memory and imagination I drew and painted each flower seventy-two times. My conscious reasoning for using wallpaper was due to the positive memories it manifested from my childhood, but unconsciously it may have symbolically acted as a 'container', perhaps mirroring skin. Bick (1967) hypothesized that skin acts as a boundary that holds the 'self' together. I later learnt that I was creating a mirror of myself, made up of my internal and external worlds.

I became immersed in painting the same motif repetitively, perhaps paralleling the experience of living with dementia. Urbas (2009) wrote that PWD are the 'masters' of repetition. In repeating a motif in art therapy, the PWD can be listened to and witnessed, showing the therapist the way in which the client experiences their world, discerning a personal theme and communicating with the outside world (Urbas, 2009). On painting and memory, Milner wrote; *when the bit of painting was finished there was before one's eyes a permanent record of the experience*" (Milner, 1971, P.142). This led to me to reflect on what felt like a powerful parallel process. Whilst painting I felt like I was 'losing my mind'; I felt angry, agitated and impatient. By being present and sensing into these feelings I gained a greater depth in to the potential emotional experience of a PWD trying to communicate, express or relive the same memory constantly. Moustakas (1990) articulates that heuristic research is a process of deepening understanding, concerning the human condition and the discovery of revealing connections with others. In creating the body of work, I was able to create links between my developing therapeutic practice, 'unfold' myself and learn in a way that traditional pedagogy would never have been able to simulate.

In the final phase of my research, I took the completed boards to places in which I felt connected with and photographed them (Figure 4). On one occasion, whilst walking back through a car park, I stopped and placed the boards down. A man who appeared to be drunk approached me, and asked if he could take a closer look at the work. I hesitated; was he going to deface my precious work or would he attack me? I apprehensively agreed and he slowly walked up to my boards, put his hands behind his back and inquisitively viewed my art. He commented on how much he loved to see art, thanked me and went on his way. In that moment I felt incredibly unsafe, based on my own assumptions as well as the political connotations of being a woman in public spaces at night. It made me reflect on how people with dementia in care homes must feel, when strangers enter their personal space. How intrusive and threatening it must feel for people to enter your space without your consent. Not only do they enter the physical room, but

PWD, (especially in the later stages) are also often touched and cleaned in very intimate places on their body. I felt very physically, the distress of my internal space being threatened and this experience placed my feet very firmly in the shoes of people living with dementia. No PowerPoint can do that.

In learning reflexively; through reading, making art, writing, viewing the arts, reflecting and processing I learnt both viscerally and theoretically about the importance of creating safe spaces in the therapeutic relationship for PWD.

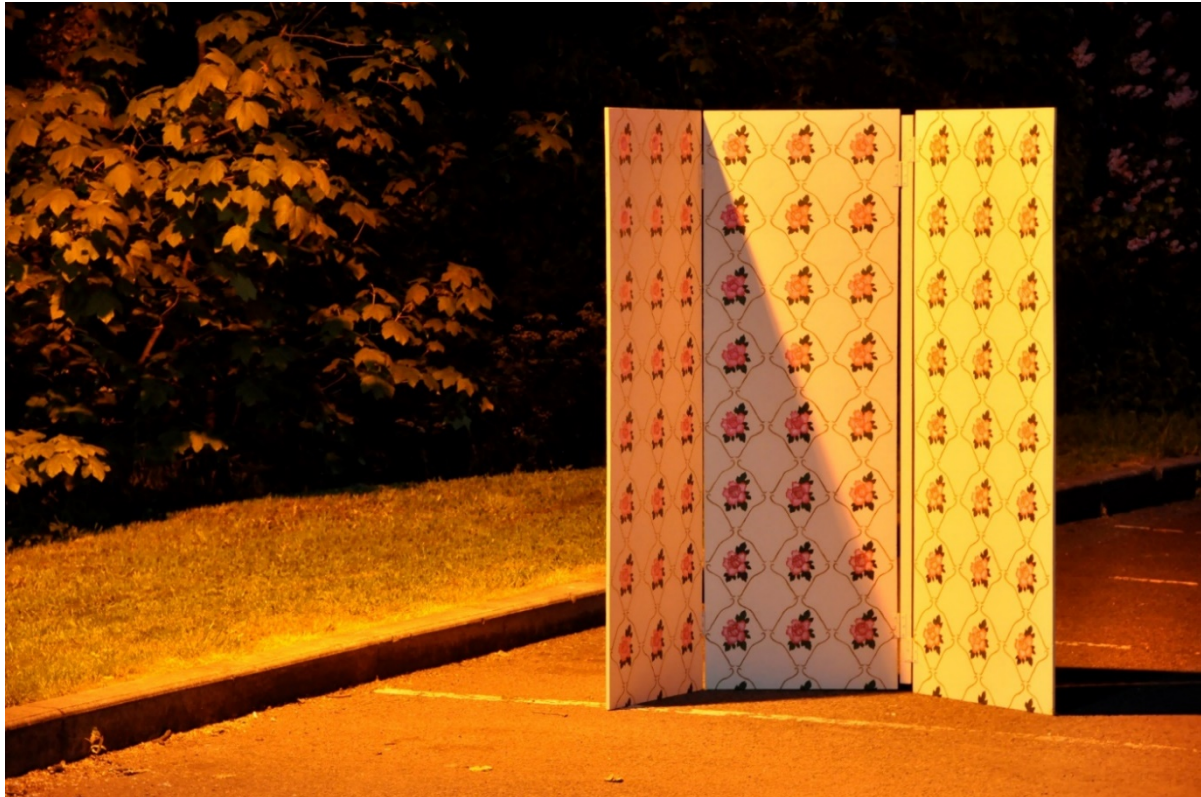


Figure 4: 'Car Park'

In exploring my self, in realizing what makes me feel safe and whole and what makes up my internal world, I drew connections between the subjective experience of living with dementia and in doing so, helped facilitate what sort of space I needed to provide for future clients as well as showing me what their potential 'worlds' looked like. Unknown to me at the time, the flower that I had painted repetitively, the Peony, is a symbol of healing. Through my body of work I learned to heal and it sparked the journey of learning to heal the wounds of PWD.

### Benefits and challenges

From Alesaandra's and Mary's responses it can be observed that the opportunity to engage in art making and creativity as a way of investigating their chosen area of interest was perceived as beneficial.

Alessandra notes how it enabled her to integrate the findings of her inquiry into her development as an art therapist, whilst Mary valued the opportunity to use image-making as form of inquiry that she could continue into her current practice as an art therapist. It should be no surprise that those training to be arts therapists or creative practitioners would appreciate the opportunity to use creativity in this way, and Alessandra and Mary confirm that employing a body of work allows that opportunity to flourish within the body of work. Both make reference to the process of immersion and of how this enabled them to explore their subjective responses to the area of concern. This reflects both the heuristic process (Moustakas, 1990) and, as Mary identifies, also allows reflections upon wider social and political contexts. Mary touches upon a crucial point here in how she talks about the created object having to exist in space and uses the work of Emmison and Smith (2000) to support that whilst also making reference to the concept of the transitional object. Here it seems that the artistic product, whilst originating within the internal world of the student, has to emerge into, and be located within, a shared social space. This can be taken as an example of how ideas and experiences can be embodied within creative artifacts, with that embodiment expressing both a personal and social context in a way that aligns with the philosophy outlined earlier (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999; Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). In addition Mary used the physicality of art making to explore the physicality of living with dementia and this again illustrates how art provides access to embodied and empathic knowledge.

Imagination appears to be an important element of the process where Mary talks about using imagination and memory to help construct the flowers that appeared on the wallpaper. In the way that Mary used the process to gain empathy with the experience of PWD confirms that the body of work is an imaginative vehicle for understanding better other people's experiences as well as one's own experience. Similarly, Alessandra notes how the body of work enabled her to engage with the topic of her research in an imaginative way and to occupy a space that gave her insight into the experience of client and therapist.

From both accounts it is evident that the body of work allows students to engage with the process of using art as a form of enquiry in a way that allows a great deal of emotional exploration. This is likely to have occurred for regardless of the medium, given that the programmes that use the body of work are founded upon the principles of personal reflection and emotional honesty. What the body of work provides is a way to enhance that emotional exploration, through embodiment and imagination, in a way that is contained and observable. Alessandra speaks in detail about the challenges and risks involved in the body of work process, noting that its placement within an educational framework moves it away from being purely about personal therapy and helps to provide a safe boundary. She talks about the process being safe and secure because she was able to make use of academic supervision throughout the process,

as well as making use of peer support and the personal therapy she would have been accessing as part of the art therapy training. Alessandra talks about vulnerability arising from the unknown, and Mary talks about feeling unsafe in a public space. It can be argued that the body of work as an approach to independent scholarship does involve greater risk and uncertainty than more traditional forms of enquiry, but with the right amount of awareness and management of risk this is acceptable.

Overall, the reflections of Alessandra and Mary point to the body of work being a very appropriate way for those students on programmes related to the therapeutic and transformative use of the arts to investigate topics of importance to them. It allows a high level of emotional immersion whilst being safely contained within an educational frame that values rigorous analysis and relating knowledge gained from personal experience with knowledge gained from theory.

## Conclusion

This chapter has set forth a theoretical and philosophical justification for the use of the body of work approach to independent scholarship within programmes related to art therapy and the arts in health and education. It has been that the body of work provides a way for students to make full use of their creative abilities within an educational framework that values personal theory as much as it values academic theory. The approach adopts a heuristic method of enquiry, with the process of enquiry developed by Moustakas (1990) proving to be a popular with students. The heuristic method is paired with methods and processes that emerge from arts-based research, the arts therapies and wider philosophical movements that value subjective and inter-subjective knowledge. In particular, philosophies that embrace imagination and embodiment have been presented as important foundations for the body of work.

Within the context of the programmes referenced within the chapter, the body of work fits very well. The examples and reflection provided by Alessandra and Mary illustrate how it enables a depth of engagement and learning that would be hard to emulate without the use of artistic exploration and expression. It is not without its challenges. Careful consideration needs to be provided as to how students manage the process in terms of emotional safety and project management. Because each student will find their own way through the process it is not uncommon for students to feel a substantial amount of anxiety during the early phases of the process as they search for a defined question direction. One of the tasks of academic supervisors is to help re-assure students that the phase of uncertainty is not unusual and that it is a fruitful place from which good ideas will emerge. Such a phase appears to exist in all forms of independent study and scholarship but it does appear to be more acute with the body of work where personal process and creativity provide even more options than might normally be encountered. What



that option provides though is great potential and great rewards in terms of what the student can learn about themselves and the relationship they have with a chosen area of interest. As such it fits well with an educational approach that values reflective practice.

This chapter whilst having a strong theoretical element has also attempted to draw upon the actual experience of engaging with the body of work. It is acknowledged that with just two anecdotal accounts provided, any claim to this being a complete and inclusive representation of the body of work will be limited. In part that represents the very personal nature of the body of work and of arts-based methods of enquiry in general. It is also a call for more systematic evaluation of the body work approach to independent scholarship. The high pass rate and quality of grades achieved is testament to its worth from a purely quantitative perspective. This chapter has started the process of understanding its worth from a qualitative perspective.

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