

The Graduate School of Education
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UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 1 | 2013

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Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin
Anita Sinner

Editor

Associate Editor
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Lindy Joubert

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

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Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner

THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts

Rita L. Irwin and Anita Sinner
Guest Editors

Over the last three decades a great deal of scholarship has emerged at the intersections between the arts, education and inquiry. This special issue of *Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts* focuses on visually oriented creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical issues or topics of contemporary significance and their relationship to a/r/tography. We are thrilled to welcome authors and artists from Australia, Canada, China, New Guinea, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. This in itself demonstrates the reach of a/r/tography since it emerged a decade ago.

A/r/tography joins other artistic forms of inquiry broadly conceived as arts based educational research and/or practice based research and seeks to enlarge our understanding of complex ideas through alternative forms of knowing. To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work is concerned with exploring conceptual ideas that can be rendered artistically and educationally through relational conditions of aesthetic inquiry. Most a/r/tographic work is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue is organized around thirteen articles and six interludes. While the sequence may be mute in an on-line journal these contributions are organized

so that a reader following the organization of the text would experience two articles before proceeding to an interlude and thereafter repeating the rhythm this sequence creates. In this way, we open a dialogue with authors and audiences to investigate how the visual arts are an important part of scholarly conversations across multi-disciplinary fields. As Ritterman, Bast and Mittelstraß (2011) suggest, creative processes are bringing the arts in proximity to the sciences, and in so doing, the processes, practices and products of art-making are becoming more accessible, moving from what is often entrenched conversations concerning artistic quality and qualification to new ways of enfolding the arts into research to address the rigours of research design and invite scholars of all levels of art experience to contribute to this growing area of inquiry.

The six cycles or rhythms of this special issue are thematically and aesthetically evolving, beginning with a provocative photo-essay by Ricardo Marín-Viadel, Joaquín Roldán and Miguel Cepeda-Morales (Spain) examining methodological structures and semantic interactions between visual expression, education and interpretation, and how as researchers, our challenge is to assess and indeed prove why such innovative approaches, like a/r/tography, function as academic research. Verna Thomas (New Guinea) shares a case study of filmmaking that demonstrates the application of a/r/tography as a methodology within indigenous discourses of socio-cultural history, community relations, colonisation of education and artistic forms of knowing and learning. Petra Zantingh (Canada) closes the first rhythm with a video about the process of teaching a group of older women how to draw, and how together, they formed a rich, aesthetic practice of art and friendship. Creating a circle of trust, cultivated through an ethic of caring, is described by Zantingh as “training the eye to not only see the visible but also the invisible.”

Initiating a second rhythm, McClain Percy (UK) employs mixed-media artworks of altered books to articulate the experiences of learning disabled individuals, too often othered in educational institutions as well as in society. Juxtaposing knowledge practices and constructing new re/presentations of disability through a/r/tographic methods, Percy challenges educators to re-think presumptions about learning and notions of artistic expression to move beyond the systematic status quo that continues to define our teaching practices. Susana McCune (USA) adds another dimension to this conversation through art therapy, demonstrating how she adopts artistic means to address countertransference in her professional psychotherapy practice. McCune applies a/r/tographic renderings to generate insights to her inner feelings as a practitioner, seeking to engage more deeply and more aesthetically, and to ensure better care for her patients. In a video interlude by Zulis Yalte (Canada), Yalte considers how disabling illness is a form of border crossing, involving power relations, identities and subjectivities within health care, resulting in complex and shared forms of living inquiry.

Our third rhythm turns to teaching and learning, with Marta Kawka (Australia) considering how a/r/tography offers a means to be pedagogically attuned with children in ways that attend to the lifeworld of both teachers and students, and embeds reflective practice in art making and in researching children’s lives. Stephanie Baer (USA) addresses trust as a cornerstone of preservice teacher education, describing how she adopts a/r/tographic methods to encourage creative processes to inform the artistic self in teacher education. Christy Ortiz (USA) presents the video, “Translated

Energy,” in which riding a bike on a racetrack is a metaphor for her journey as a researcher, denoting the in-betweenness and suspension of self when developing a new identity, from artist/teacher, to artist/researcher/teacher in a continuous cycle of becoming.

Moving to alternate educational sites, our fourth rhythm highlights communities of practice, with Yung-Shan Hung’s (Taiwan) contemplative discussion on transcendence through painting. Pedagogical practice, questions of aesthetics and even spirituality form part of Hung’s educational integrity and provide the basis for professional identity development for teachers. Marie-France Berard (Canada) attends to the importance of museum education as living inquiry, and the role of embodied knowing through a/r/tographic frames of reference when giving gallery talks. The tension of doing museum education and being a museum educator in relation to artworks is the central issue of Berard’s inquiry. Heidi May (USA) offers an experimental video invoking digital language and aesthetics to investigate the notion of dialogical process as a network of relations between artists, learners and multiple selves, which operates as a self-reflective pedagogical tool.

Natalie Kauffman (Canada) opens our fifth rhythm focused on theoretical considerations. Kauffman seeks to rupture understandings of artistic practice in elementary school classrooms by taking up the principles of Reggio Emilia, and exploring holistic experiences of learning as speculative realism, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. Mindy Carter (Canada), informed by Bertolt Brecht’s method of epic theatre, considers the methods of a/r/tography, and in particular, the slash in relation to borderland discourses and how such dialogues afford our dwelling in-between our roles and our spaces, but at the same time serve to disrupt understandings. Such transitioning is ever-present for Carter, making crossroads a critical site of her inquiry.

In turn, Dan Barney (USA) offers an interlude that plays upon symbolism, building on Mary Aswell Doll’s position that intertextuality is living pedagogy. Recycling bed sheets from dorm rooms, Barney embroiders phrases from fortune cookies to solicit potentially subversive meanings.

For the final rhythm of this special issue, Lucille Korwin (Canada) adds a psycho-social dimension to our conversation, invoking mandalas to explore issues of displacement, fragmentation and the meaning of finding home. Enid Larson (USA) assesses the malleability of collage as a method and metaphor in post-secondary education, and how collage is a means to access and activate transformational potential in adult learners. Corinna Peterken (Australia) also applies collage in an interlude that visually expresses transitory spaces for understanding self in ways that emerge when wandering physically and wandering emotionally through memory and across time. Patti Pente (Canada), informed by Nancy’s ontology of becoming, explores landscape art as decay, and how, as a long-standing a/r/tographer, Pente employs sensual relationality as a kind of “smelly ontology” that presents ways to move from conservative educational climates to becoming cultural workers in education. Pente concludes by demonstrating forms of art practice that advance our conversations to new visual methods and regimes of thought.

These articles exemplify everything outlined in the description of a/r/tography, yet so too do the interludes. Even so, they are different. These forms of representation provoke the reader in contiguous ways – at once, critically debating the finer details of a theoretical argument while soon being offered the chance to linger with a visual representation of an inquiry that disrupts something we have taken-for-granted. Both forms of scholarship are meritorious. They deepen our understandings and perceptions of the world around us. They offer us ways to reconsider our own experiences, to reimagine the potential of our movement in the world, and to reignite our passions for creative engagement. They also represent the arts and education writ large. These contributions embrace art therapy, nursing, museum education, philosophy, adult education, digital media, disabilities, art processes, and cultural sensitivities. This breadth of engagement within a visual realm is quite astonishing. It also expands our awareness of what counts as education, research/inquiry and the arts. These are important contributions to the field of visual arts research not only for what they say but also for what they render visually. We are indebted to these contributors for their courage and vision as we encounter their work in this special issue.

REFERENCES

Ritterman, J., Bast, G., and Mittelstraß, J. (2011). *Art and research: Can artists be researchers?* Vienna, Austria: Springer.