Lips and Scissors

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FIGURE 1

i
tasting arts-based research and auto-ethnography
means tasting with my whole body
it means tasting my home, my world, my self
with the sensitive sled1
of my flesh2
it means closing my eyes
and feeling the path in the dark

krishnamurti said
when we teach a child the name for bird
the child will never
see a bird again3

1 “The snails on the pink sleds of their bodies are moving / among the morning glories” is a line of poetry by Mary Oliver (1992).
2 Arts-based research emphasises embodied knowledge (Kapitan, 2018; Leavy, 2017)
3 Jiddu Krishnamurti, as referred to by Adyashanti (2011, p. 6-7).
I hope to lose my words for a moment
to be open enough
and soft enough
and lost enough

that I might feel
the feathery pulse
on my finger:
the exquisite lightness
of being

as I taste
I snip

my slick and slippery
lips move like a pair of scissors
leaving a trail of meaning

how can I avoid
cutting my own tongue?

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4 Eberhart and Atkins suggest that in expressive arts therapy we focus on poiesis: “knowing by creating,” in contrast to theoria: “knowing by reason,” (p. 44) which involves suspending our habitual reliance on language (p. 86). McNiff (1998) says that the ABR “should correspond as closely as possible to the experience of therapy” (1998, p. 170).


6 “Lips moving like a pair of scissors” is a line from Kate Atkinson’s (1995) novel Behind the Scenes at the Museum (p. 324).

7 Varney et. al. (2014) highlight the tension between authenticity and being taken seriously by ones audience when conducting ABR.
who is guiding my scissors?
who’s voice is whispering in my ear?
what parasitic prejudice?
what privilege?
what hope?

when the skin on my back
is awake
I can feel the hands, the claws
that guide me from behind

they lift their faces
and look towards the light

8  Auto-ethnographic research requires a rigorous examination of ones own context (Gray, 2011), which can be challenging because one is ‘inside’ oneself.
9  Fortunately, arts-based processes can support the surfacing of ‘shadow’ aspects of self, making what was invisible visible.
it is necessary
to kiss the toad
or at least
lick its eyelid,
to look it in the eye
or at least
sit beside it\[10\]

the performance of my particular\[11\]
tongue and toad
might move you
or disgust you

how much of my toad
do you need to see?
and which part of my
tongue?

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\[10\] ABR is performative: it does not “simply describe or represent things [...] it actually does things” (Kapitan, 2018, p. 217).

\[11\] ABR focuses on the particular, unlike many other research methods that seek generalisations (Kapitan, 2018).
Multiplicity and proliferation are heavy words to digest. How many birds is too many birds in the nest?¹²

¹² A challenge of ABR is that it can create masses of data and multiple viewpoints (Kapitan, 2018), which can become hard to grapple with.
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do I need to explain my metaphors?
and trace their source? and how?
can I just let them bloom between us?\textsuperscript{13}
look here!
above thousands of kilometres
of mycelium running
and digesting the underworld\textsuperscript{14}
my art is rising
like the fragile face
of a mushroom

\textsuperscript{13} McNiff (2014) advocates for allowing art to “speak for itself”.
\textsuperscript{14} Mycelium Running is a book by Paul Stamets (2005). Mycelium is the part of a fungus which lives underground and absorbs nutrients. It is made of microscopically thin threads that can spread for thousands of acres and are thought to be the largest living organisms in the world (Stamets, 2005).
About the Author

Rata Gordon is a poet and creative facilitator living on Waiheke Island, New Zealand. She is currently studying towards a Master of Art Therapy at Whitecliffe College. Rata’s poems have been published widely including in *Best New Zealand Poems*. Her first poetry collection *Thumb and Tongue* is forthcoming with Victoria University Press.

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References