

Lips and Scissors

Rata Gordon
Whitecliffe College, New Zealand



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 enough⁴

that I might feel
 the feathery pulse
 on my finger:
 the exquisite lightness
 of being⁵

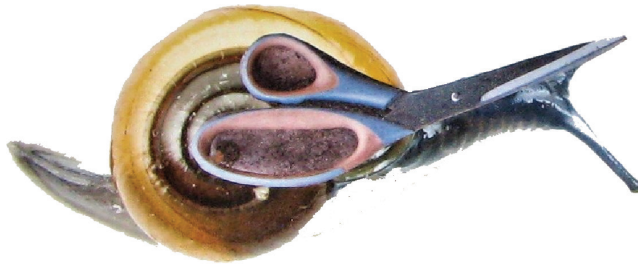


FIGURE 2

ii
 as I taste
 I snip

my slick and slippery
 lips move like a pair of scissors⁶
 leaving a trail of meaning

how can I avoid
 cutting my own tongue?⁷

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).

5 *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a book of philosophical fiction by Milan Kundera (1984).

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.



FIGURE 3

iii

who is guiding my scissors?
 who's voice is whispering in my ear?
 what parasitic prejudice?
 what privilege?
 what hope?⁸

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 light⁹

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.



FIGURE 4

iv

it is necessary
to kiss the toad
or at least
lick its eyelid,
to look it in the eye
or at least
sit beside it¹⁰

the performance of my particular¹¹
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?

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).



FIGURE 5

v

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.

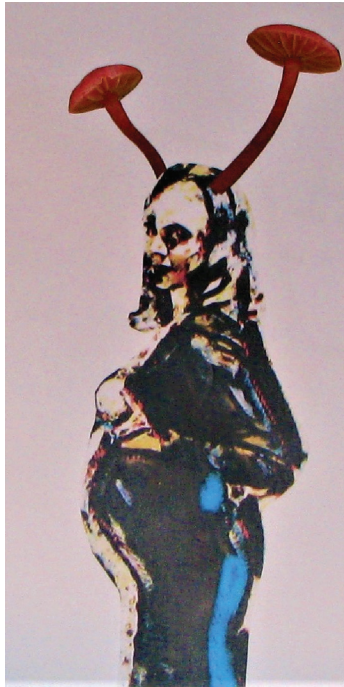


FIGURE 6

vi

do I need to explain my metaphors?
and trace their source? and how?
can I just let them bloom between us?¹³
look here!
above thousands of kilometres
of mycelium running
and digesting the underworld¹⁴
my art is rising
like the fragile face
of a mushroom

13 McNiff (2014) advocates for allowing art to “speak for itself”.

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).



FIGURE 7

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. www.ratagordon.com

References

- Adyashanti (2011). *Falling into grace: insights on the end of suffering*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Atkinson, K. (1995). *Behind the scenes at the museum*. UK: Doubleday.
- Chilton, G. & Scotti, V. (2014). Snipping, Gluing, Writing: The Properties of Collage as an Arts-Based Research Practice in Art Therapy. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 31(4) pp. 163–171.
- Gray, B. (2011). Auto-ethnography and arts therapy: The arts meet healing. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Arts Therapy* 6(1). pp 67–80.
- Kundera, M. (1984). *The unbearable lightness of being*. France: Gallimard.
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Research Approaches*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Marttila, A. (2018). *Cats on Catnip*. NY: Running Press Adult.
- McNiff, S. (1998). *Art-based research*. Boston, NY: Shambhala.
- McNiff, S. (2014). Art Speaking for Itself: Evidence that Inspires and Convinces. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health* 5(2). pp 255–262. doi: 10.1386/jaah.5.2.255_1
- Oliver, M. (1992). *New and Selected Poems, Vol. 1*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Stamets, P. (2005). *Mycelium running: how mushrooms can help save the world*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Varney, H., Rumbold, B., and Sampson, A. (2014). Evidence in a Different Form: the Search Conference Process. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* 5(2). pp 169-178. doi: io.i386/jaah.5.2.i69_i