Perspective

Process and Relationship: A Walking-Dialogue

Sandra A. Cowan and Mia van Leeuwen

ABSTRACT

As an interdisciplinary duo from an academic library background and a performing arts background, we underwent a process of recording a series of dialogues about our respective research practices in and between our fields. As we conversed, we walked in separate locations while remaining connected by our phones, permitting us to explore a kinetic and spontaneous approach as a mode of inquiry. An experiment and intended provocation to demonstrate that, just as there are other ways to research, there are other ways of knowing, generating, and presenting ideas that articulate the value of alternative methods within the academy, specifically within the realm of arts-based research. Troubled by the fact that what we perform and produce as research is not easily sanctioned as "research" within the library or the academy, we discuss what it is about these arts-based methods of experimentation, creation, practice, and knowledge-seeking that we find so generative and value so highly. The main themes that we circled and returned to throughout this walking-dialogue fell into the following categories: embodiment on a local, living landscape; fragmentation, collage, and the interstices of juxtaposition; unknowing, failure and doubt; and diverse ways of knowing.

Cowan, Sandra A. and Mia van Leeuwen. "Process and Relationship: A Walking-Dialogue," in "Assemblage, Inquiry, and Common Work in Library and Information Studies," eds. Melissa Adler and Andrew Lau. Special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 4.

ISSN: 2572-1364

> I'm interested in the mess, the unknowing, the mystery of our world. It's interesting to try to write a poem that has no certainty or can breathe in the in-between spaces. I'm fascinated by what it means to be an artist that has no answers and how that can translate on the page.
>
> Ada Limón[1]

INTRODUCTION

As an interdisciplinary duo from a performing arts background (Mia van Leeuwen) and an academic library and art background (Sandra Cowan), we underwent a process of recording a series of dialogues about our respective research practices in and between our fields. As we conversed, we walked in separate locations while remaining connected by our phones, permitting us to explore a kinetic and spontaneous approach as a mode of inquiry. An experiment and intended provocation to demonstrate that, just as there are other ways to research, there are other ways of knowing, generating, and presenting ideas that articulate the value of alternative methods within the academy, specifically within the realm of arts-based research. Both authors resonate with a definition of the arts put forward by Natalie Loveless in her book *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation*.

> They offer modes of sensuous, aesthetic attunement, and work as a conduit to focus attention, elicit public discourse, and shape cultural imaginaries. "How might the world be organized differently?" is a question that matters urgently, and it is a question that art—particularly art attuned to human and more-than-human social justice—asks in generative and complex ways.[2]

We have both observed that there is a traditional hierarchy in academic research methods in which positivist research based on empirical observation has been the most acknowledged and rewarded. In addition, the increasing reliance on evaluative metrics, along with the emphasis on quantifying worth and on job skill training within educational institutions, exacerbate the devaluation of other ways of researching, and ultimately, other ways of knowing that may not be as easily categorized, quantified, or attributed utilitarian value within a neoliberal paradigm in which efficiency, productivity, return on investment, and materialism are the standards of value. The work of faculty and graduate

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[1] Ada Limon, "Behind the Byline," *New England Review* 42, no. 2 (2021), https://www.nereview.com/2021/10/01/ada-limon/.

[2] Natalie Loveless, How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 16.

students in the fine arts, like that of librarians in many cases, does not always fit easily into the conventional models of research methods, and yet we and others assert that other ways of research and knowledge-generation, especially but not exclusively those in the creative arts, are valid and valuable.

Troubled by the fact that what we perform and produce as research is not easily sanctioned within the library or the academy, we set out to discuss what it is about these arts-based methods of experimentation, creation, practice, and knowledge-seeking that we find so generative and value so highly. As Chapman and Sawchuk point out, "Creative productions constitute knowledge in a different, but culturally equivalent, way to other forms of transcribed research findings, such as academic journal articles, scholarly books, mathematical formulae, research reports, studies, theses, etc." [3] These alternative methods of research have value not just in knowledge generation, but also in providing a counterpoint and a critique to the traditional ways of researching and knowledge creation in the academic world.[4]

In recent years, there has been considerable work published that affirms the role of arts-based research [5] and research-creation [6] within the academic framework. Although it may require more interpretive complexity, art in its many forms can be a form of information and of knowledge, and arts-based methods are increasingly used in research and pedagogy even outside of the fine arts.[7] Over the years there has been an expanding array of arts-based and other research methods and approaches that are being explored and presented as necessary additions to conventional academic research. These other ways of researching are not intended to replace positivist empirical research, but rather to increase and diversify our ways of knowing and finding meaning, to acknowledge

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[3] Owen B. Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and 'Family Resemblances,'" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): 21.

[4] Discussed in many places, for example: Amy K. Kilgard, "Collage: A Paradigm for Performance Studies," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 5, no. 3 (2009); Kathleen Vaughn, "Pieced Together: Collage as an Artist's Method for Interdisciplinary Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 4, no. 1 (2005): 27-52; Loveless, *How to Make Art.*

[5] For example: J. Gary Knowles, Ardra L. Cole, Cynthia Chambers, Janice Rahn, and Erika Hasebe-Ludt, *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008); Patrica Leavy, *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*, (New York: Guilford Publications, 2017).

[6] For example: Chapman and Sawchuk, "Research-Creation; Loveless, *How to Make Art*; Sarah E. Truman, Natalie Loveless, Erin Manning, Natasha Myers and Stephanie Springgay, "The Intimacies of Doing Research-Creation," in *Knowings and Knots: Methodologies and Ecologies in Research-Creation,* ed. Natalie Loveless, 221-249 (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2019).

[7] For example: Patricia Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2017).

the role of subjective processes like creativity, movement, and intuition in knowledge-creation, and ultimately to broaden and complicate our collective ways of knowing. In expanding our phenomenological and epistemological possibilities, connections and knowledges can be articulated that enrich our understanding of the world and our places in it, and possibly help create positive change.

While exploring an eclectic and dynamic multiplicity of methods during our process of research and writing, we were particularly inspired by collage as a method. The juxtaposition of apparently unrelated images, thoughts, and texts, provides space for new connections, recontextualizations, insights, and a more inclusive point of view.

> A collage practice is built on juxtaposition, on the interplay of fragments from multiple sources, whose piecing together creates resonances and connections that form the basis of discussion and learning….A collage methodology is interdisciplinary, juxtaposing multiple fields of endeavor and situating the practitioner and his or her work within and between them.[8]

Can bringing collage methodology to the established patterns and systems of research production help us think more creatively? There are examples of using collage as both method and form in scholarship that we take as inspiration, such as Amy Kilgard's 2009 article, "Collage: A Paradigm for Performance Studies," Kathleen Vaughan's 2005 article, "Pieced Together: Collage as an Artist's Method for Interdisciplinary Research," and Suzanne Bost's 2021 article, "The Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers and Radical Research Practices: A Collage." All of these examples use collage as an alternative method, a metaphor, and a structure, in order to bring disparate ideas in varied forms together to see what resonances occur, as well as to critique established methods. As Kilgard wrote, "…the unsettled nature of the form itself opens a space for critical reflection and action."[9]

Our walking-dialogue process provided the space for an open-ended, informal, playful, thoughtful, and personal conversation that meandered through various themes related to research, research-creation, arts-based methods, and many other topics, while including the outside world as part of our experience. We acknowledged our connections to the places and environments in which we walked, as well as our relationship to each other, as valued parts of the process. The main themes that we circled and returned to throughout the walking-dialogue fell into the following categories: embodiment in a local, living landscape; fragmentation, collage, and the interstices of juxtaposition; unknowing, failure and doubt; and diverse ways of knowing.

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[8] Vaughan, "Pieced Together," 40.
[9] Kilgard, "Collage," 4.

The format of this article is based on our walking-dialogue recordings that took place from May to August 2021 during a summer of record-setting heatwaves, wildfires, smoke, and drought. We conversed by cell phone as we each walked in different locales in western Canada, and recorded each of our walking dialogues. After a summer of walking and talking, we transcribed the recorded interviews, and then we each went through the transcripts to highlight what seemed most striking, insightful, or important. We extracted the key sections of the transcripts that we both identified and assembled them into a more collage-like dialogue that meanders through the topics that we explored, introduces other textual voices, includes images of our work, and allows for further reflection on our initial dialogues. This dialogue-based work is intended to be open-ended, fragmented, with more questions than answers—an exercise in doing research differently in process and form, from method to output. With no aspiration for overarching conclusions, we hope that the reader enjoys meandering with us.

WALKING-DIALOGUE

MIA: I am just crossing over the street to enter the Mountain View Cemetery here in Lethbridge, Alberta.

SANDRA: What a good place to walk on this hot smoky day—in the shade. All those big, beautiful trees in the cemetery. I'm walking along the South Saskatchewan River in Medicine Hat right now, under the cottonwood trees. I appreciate that we are walking through this conversation, as I'm particularly interested in walking as a method of creative research. There's something about the physical act of walking—the rhythm, the connection to the ground and environment, the slowness of it, the movement it creates in body and mind—I think all of this is part of how walking can facilitate different kinds of thought and work. This has always been part of my process, to walk and think, to walk and observe, to walk and talk with people, to mull over ideas while on foot, alone or with others. Whatever kind of project I'm working on, whether it's a research paper or a creative project, walking is always part of my process. I'm not sure how much work I could get done without it.

MIA: As an artist who integrates practice and research, I see movement in a mutually symbiotic relationship with ideas. The studio is a laboratory that holds this process, and more recently, due to the global pandemic, so are the outdoors and site-specific locales. Research-creation, arts-based, practice-led, are terms that I use interchangeably to describe these modes of inquiry, and sometimes, I do not use these terms at all. "Devised theatre" is a term that I associate with, an approach to performance-making that develops distinct and open methodologies based upon the backgrounds, idiosyncrasies, research interests, and talents of those who create it. Ultimately, I am a collagist for the stage.

My MFA thesis, *Destroy She Said: Collage as Performance Paradise,* researched the artistic, historical, and philosophical underpinnings of collage, while simultaneously reflecting on my practice of devising performance collages that began in 2003. I am now an artist housed in academia and wonder how this practice—to cut, to remix, to unsettle, to juxtapose, to assemble, to make strange—can shape approaches to research outputs, such as these academic publications.

SANDRA: When I was completing my master's degree in the humanities, I also used collage, mosaic, and juxtaposition as ways to think about and structure the work, even though it was academic writing. I've worked with these as artforms in different media as well. In my current role as a fine arts librarian in an academic library, I've become interested in how art-making and creative process relates to, informs, *is* research, and I've been adopting research-creation as part of my own research program. I find these arts-based methods and practices much more meaningful than doing surveys and

literature reviews, for example. I think they present a necessary challenge to the established traditions of academic research and knowledge creation too.

MIA: "A pandemic came. All the theatres shut down, so I went outside for a walk. I carried you with me everywhere I went. And everywhere I went, I was haunted."[10]

Figure 1. Image from Mia van Leeuwen, *How to Raise a Ghost: A Performance in Pictures,* 2020.

This text fragment and image are from my current project *How to Raise a Ghost,* a tentacular initiative that explores arts-based research as a mode of inquiry into the vast subject of death. This multi-pronged project engages in solo and collaborative artistic practice (ritual, performance, photography, video), interviews with artists about their relationship to death, and the facilitation of group conversations based on prompts I have been collecting as part of the research process: *When did you hear about death? What are you haunted by? What is a ghost?*

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[10] Mia van Leeuwen, *How to Raise a Ghost: A Performance in Pictures*, with contributions by Heather Ladd and Tyler Muzzin, photography by Karen Asher and Mia van Leeuwen (Self-published, 2021), 13.

I am making art to help me think-feel through death. To confront it. To dance with it.

Due to the restrictions of the pandemic, the work developed outside the regular indoor studio context. In 2020, a summer of griefs and ghosts, I spent a lot of time devising performance outdoors, and walking became a central movement practice to the work. In character, I walked various locations throughout Manitoba carrying a shrouded effigy, a large puppet body that symbolized aspects of the self that I sought to let go of and to lay to rest. Sometimes I walked alone in contemplation. Other times, I was joined by the Happy Phantoms,[11] forming into a procession and haunting the empty urban streets of the historic Exchange District in Winnipeg, an area usually brimming with festive energy.

This approach is rooted in the ancient practice of *memento mori* (Latin for "remember you must die"), and playfully reconsidered through a secular praxis. Simultaneously, the project is haunting many questions: *What can the artist contribute to the conversation and practices surrounding death, dying and memorial rites? How do we make room for play in a time of crisis? What kind of symbolic deaths must we contend with? How...to raise a ghost?* Ha, I suppose it is of no surprise that I find myself walking in a cemetery!

SANDRA: Death is another interest we share. Throughout our conversations we keep coming back to the idea of gaps—the unknowns—the space where the edges meet in a collage, the juxtaposition where one piece rubs up against another, that unsettled, in-between place where relationship happens, where meaning-making occurs, and where the unexpected can arise. But the assemblage, the reassembling of pieces, can't happen without a prior fragmentation or breakage, sometimes even a violent one, a disordering that makes some space, unhinges things, creates gaps. We have to be willing to tolerate the not-knowing and confusion for this process to work, and then the pieces can be rearranged, juxtaposed in surprising ways. And of course, death or the bardo is the biggest gap for us, isn't it? It's our biggest un-knowing.

MIA: It is also interesting to point out that you and I do not really know each other. We are juxtaposing ourselves as people. We are getting to know the other through movement and the sharing of ideas. This requires a certain amount of trust as we step into the unknown together, allowing this article project to emerge from our walking-dialogues. This is how I approach my performance projects. I never know from the onset of a production what it will be in the end, but I have grown to trust this approach as it always yields surprising and meaningful discoveries. Of course, failure is always possible.

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[11] Mia van Leeuwen, "The Happy Phantoms," https://miavanleeuwen.com/current-artistic-research/death-becomes-us-with-the-happy-phantoms/.

In this moment, I am talking with you while looking out into the world at the trees, noticing the smoke that hangs in the air, and the sprinklers watering the graves, while re-organizing the self in motion in dialogue with you.

SANDRA: I think a lot about walking as a research method. It has a long history of being associated with creative and philosophical thinkers, and in the past number of years there has been research done that demonstrates the link between creativity and walking.[12] A significant characteristic of walking as method is the phenomenological—it is a way to have direct, subjective experience of the world. Walking can be a way to explore the unknown, the overlooked and ignored, to use all your sense perceptions in embodied discovery. It is always undeniably embodied and connected to the land, which is important to me because it doesn't allow for any false separation of mind and body, or human and environment. So, it is not only embodied, but emplaced. Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman introduced me to the idea of *transcorporeality*, where we don't think of the human body as a separate, individual, exceptional being, but rather as existing and becoming in interaction with all the other bodies we are with—bodies of land, water, animals, plants, other beings.[13] We are always walking within local history, and politics and culture as well. We are beings, or becomings, within this assemblage, and walking as a method is one way to understand this. I recognize my ableist perspective on walking and movement, so I find transcorporeality is also a helpful way to think about the embodied connection to place without necessarily requiring movement through it.

MIA: In *How to Raise a Ghost*, walking with the added layers of persona and costume while carrying an effigy in my arms certainly intensified my relationship to the environment that I was stepping through and with. I was juxtaposing myself with the landscape, walking and contemplating death, while I searched for a place to lay my effigy to rest.

"Where do I put it? Where do I lay this body? Where does it belong?"[14]

A complicated revelation. As a person who hails from Ukrainian and Dutch settlers, my relationship to the land is a moving question, made more apparent when I walked in search for a place to rest my effigy. I tried various locations and settled on none of them.

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[12] For example: Marily Oppezzo and Daniel L. Schwartz, "Give Your Research Some Legs: The Positive Effect of Walking on Creative Thinking," *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 40, no. 4 (2014): 1142-1152.

[13] Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman, "A Transmaterial Approach to Walking Methodologies: Embodiment, Affect, and a Sonic Art Performance," *Body & Society* 23, no. 4 (2017): 29.

[14] Mia van Leeuwen, "How to Raise a Ghost: Memento Mori as Contemporary Practice," International Federation of Theatre Research Conference, Galway, Ireland, July 12, 2021.

SANDRA: Inspired by walking artists like Hamish Fulton, I've been working on several walking-related research-creation projects for a while now. One of my projects is an investigation of the numinous quality of some sites, sometimes referred to as the *anima loci* or spirit of place, which is something we recognize by intuition but is not knowable through observation with our five primary senses or through quantitative methods. I investigate sites by walking, sitting, sensing with all my senses, being with a place. I gather soil, memory, photographs, data, affective experience, and often some cultural-historical research, and bring all these together, usually in the medium of clay. There is something about abstract sculptural expression that can convey intuitive knowledge in a way that I am not able to do in words. I think of the quote by artist Georgia O'Keefe: "I found that I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way—things that I had no words for."[15]

Figure 2. *Awareness Walk*, 2021. Photograph by Sandra Cowan.

[15] Georgia O'Keefe, quoted in Museum of Modern Art, "Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925," https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/inventingabstraction/?work=173.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when we were requested to stay close to home, I became very focused on my local terrain—the folds of dry, grassy hills in the Oldman River valley near my home. Like many people, I also became even more interested in walking as one of the few safe, non-computer-mediated ways to converse and connect with other people. This sparked an interest in more collective and community-based walking. One recent project that I worked on with artist and colleague Annie Martin in July 2021 was an awareness walk,[16] based on the sound walk work of Canadian composer Hildegard Westerkamp.[17] In this case, the work was the walk itself, which was at a local site in Lethbridge and open to anyone to join. The idea was to walk in silence, bringing awareness to all our senses, and investigating the interaction between our body, mind, other human and non-human beings, and the terrain in this way.

MIA: I am inspired by your "awareness walks" with Annie Martin and I recognize how this approach crosses over into my practice. In performance training, working with the senses while moving through the principles of time and space are an essential part of the process. This supports a moment-to-moment discovery that allows for a dropping into the body while working through impulses, cultivating a quality of presence that is heightened. This sensorial exploration is mostly practiced within a studio context. As a teacher and artist now situated in a pandemic, I am thinking about how I can spend more time integrating movement practices in relationship to the outdoors. Our university is built into the incredible landscape of Southern Alberta and there are pathways that meander throughout the coulees, accessible right outside the doors of the institution. I am also thinking about how to best integrate an Indigenous awareness of the land we are moving through as part of this relationship.

SANDRA: Where and how we place ourselves on the land that supports us is an important consideration. Sometimes I think the kindest action is simply to let things be, to cease acting upon the world; but at least we can place ourselves thoughtfully. How do we juxtapose ourselves and our many material objects alongside other human and non-human beings, alongside the terrain? Can we place ourselves in the landscape without any extractive or hierarchical intent? Can we approach the land with an attitude of offering?

A collage perspective can help defamiliarize and unsettle our assumptions. Juxtaposing things that may seem unrelated often makes interconnections obvious. But

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[16] Lethbridge Walking, "Awareness Walk: A Participatory, Multi-local Walk Focused on Sensory Awareness," July 6, 2021, http://lethbridgewalking.weebly.com/awareness-walk-2021.html

[17] Hildegard Westerkamp, "Inside the Soundscape," accessed June 10, 2023, https://www.hildegardwesterkamp.ca/sound/installations/Nada/soundwalk/#soundwalk-is.

I keep thinking about how there has to be fragmentation first—something has to break apart our solid, preconceived ideas and learned assumptions. We are in such a period of fragmentation right now—politically, environmentally, economically—it certainly feels like things are falling apart. Even though collage is often associated with modernism and postmodernism, I find that as a metaphor and a practice it is relevant in our times. The idea that fragmentation can lead to unexpected results helps keep me from despair at times.

Fragmentation, destruction, and death are actually always present. I think we are just habituated to not noticing them. And I think it's also true that nothing exists outside of relationship and interconnection. So, the idea of bringing together all these bits and pieces in our falling-apart world, and working within the gaps of uncertainty, doubt, relationality, unknowing, and meaning-making that arise through juxtaposition can be a generative, insightful, and holistic way of approaching research.

Figure 3. Production image. *Destroy She Said,* 2018. Photograph by Leif Norman.

MIA: Postmodernism was not lost on me. In my approach, performance collages are built by reassembling the fragments into a new whole. This restructuring is akin to a nest building process, with an awareness of what came before. Metamodernism is a term I

find useful when thinking about fragmentation now, and the process of collage as a contemporary practice:

> Whereas postmodernism was characterized by deconstruction, irony, pastiche, relativism, nihilism, and the rejection of grand narratives (to caricature it somewhat), the discourse surrounding metamodernism engages with the resurgence of sincerity, hope, romanticism, affect, and the potential for grand narratives and universal truths, whilst not forfeiting all that we've learnt from postmodernism.[18]

SANDRA: All these various ways of knowing are important, which is starting to be acknowledged with the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing, queer theory, research-creation, and so on, in academic discourse. I'm learning from you, Mia, how to trust the process, instead of always having a defined goal, something that you can say you've achieved, or that can give you a sense of failure if you don't end up where you expected. There's something to confusion, to slowness, to not being production-oriented that allows for different kinds of work to emerge. Why don't we allow for doubt, for failure? I tend to agree with the way Jack Halberstam talks about failure and its necessary function as a counterpoint to our conventional thinking about productivity, consumption, and success.[19] In my experience, once I have worked through the conditioned emotional reaction to failure, I usually find out that it is not failure at all, but a different-than-expected result or an unexpected path, and perhaps a more meaningful one.

> We don't discard what we can't signify, try not to underestimate a hunch, and respect the effect of what cannot be spoken. But, despite the cacophony of ideas that muster our thinking, we find we are nonetheless expected to ask defined questions, to seek out answers to those questions, and to disseminate the knowledge we construct, swallowing our doubt in the process.[20]

MIA: What about the role of doubt? I learned about doubt as a productive artistic process through Paul Cézanne, an artist who laid the foundations for a radically different world of art in the 20th century. Cézanne introduces doubt as a revelation of process for the viewer to enter. He began altering one-point perspectives in paintings by representing 3-dimensional forms void of detail, creating a kind of architectural style of painting that

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[18] Luke Turner, "Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction." *Notes on Modernism*, January 12, 2015, http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/01/12/metamodernism-a-brief-introduction/.

[19] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[20] Teri Holbrook and Nicole M. Pourchier, "Collage as Analysis: Remixing in the Crisis of Doubt," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (2014): 754-763.

fundamentally challenged the ways in which we see. In Cézanne's later works, he reveals the process of seeing: "You share his hesitations about the position of a trunk or branch, or the final shape of a mountain, and the trees in front of it."[21] Cézanne's painterly doubt introduces the question to the viewer: *Is this what I see?* as opposed to the secure statement: *This is what I see*. Echoing that quote from Amy Kilgard, it is worth repeating that "the unsettled nature of the form itself opens a space for critical reflection and action."[22]

SANDRA: I think repetition is another component of a research or creative process that is important to acknowledge. Practice requires repetition, it *consists of* repetition, and it is critical for building skill, for play, for learning. We become what we practice. Even dialogue can be a form of repetitive practice—for example, we're having these conversations, and we keep circling back to the same ideas, we're exploring these ideas through repeated discussion, and we're noticing what keeps coming up, what is repeated, and those themes are emerging from the process as important ones. We look at the same idea from different angles, trying different language around it, discussing it in different contexts. I think this kind of repetition is an important process in developing thought and in knowledge creation. Repetition is powerful, and it can be used for rhetorical and manipulative purposes too. But I think repetition as practice can be playful and generative, as well as a way of acknowledging our not-knowing. Practice is never finished.

MIA: I am currently re-examining my art practice. There is much to reconcile with the collision of worldly events over the past two years; COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd, the uncovering of unmarked graves at Canadian residential schools, and the smoke-filled summer of wildfires burning throughout the country. *How to Raise a Ghost* is poised to consider all of this. Death is everywhere, but it is not just the materiality of death, it feels like a great reckoning that points to a symbolic death of what came before, and on many levels—systematic, societal, personal. I am currently drawn to these notions of un-learning, un-becoming, un-making, un-doing, un-creating this disorder of paradise lost. Inspired by Jack Halberstam's recent 2020 talk at the RIBOCA2 online series about his book *Wild Things: An Aesthetics of Bewilderment*, he states: "We're at a moment where we actually have to figure out how to unmake the world in which so much is wrong and

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[21] Robert Hughes, "The Mechanical Paradise," Episode 1 in *The Shock of the New*, produced by Lorna Pegram, BBC, 1980, YouTube video, 57:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3ne7Udaetg.

[22] Kilgard, "Collage," 4.

so many are left out and so few profit."[23] Can arts-based ways of knowing be a part of this process? *How might we organize the world differently?*

SANDRA: I think arts-based work is one of the most powerful lenses to bring attention to these kinds of ideas, and to practice and trust in the processes of un-knowing, un-making, to rest in uncertainty, to witness and express the cycles of wholeness/fragmentation, growth/decline, production/rest, life/death, inhalation/exhalation that we all live through in every aspect of our lives. In our world, and certainly in our workplace in the academic institution, it feels like we are expected to be in a constant state of inhalation/growth/production. Obviously, this is impossible to sustain. In embodied, creative practices, we can aerate or disrupt conventional and institutional worldviews, see the components in different contexts, and reassemble things in different ways, maybe discarding some things along the way. And from there we might begin to see different ways of organizing the world. I probably have a gentle view of this; I suspect that for many people the answer to this question might be revolution.

MIA: Sandra, is there an opportunity for *us* to organize the world differently? Now that you and I are connected in this way, what pieces can we bring forward from this experience to serve the institution we are a part of, and ultimately, our students, colleagues, as well as our future research projects?

SANDRA: And I wonder how libraries could integrate these kinds of ideas about research that we've been talking about? How can academic libraries support and disseminate arts-based research? How might we use arts-based and other creative methods in LIS research and practice? How can libraries help articulate the importance of alternative research processes and outputs? As an organization that is conservative by nature, and that has a mandate to support the larger academic institution, is there room in the library for more creative, inclusive, even subversive ways of knowing and doing research?

I have begun introducing research-creation in graduate student library instruction. As processes that are arts-based, affective, embodied, interdisciplinary, often muddy and full of doubt, generative rather than extractive, and that usually result in atypical end products for academia, I hope research-creation gives the students a counterpoint to contextualize the traditional research methods and scholarly communication apparatus that I also introduce them to.

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[23] Jack Halberstam, "Wildness," in RIBOCA2 Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art Talks and Conversations, October 7, 2020, YouTube video, 1:25:22, https://www.youtube.com /watch?v=Ia5CmrzTqw4.

Going back to collage thinking, the library can be conceived of as an assemblage itself—it is a place where many kinds of research, thought, and creative work bump up against each other, at least in the form of texts. We know there are problems with representation and the fact that, as a Western colonial institution, libraries continue to perpetuate inequalities and oppressive structures, but there must be ways to become more inclusive, to define, use, and organize information resources in creative ways, to collect different kinds and forms of knowledge. I think building relationships is the way forward with any of these changes, so the two of us collaborating on this dialogue might be a good start.

MIA: I am walking towards you now. Can you see me?

CONCLUSION

During our last walking-dialogue, we were both in Lethbridge and walked towards each other, finally meeting up at a local café, where we continued our conversation in person. Throughout this process, we have asked many questions, touched on many research methods and different ways of knowing. These included conversation, walking the terrain, rehearsal, practice, devised theatre, collage, dialogue, improvisation, experimentation, interviews, play, contemplation, intuition, movement, reading, interdisciplinarity, just to name a few. They are embodied, emplaced, cognitive, affective, and sometimes messy. They are all valuable, and each contributes to holistic ways of knowing that are not constrained by the parameters of academic output and the systems of competition and metrics that these are shaped by.

Through the process of editing, shaping, and assembling this written likeness of our walking-dialogue, we have continued to talk about ideas, elucidate our thoughts, make connections, and perhaps most importantly, become friends. Given our emphasis on relationality as method, source, and process for meaningful knowledge creation, we have come to recognize friendship as part of our method, as meandering, personal, and subjective as it is. As artists Van Wyck and Salverson said in a 2018 ArtNOW talk on friendship as method:

> So. What is it we do? Ponder. Ramble. Walk. Get lost. Notice. Follow words and footsteps that lead around a bend. Speak in incomplete sentences. Pause. Take road trips. Nudging along a prismatic route with no short cuts. It's a kind of collective ruminating. We inch our way along the pasture grazing. We keep each

> other company. We climb onto the ark and pull the door behind us. We build a web of curiosity. We wait.[24]

The work of teaching, research and librarianship is relational, although with our focus on outputs we often lose sight of this. One outcome of juxtaposing ourselves through this process is that we now have a relationship that did not exist before.

As universities currently face a host of challenges, relationality and arts-based approaches have a lot to offer. As Stephanie Springgay says,

> What these art practices share is a desire to challenge dominant taxonomies of knowledges and bodies, neoliberal conceptualizations of space and time, institutional power, capitalism, and white supremacy, and to consider other ways of being in relation, and other ways of thinking-making-doing that are not confined to normative logics of the institution.[25]

Teaching and research that embraces the kind of experimentation and creativity that we uncovered and discussed in our walking-dialogues, can plant seeds that over time may result in a different way of organizing the university, and therefore the world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the lands that supported us in our walking-dialogue practice. These include the traditional territories of the Blackfoot, Anishinaabe, Cree, and Métis. We honor the traditions of people who have cared for and continue to care for these lands since time immemorial. Like everything, this project was made possible by the contributions of a wide network of people. Apart from those listed in our bibliography, we would like to thank Jaime Johnson, Annie Martin, Nayan Velaskar, Mary Kavanagh, and our students for their (sometimes unwitting) contributions.

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[24] Peter C. Van Wyck and Julie Salverson, "Friendship as Method: Fieldwork, Writing, Exposure," unpublished text from presentation at ArtNOW talk, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, AB, Canada, March 18, 2019, 15.

[25] Truman, Sarah E., Natalie Loveless, Erin Manning, Natasha Myers and Stephanie Springgay, "The Intimacies of Doing Research-Creation," in *Knowings and Knots: Methodologies and Ecologies in Research-Creation*, ed. Natalie Loveless (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2019), 226.

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