

BUILDING A VISUAL VOCABULARY: AN ART THERAPIST'S SELF-INQUIRY INTO
THE POETICS OF FOUND MATERIAL

DANI MINUSKIN

A Research Paper
in
The Department
of
Creative Arts Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2021

© DANI MINUSKIN 2021

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This research paper prepared

By: Dani Minuskin

Entitled: Building a Visual Vocabulary: An Art Therapist's Self-Inquiry into the Poetics of Found Material

and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Creative Arts Therapies; Art Therapy Option)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality as approved by the research advisor.

Research Advisor:

Josée Leclerc, PhD, ATR-BC, ATPQ

Department Chair:

Guylaine Vaillancourt, PhD, MTA

July, 2021

ABSTRACT

BUILDING A VISUAL VOCABULARY: AN ART THERAPIST'S SELF-INQUIRY INTO THE POETICS OF FOUND MATERIAL

DANI MINUSKIN

Found material offers many benefits to the artist who chooses to use it. Not only is it environmentally sustainable, found objects can provide a sentimental and nostalgic quality for the artist to engage with. The experience of finding an object in one's environment can help cultivate a sense of connection to place and foster a sense of curiosity. Allowing oneself to project this nascent emotional content onto the found object and ascribe meaning to it can generate art material that has a self-imposed poetic quality. This meaningful material can then be creatively manipulated in alignment with the projected emotional content, propelling transformations from within and without.

This research, using an art-based heuristic self-inquiring approach, seeks to explore and investigate the potential for self-reflection and self-insight through the creative use of found material. The artist-researcher examines how the process of engaging in her environment through mindful walks and collecting found material can facilitate processes of self-awareness and emotional regulation. Through guided meditation and reflective writing practices, the found objects become imbued with meaning and worked with creatively in the artist-researcher's studio. Once complete, the artworks are further reflected upon in order to construct a sense of meaning out of the experience.

This research presents an intimate account of the artist-researcher's experience working with found materials and reveals the potential for the proposed art-based process to facilitate self-awareness, self-reflection, emotional regulation, and self-insight. Based on the findings, this art-based intervention could potentially be applicable in an art therapy context.

Keywords: Found Objects, Art Therapy, Self-Reflection, Emotional Regulation, Self-Insight

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vi
Literature Review	2
Mindful Walking to Promote Self-Awareness.....	3
Seeking and Finding Material in One’s Environment	4
Reflective Writing Practices	5
Reparation and Transformation of the Found Object	6
Making Meaning of the Creative Process.....	8
Methodology.....	9
Research Question	9
Art-Based Ways of Knowing.....	10
Process.....	11
Data Collection and Analysis.....	12
Data Analysis Procedure.....	13
Drawing Conclusions.....	13
Ethical Considerations	14
Validity and Reliability.....	14
Data Analysis and Creative Process	15
First Walk (45 Minutes).....	15
Reflections on the Object.....	16
The Guided Meditation.....	16
Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork	17
Second Walk (20 Minutes)	18
Reflections on the Object.....	19
The Guided Meditation.....	19
Reflections While Working with the Object.....	20
Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork	20
Third Walk (40 Minutes)	21
Reflections on the Object.....	21
The Guided Meditation.....	22
Reflections While Working with the Object.....	22
Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork	22
Fourth Walk (35 Minutes)	23
Reflections on the Object.....	24

The Guided Meditation.....	24
Reflections While Working with the Object.....	24
Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork	24
Fifth Walk.....	26
Findings	26
Overarching Themes.....	27
Self-Reflection and Self-Insight	29
Discussion.....	30
Implications and Limitations of the Findings for Application in Art Therapy.....	31
Recommendations for Future Research.....	33
Conclusion	34
References.....	35

List of Figures

Figure 1 Artwork from first found object	17
Figure 2 Artwork from second found object	20
Figure 3 Artwork from third found object	23
Figure 4 Artwork from fourth found object.....	25

Introduction

Making creative use of material found in one's environment can offer a poetic means through which a lens unto the self can be constructed. As an artist, I have been drawn to exploring found and foraged materials from my surroundings for some years. Employing material from my various environments over the years has facilitated sentimental and nostalgic connections to certain places. The physical characteristics of raw materials have always fascinated me with their innate potential to offer symbolic metaphor and describe a sense of place or a piece of oneself. It was this fascination with the potential of found objects that prompted me to explore in depth the possibility for self-reflection and self-insight through the creative use of found material. Through this heuristic research process in which I deeply investigate an art-based process, I seek to establish an art-based intervention that can be potentially applied in an art therapy context.

Although the use of found objects in art therapy has been recognized and discussed in contemporary literature, an in-depth examination that brings together therapeutic elements pertaining to each aspect of working with found material has not yet emerged. I felt inspired to conduct this research because I find raw materials or objects found in one's environment to be a very accessible entry point into artmaking, as well as environmentally sustainable. Found objects allow a sense of freedom in relation to how they can be manipulated and transformed, whereas traditional materials often carry inherent associations and expectations. This research inquiry seeks to understand the relationships between artmaking and self-reflection while examining how I relate to my environment in an emotional way. I endeavor to illuminate how materials found in my environment can foster both a relationship to my environment and to myself.

The research process involved taking five mindful walks in my neighbourhood during the Spring of 2021. With the intention of cultivating curiosity through my senses, I sought to engage

with my environment with open eyes, allowing myself to be drawn to materials and to feel safe enough to indulge my curiosities. The found object was brought home to be contemplated and reflected upon through guided meditation and reflective writing prompts. These exercises facilitated a process of projection onto the objects, ascribing meaning onto it for it to be used as a type of creative vocabulary. Finally, I engaged in a creative dialogue in order to understand myself better through immersion with the object-artwork.

Fully confident in the potential for art-based ways of knowing, I felt a strong pull to conduct an art-based research for the sake of further expanding the possibilities and awareness of art as a healing modality. Thus, this research was undertaken as an art-based self-inquiry in order to understand more fully the processes that I am presenting here. Before presenting the research, it is important to define some terms I will be using. I use the term *therapeutic potential* to encompass processes of self-reflection, self-awareness, self-insight, and emotional regulation. Throughout the paper I refer to myself either in first-person or with the designation *artist-researcher*. The term *artist* will refer to an individual participating in art therapy or other art-based therapeutic activities. This paper presents the details and outcomes of this creative endeavour, revealing an intimate account of my personal experience with the constructed art-based intervention.

Literature Review

The exploration of one's environment through mindfulness-based practices has been seen to encourage a sense of attachment and belonging to place (Wunderlich, 2008), as well as promote awareness of one's body and emotional state (Ogden & Fisher, 2015). Cultivating curiosity and allowing oneself to orient to one's environment and to notice external stimuli constitutes the initial step in the aforementioned art-based therapeutic process. Materials found

in the environment are intended to be used as a tool that offers a bridge between artmaking, self-reflection, emotional regulation, and a sense of attachment towards one's environment. This literature review presents the theories, ideas, and approaches that heavily informed the current research.

Mindful Walking to Promote Self-Awareness

Mindful walking is described by Kabat-Zinn (1990) as “intentionally attending to the experience of walking itself” (p. 114). He describes walking meditations that are focused on the sensory experience. Mindfully walking in one's environment can promote a plethora of benefits for the individual, mainly reduction in anxiety and depression (Gotnik et al., 2016), as well as the ability to perceive one's environment through the senses and establish a sense of belonging, familiarity, and emotional attachment (Wunderlich, 2008). Peterson (2015) describes an art-based intervention approach to walking mindfully in which participants were asked to take photographs of what they were drawn to during their walks, as well as what they found unpleasant. The images were subsequently used for collage in art therapy and the participants were encouraged to create mindfully, that is, to allow thoughts and emotions to arise, notice them, and process them through the artmaking experience. This process allowed for self-reflection based on the participants' experience of mindfully exploring their environment and subsequently processing their emotions through the content of their images (Peterson, 2015). Paired with walking, mindfulness practices encourage an awareness of one's environment that otherwise may be missed as we hurry and ruminate throughout the day. Further, Ogden and Fisher (2015) propose a process of becoming aware of one's habits of orientation toward external stimuli in the environment and outline how to use this practice to break patterns of maladaptive orienting. Such forms of orienting may be a result of living in a traumatized body in which real

dangers in the environment go unrecognized or perceived dangers attract hyperfocus, stimulating a skewed, but very real, nervous system response further enhancing the embodied traumatized experience. Ogden and Fisher's sensorimotor psychotherapy guidelines, which promote self-awareness through the body heavily influenced the approaches explored in my research inquiry.

Seeking and Finding Material in One's Environment

The exploration of chosen materials or objects from the environment provides a rich opportunity for investigating what arises in the present moment. Camic (2010) describes the emotional arousal that may occur as the search for material begins and how this experience could be enhanced by the discovery of the object, noting that "found and second-hand objects were found to be evocative *things* that stimulated emotions..." (Camic, 2010, p. 88). Camic notes that the affective engagement in the process can continue throughout the contemplation and the transformation of the object as it can act as a mnemonic trigger in the sense that it reminds the individual of the embodied emotional experience of finding the object. The object can consequently act as a bridge both between the artist and the environment as well as the artist and themselves; what Brooker (2010) describes as a "psychological bridge" (p. 33). In terms of therapeutic engagement in an art therapy context, the cultivated relationship with the environment helps to keep the therapeutic process in mind between sessions (Brooker, 2010), as well as continue to engage the artist's creative processes (Hinz, 2019) and encourage self-reflective processing of certain themes (Afonso Rodrigues, 2018). The Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) is a framework that describes creative functioning at various levels (Hinz, 2019). The process of scanning one's environment for material can engage various levels of the ETC, in particular the sensory, kinesthetic, and perceptual dimensions (Bat-Or & Megides, 2016). As Afonso Rodrigues (2018) exemplifies in her art-based research concerning

displacement and belonging, seeking found material is akin to searching for a vocabulary. Her research explores the creative process of immigrant women in London collecting words, through images, in their London environments in order to tell their stories of relocation. She proposes the use of a diary between meetings to encourage participants to continue thinking about pertinent themes as they navigate their daily lives in this new place. The use of a reflective diary should help keep the therapeutic qualities of the process in mind while providing a space for the artist to witness their experience. McNiff (2013) describes witnessing as a form of mindful perception and concentration that requires empathy, compassion, and creative perception. The process of seeking and finding materials in one's environment engages the inner witness as the artist mindfully explores their environment, cultivating a relationship with both themselves and the environment, and fostering meaningful reflection through practices such as journal writing.

Reflective Writing Practices

The self-reflective practice of journal writing and engaging with one's experience is explored in depth by Allen (2013) in an article describing her Open Studio Process (OSP) where she outlines the practice of setting an intention and witnessing one's experience. Allen proposes a structured format used to open a dialogue between the artist, the creative process, and the final art object. The process begins with a moment of mindfulness and the use of an anchor to bring awareness to the present moment. The artist is then encouraged to set an intention for the making process and later, to witness their creation through describing it and asking it a question (Allen, 2013). This opens a creative dialogue intended to bring self-insight and awareness to the process.

Reflective journaling as a way to dialogue with the art object explores alternative ways of looking and examining; what Bachelard (1958) describes as phenomenological experiencing. Bachelard posits that the only way to reach the depth of our own experiences is by seeing

novelty in what is before us and allowing new impressions to emerge. To simply state facts and describe an experience does not allow us to access the emotional content of our narratives. In *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Bachelard explores the concept of memory as a poetic image and urges the reader to phenomenologically examine their own memories and experiences.

Considering the written poem as well as the figurative poetry of experience, a third entity can be formed through the surfacing of emotional content from the phenomenological way of seeing *newness* in what already exists. Reflecting on Bachelard's ideas in the context of art therapy, the meaning imbued upon the found objects allows the objects to be worked with as a vocabulary of the artist's reflections.

Using these reflective practices while exploring the newness of the object, the artist can foster a sense of attachment towards the object and potentially find parallels between the experience of the object and the artist's own experience (Brooker, 2010). This process may provoke the development of a transitional object (Winnicott, 2005) that can carry meaning, memory, and a sense of comfort as it withstands the artist's manipulation. The object and eventual artwork thus become a site for self-insight and self-reflection.

Reparation and Transformation of the Found Object

The Japanese transformative repair practice of *kintsugi*, as described by Keulemans (2016), is a form of ceramic repair that intends to illuminate areas of damage instead of hiding them. Keulemans illuminates how *kintsugi* was informed by the Japanese experience of earthquakes through a framework that incorporates philosophers Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concepts of affect. Deleuze and Guattari note that being present in the practice of *kintsugi* stimulates affect as the material itself has the capacity to engage with the senses and provoke reflections on damage and repair (Keulemans, 2016). Similarly, *wabi sabi*, a Japanese

aesthetic ideal, is a philosophical approach to beauty that acknowledges and embraces mortality and impermanence, honouring the beauty of ephemerality and transience (Juniper, 2003). The practice of *wabi sabi* seeks to witness the authenticity of the material in its rawness: “truth comes from the observation of nature” (Koren, 1994, p. 40). These concepts relate to Bachelard’s (1958) discussion of examining the *newness* of the material. As philosophies under the umbrella of Zen, foundational to these concepts is the practice of witnessing without making a judgement of value. In the transformation of the found object, acknowledgement of what is damaged in the object promotes reflection on reparation. In her description of a case study depicting art therapy with Naz, a woman in her 30s who had arrived in London as a teenager seeking political asylum, Brooker (2010) discusses Naz’s projection of aspects of herself onto the found material. Naz was able to relate the found objects’ displacement with her own sense of displacement and thereby work with her found materials as a language that allowed her to explore her inner world at a depth that had not previously been possible (Brooker, 2010). In a phenomenological sense, Naz was able to experience the object as disparate from its original context and see it in its new context – to see its *newness* – and gain access to previously buried emotional content.

Bat-Or and Garti (2019), in their discussion of art therapists’ perceptions of working with children and bereavement, describe concepts of destruction and reconstruction. The process of deconstructing materials can promote a sense of building something new from the fragments, both literally and figuratively (Bat-Or & Garti, 2019). Similarly, the reflective process of conceptually deconstructing material and subsequently constructing new objects could promote a similar sense of transformation and rebuilding. Working with fragments of the environment can offer the space for affect-loaded memories to be rejoined and integrated, as well as provide an opportunity for choice in relation to a chance experience (i.e. the found object), reflecting the

accidental experiences associated with trauma, but re-pairing the experience with a sense of control (Bat-Or & Megides, 2016).

Reflective writing practices will help bring clarity to the characteristics of the material, thereby establishing a sense of language that can be expressed through the manipulation, combination, and transfiguration of the found material. The specific qualities of the material (e.g. the texture, the shape, the weight) can evoke associations for the artist to make connections between qualities of themselves and the qualities of the material. Bat-Or and Megides (2016) note that collecting broken or faulty objects can evoke identification with wounded aspects of the self. Bringing together the potentially disparate characteristics of the materials can then be viewed as bringing fragments or aspects of the self together to establish new meaning through newly formed wholes.

Making Meaning of the Creative Process

Considering the found material a vocabulary, the process of forming visual sentences in a creative process is a step towards creating new meanings from disparate parts. Camic (2010) and Winnicott (2005) posit that the simple quality of the object being *found* adds meaning to it as it is ascribed a new value. This process of imbuing or extracting meaning is viewed as a growth state in which cognitive and emotional challenges related to bewilderment can lead to further understanding of the individual (Camic, 2010). In his chapter concerning meaning and symbolism in the arts, Reid (1969) notes how qualities that are inherent in materials already possess aesthetic meaning in that they carry inherent associations (e.g. colours, textures, shapes, sounds, etc.). He describes the composition of these various meaning-possessed qualities as an aesthetic system in which the agency of the artist is apparent in the creation of a new system (Reid, 1969). The concept of the aesthetic system is comparable to the creation of a visual

vocabulary. The system created becomes a system of meaning that can be methodically composed, witnessed, and reflected upon in order to construct new meanings. As the contemplation of the object can reveal elements of the artist's inner world (Brooker, 2010), the integration of these elements can lead to healing when considering the therapeutic potential of the process (Bat-Or & Garti, 2019).

Bat-Or and Megides (2016) describe the dialogue that occurs between the found object and the artist. They present stages in which dialogue in the process can occur, mainly through scanning the environment, transfiguring the object, and titling the work. The final act of titling the work is a form of concluding the process of meaning-making by telling a story about the artwork. The naming of the work can create a bridge between nonverbal representations and words (Bat-Or & Megides, 2016).

Methodology

My chosen topic of research seeks to examine how creative practices, specifically the creative use of found material, can promote self-awareness. As an artist who has worked with found material for years, this research inquiry arose from a curiosity concerning how the use of found material can offer therapeutic potential. It seemed therefore evident that an art-based heuristic inquiry should be the mode through which I explore this potential.

Research Question

How can the process of seeking, contemplating, and creatively manipulating found material facilitate processes of self-reflection and self-insight in the artist-researcher?

I sought to research the therapeutic potential of mindfully and creatively dialoguing with my environment and myself through the act of using found and foraged materials in a creative setting in an attempt to facilitate self-reflection and self-insight. There is a lack of documentation

in the literature pertaining to the process of working with found material in the art therapy setting despite its ability to offer a more accessible entry-point into artmaking and the therapeutic process.

Art-Based Ways of Knowing

In order to investigate the process of working with found materials in an art-based practice within the context of an art therapy degree, an art-based heuristic self-inquiry seemed to be the most authentic approach. In *Art as Research*, McNiff (2013) collected a number of articles written by creative arts therapists on the topic of art-based research; all authors calling for a movement towards art-based ways of knowing for practitioners in art-based disciplines. I use the word *authentic* to embody McNiff's (2013) statement regarding the "need for first-hand involvement by the researcher in the material being examined" (p. 5). In art-based research, artistic experimentation is used as the primary method through which the artist-researcher embarks on understanding the research question at hand as well as communicating the conclusions (McNiff, 2013, p. 4). I chose to pair an art-based approach to knowing with the scientific method in which an inquiry is tested through experimental investigation (i.e. artmaking) and resulting data are analysed, coded, and synthesized to form relevant conclusions (Franklin, 2012). As the research was conducted as a heuristic inquiry in which the artist-researcher was also the participant, the process of experimental testing and analysis was guided by Moustakas's (1990) heuristic model. He describes a six-phase model that guides the researcher through a process of exploring a question through personal experience. The phases include: 1) the initial engagement with the question, 2) immersing oneself in the question, 3) incubation to allow ideas to crystallize, 4) illumination of crystallized ideas through intuitive engagement, 5) explication of ideas and seeking meaning, and finally, 6) creatively synthesizing

meanings in a way that articulates raw conclusions. Sela-Smith (2002) notes that Moustakas's model calls for intuition as the guide through the phases, rather than formal technique. As found materials have been a staple in my studio practice for many years and thus concepts related to their use have been incubating for some time, Moustaka's initial three phases will not be described in the context of this research paper. Instead, this paper will focus on the final three phases of the research process – illumination, explication, and syntheziation – though I have chosen to describe the results in a format that is more relevant to the researched creative process. Moustakas's model helps to contain the process in a structured framework, yet allows enough flexibility for experimentation (Trimingham, 2002; as cited in Bird, 2016).

My decision to entrust the gathering of knowledge to practices of artmaking is informed not only by it being the most natural approach for me, but also because it seems necessary as a method for understanding first-hand how the use of found material can hold therapeutic potential. Franklin (2012) notes that art is often considered intimidating in academic and scientific circles; deemed “over there” (p. 88) rather than an embodied path to knowing. I have also recognized this apprehension towards artmaking when discussing art therapy with people unfamiliar with it, which is why I seek to make what might be considered abstract more approachable and thereby contribute to a more accessible understanding of art therapy.

Process. Following Moustakas's (1990) heuristic model, the intuitive yet structured research process investigated the research question through immersive engagement. The research process consisted of five walks, each preceded by the setting of an intention for the walk inspired by Allen's (2013) Open Studio Process (OSP) and Ogden and Fisher's (2015) process for changing orienting habits. One or more objects were collected during most of the walks. After initial reflection on the found object, consisting of writing down any immediate thoughts or

associations, a guided meditation that I developed was used to reflect more deeply on the found object, to promote grounding, and to pair the experience of the object with a location on the body to further facilitate body-awareness. I created writing prompts to expand on any associations that surfaced between my experience of the found object and the part of my body that seemed salient during the meditation. Associations with the different parts of the body were used as information to guide the artmaking process. Finally, the OSP was used to generate a dialogue between the final art object and myself in order to make meaning of my creative process and reflect on what I had learned. All reflections were documented in a personal journal as well as spontaneously in the notes folder on my cellphone, which became the source of data coded for relevant themes and was then analyzed. The journals were combed for relevant themes pertaining to self-reflection and self-insight and conclusions drawn in accordance with the research question.

Data Collection and Analysis

McNiff (2013) discusses the tension between scientific inquiry and art-based inquiry in that art-based approaches to knowing are often encapsulated in scientific methods. The tension arises from the artist-researcher's need for improvisation and chaos when engaging with their material while the scientific method hinders such flexibility. In order to fit art-based approaches into an academically accessible way of knowing, written content seems necessary to generate and assess data and communicate outcomes. According to Moustakas's (1990) heuristic model, dialoguing with oneself through diaries, poetry, and artwork is included in the typical method for gathering data. Analysis of the content should take the form of identifying themes and "essences of the experience" (p. 10). Reflective journals, what Prior (2013) describes as a method of "capturing those moment-by-moment thoughts and reflections that unconsciously spring from improvisation..." (p. 61), was the primary method of data collection for this research project.

Sajnani (2012) discusses the importance of being flexible within improvisation to allow the chaos of intuitive research to inform the researcher. Integrating structure into an artistic approach to knowing was a measure taken to respect the timeline of this research in the context of my graduate degree while allowing myself flexibility in terms of improvisation. The structure, while providing containment for the necessary chaos, also allows for accessibility in terms of an audience's understanding of the research, as well as for my own sake in terms of generating digestible content.

Data Analysis Procedure. In Moustaka's (1990) heuristic phase of illumination, an intuitive approach to understanding the data is encouraged. Informed by this process, Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis were followed while maintaining an openness to discovering unexpected themes in the data. The phases of thematic analysis include 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) synthesizing the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on Braun and Clarke's suggestions, my process journal was reviewed as the major source of data. To extract pertinent themes relevant to my research question, the data underwent the aforementioned steps proposed by Braun and Clarke. Seven overarching themes were distilled from the data. These are described in greater depth in the Findings section of this paper.

Drawing Conclusions. As the research is a heuristic self-inquiry, the data cannot be considered generalizable nor empirical. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data can address the art-based process' potential to facilitate self-reflection and self-insight in the artist-researcher only. That said, positive conclusions will foster the potential for future studies pertaining to the use of found material in other contexts; for example, with participants.

Ethical Considerations

As the research method employs the artist-researcher as the only participant, little consideration concerning the ethics of participants is necessary. That said, ethical considerations for heuristic self-inquiry should be weighed, especially when considering the potential for application in art therapy. Creswell and Creswell (2018) delineate various potential ethical issues that pertain to research, some of which are applicable to heuristic self-inquiry. Firstly, it is important to ensure that the research intends to produce beneficial outcomes without harming the artist-researcher in the process of investigating the content. As the study will examine my perceptions of the research problem, self-protection and self-care should be prioritized. Furthermore, as the data will be generated, coded, and analysed by me, biases must be acknowledged. There is the potential for an unconscious tendency towards positive results being generated and potentially contradictory data to be disregarded. In a similar vein, data must not be fabricated in order to relay conclusions in alignment with the hypothesis. This process could be unconscious and such motivations should be reflected upon regularly throughout the research process.

Validity and Reliability

Valid results in terms of qualitative research, and in particular heuristic inquiry, describe the accuracy of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and the authentic and trustworthy depiction of the experience of the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). As I am the only judge of the results as well as the only person having participated in the heuristic inquiry, procedures must be in place in order to ensure as much validity as to the meaning of the findings as possible. In order to generate more reliability, the research procedures will be very clearly outlined so that the process itself can be performed by others (Yin, 2009; as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis and Creative Process

Each session of the research process consisted of a number of steps, namely: (1) a mindful walk, (2) a guided meditation, (3) artmaking, and (4) creatively dialoguing with the final artwork through written reflection. To engage in a guided meditation, I made a five-minute voice recording that facilitated grounding and mindfulness by directing attention to the physical qualities of the object as well as to salient parts of the body that seemed to call for attention. Through the recording, I was prompted to notice any associations that surfaced spontaneously as I focused on a specific part of my body while holding awareness of the relationship between the object and this part of me. Finally, I was to ask this part of my body what it needs and to allow a response to surface spontaneously. The answer to this question would guide the artmaking process as I would attempt to address the needs of the object as a stand-in for vulnerable parts of myself. This section will describe my felt experience throughout the research process and includes some excerpts, identified by italicized text, from my process journal.

First Walk (45 Minutes)

Before my first walk, I set an intention simply *to be in the present moment*. I immediately noticed the sounds of the city around me. I focused on the sounds of this urban environment as my anchor to remain in the present moment. I felt that simply being in the here-and-now made the moment feel more meaningful. My footsteps became my anchor. When my mind would wander, I could return to the rhythmic and consistent sound of my footsteps. As I walked into a park, I noticed a small log on the ground and was drawn to pick it up. Throughout the walk my attention was also called to two other objects but after engaging in the guided meditation with one object, I decided that it felt more meaningful to focus only on one object per walk. I let

myself feel free to simply notice my surroundings, be curious, and to engage in those curiosities by approaching the objects I was drawn to.

As I traveled from side streets to the main urban streets with loud sounds of trucks and buses, I started to lose the ability to hear my footsteps and it felt like I was losing my awareness of myself. I fought to hold onto any whisper of sound from my movement until I realized I could let the sound of the city be my anchor again.

As I continued walking, I noticed that I had no memories to revisit in the spaces around me. Since I moved to Montreal shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic, I haven't had the opportunity to create memories in new places. I wondered what it would feel like to walk in an environment imbued with memory. I felt that by anchoring to the present moment and creating these meaningful experiences through meditation and here-and-nowness, I was creating a sense of place for myself.

Reflections on the Object

I wrote down a detailed description of the physical qualities of the object as an initial step. *Noticing the object as novel is a meditation on its own. Very grounding and in the moment.* At this point I was already feeling resistant to doing the deeper work facilitated by the guided meditation. I felt that I needed more containment for the process and decided to create a structure of writing prompts that progressed from more superficial (e.g. description of the object's physical qualities) to more reflective. This structure helped to provide the necessary containment.

The Guided Meditation

Elements of the object were very fragile; a flaking piece of bark that seemed held on by a thread. My upper arms immediately became salient. I felt a desire to be embraced in some way; a



Figure 1 Artwork from first found object; found log and macramé cord

desire for pressure against my upper arms. I linked the awareness of the fragility of the object with my desire to be hugged, which culminated in a desire to protect the fragility of the object. *To not harm it.* I asked; *can I embrace the object without harming it?* I felt tenderness and care for the object; I wanted to tend to its fragility. I decided to ‘embrace’ it using macramé cord that I had in my studio (Figure 1).

Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork

I set an intention *to understand what the artwork wants to tell me* and proceeded to describe the artwork based on its physical qualities. *Its layers are peeling off. They are in the process of peeling... Areas with bark seem resilient... The rest is bare. Fresh and raw. There is a gentle, delicate movement to the part that is peeling off. It shivers when the object is touched... Different stages of decay... Looks like it’s being eaten away. The red cords bring a kind of comfort.* I asked the artwork a question: *I want to know about the part of the bark that is still there. Why is it holding on? When will it be ready to move on?* I wrote down an answer spontaneously: *The bark is there because it is decaying slower. Why? It has so far been protected from the harshness of weathering that the more decayed part has endured. The bark is still there because without it the log would be too exposed, too vulnerable and raw. I am staying*

to keep you protected. I know you are ready to be bare, but I don't want you to get hurt without me. Your skin will be too soft, too tender, too fresh, too easily wounded. Let me stay and keep you warm. Finally, I connected my responses to the intention: *There is a defensive, protective part of me that is holding on tight, trying to stop me from hurting more. I do feel raw and maybe somewhat retreated. I have to honour this protective part of me.*

Second Walk (20 Minutes)

My intention for the second walk was to *come back to myself*. This walk was taken on a busy Sunday and it felt more difficult to keep my awareness on my body or to use my footsteps as an anchor because of the distractions. I tried to reach for presence through my other senses. Noticing the feeling of the sun against my skin felt beautiful. Again, I had to foster curiosity not only to my surroundings but also in the way I recognized my felt experience through my senses. Even if I couldn't hear the sound of my footsteps, I could still focus on the movement of my legs and the feeling of my feet hitting the ground.

I found two objects even though I set out only to take one home. The first object was a piece of bark I found at the foot of a tree. It was very plain and grey. I'm not sure what attracted me to it, but I reached for it, turning it over to find a beautiful palette of oranges and browns forming landscapes on the wood. *The layers were so beautiful, I couldn't stop looking at it.* I felt surprised by my discovery and pleased that I allowed myself to indulge my curiosity. I walked while staring at the piece of wood in my hands, letting the beauty surprise me and bring me joy. As I continued walking, following my intuition for directions, I turned the corner into an alley I had never walked down before. I noticed in the corner, in a pile of trash, a dead, dried up part of a plant. A palm, I assume. I didn't choose it because of its beauty, rather because its shape was so interesting despite its neglected existence. Reflecting on my intention for the walk, I felt that

this process helped me come back to myself in the moment and brought attention to my inner state. I noticed that I'm attracted to tender or delicate materials and indeed, I did feel a tenderness during this time.

Reflections on the Object

I decided to focus on the second object that I found as I found myself very curious about it. I wrote in my journal that there is *something sad about it. Something neglected. I feel like I want to nurture it. Give it nourishment. It seems so dead... The frailty is so noticeable. The paper-like quality... Its frailty is audible through the way it brushes against itself.*

The Guided Meditation

When prompted to notice what part of me was calling my attention, the back of my neck felt significant. *I immediately thought about being kissed on my neck. How the neck is such a vulnerable part of the body.* I recognized a link between the damaged stem of the plant and my spine. When I asked this part of me what it needs, I heard *to be loved. I want to give love and kisses to this neglected object; to this vulnerable part of me.* I decided that I wanted to create a support structure for the plant out of clay with the intention to bring care and comfort to it. The stem stuck out the most to me during the meditation and I wanted to create a holding environment for it, but I was still curious about the symbolism of the leaves. I decided to engage in a second meditation on the leaves and again, the back of my neck called my attention. *I caressed the leaves. I felt the same desire to be caressed and cared for myself and for my vulnerable parts to be held and caressed and cared for.*



Figure 2 Artwork from second found object; found plant, air-dry clay, paint, burlap sack

Reflections While Working with the Object

It feels very regulating. Like the soothing I want from someone else, I'm able to give myself if I work with this dried floral piece as if it's a part of me. It feels like I am comforting and caring for that part of me. In attempt to caress the dried leaves of the plant I made use of an old burlap sack I had found in Germany years ago (Figure 2). I intuitively created the shape that holds the object up and felt the significance of trusting the process. I feel comforted looking at it. It feels exactly as I wanted it to.

Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork

I set an intention to learn how I can feel this more. I described the object in detail. The bundle of burlap offers a resting ground for the dried plant's leaves. It holds the dried plant up

so it doesn't have to strain and bend more than it can bear. I described how I felt in the moment, holding parallel emotions and being aware of them: *I feel a bit anxious right now, but I love looking at the artwork. I find it so beautiful.* I asked the artwork, *how did you become so enveloped? It's hard to say. You made me this way. All I wanted was to be held, to be comforted, to be loved. To be caressed. I just want to savour this moment. Maybe this feeling won't last. Even if you want it to. But when you look at me, you know it. It exists within you, because otherwise you wouldn't have been able to make me. This is not a foreign feeling to you. It is something you know.* I connected this response to my initial intention and noted that I was informed by the object, that I am able to produce this feeling on my own, that it is already something that exists within me.

Third Walk (40 Minutes)

I set an intention *to feel hopeful.* Within a minute of walking down the street I noticed the tip of a flower on the sidewalk. I felt the urge to pick it up and felt how delicate it was. It forced me to pay attention to its fragility as I held it very carefully for the whole walk. I felt that I was changing the way I walk in general, creating habits for mindfulness and awareness of my body. *Noticing myself more in the moment, my body in space, in relation to other things, in relation to other bodies. I held the intention of wanting to feel hopeful and I noticed symbols of hope.*

Reflections on the Object

In holding an intention to feel something specific, I felt that I limited my experience to looking for guidance of hope rather than letting myself reflect on what might have occurred in the moment. I felt a resistance to exploring the flower, as if it wasn't of value because I was drawn to it while influenced by my intention for hope. Noticing my resistance helped me realize

that I was seeking to feel something specific by forcing an interpretation of the object to suit my intention, rather than letting the object tell me something about me.

The Guided Meditation

I felt a pressure in my head, in my forehead, a bit at the back where my head connects to my spine. I feel like I am overthinking. When I asked what it needs, I heard 'softness'. How can I bring softness to my head? I felt that the attention on my head symbolized my pattern of overthinking emotional challenges and sought to bring relief to this tendency with softness.

Reflections While Working with the Object

Feeling uncertain as to how to approach relieving my overthinking tendencies with softness, I pulled out all possible materials in my studio that could relate to softness. This display of disparate materials on my studio table reflected how confusing this concept of bringing softness to my overthinking nature seemed to me. Reflecting on the choice of materials and the process of choosing them can also contribute to self-reflection and awareness.

Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork

I set an intention to *understand what the softness means*. After describing the artwork (Figure 3) in detail and reflecting on my emotional state in that moment, I asked the artwork, *what is the role of the fibre? The fibre is meant to be your softness. You thought that the flower was the softness, but now the flower is wilting, and you know it will die and decay. The fibres are the softness that support the cycles you go through. Be kind to yourself. You know your patterns, your cycles. The fibres are like an embrace. To hold you, contain you. You are the flower. At least the part of you that suffers. But that's not all you are. You are more than your suffering. Let me hold you when you are activated. Be kind to yourself. Follow the thread of your comfort.* I reflected on my intention to understand the softness and noted that the softness of the fibres in

the artwork represents self-regulation and self-compassion. *I have to cultivate what brings me softness.*

Fourth Walk (35 Minutes)

For my fourth walk I set an intention for *presence and self-awareness*. With the overall intention to find an object in mind, I wondered when it would happen and what would I do if nothing called to me? I allowed myself to feel trust in the process and was drawn to a plain grey rock on the ground. I wondered what called me to it, but I picked it up with curiosity and carried it home. I became very aware of myself holding this heavy rock in my hands as I walked, wondering if the people around me might interpret this behaviour as violent. The awareness of myself and how others might perceive me, as well as the effort I made to present myself as warm and kind so as not to evoke fear in the other seemed like important information to reflect on.



Figure 3 Artwork from third found object; found flower and synthetic wool roving. Left image shows the artwork immediately after completion; right image depicts it in later stages of decay.

Reflections on the Object

The scars are interesting. I was surprised that I was drawn to this. It's not particularly beautiful, but I was intrigued by my own attention towards it.

The Guided Meditation

The front of my neck immediately called my attention. Violent images came up, slitting throat, etc. Pointing out how vulnerable the neck is, in this case the front. When I paired it with the object, the awareness of the rock's heaviness was salient. I imagined how I would draw this feeling; an image of a neck being crossed out came up, as if the communication was being blocked. I felt the heaviness of the rock paired with the sense of communication blockage. What it needs is openness.

Reflections While Working with the Object

I decided to break open the rock using a hammer in order to 'open' it and reveal its insides. The experience of smashing it with a hammer was pleasurable and cathartic. It felt like a relief to make the pieces lighter and I was inspired to highlight their lightness by hanging them.

Creatively Dialoguing with the Artwork

I felt resistant to writing about this artwork (Figure 4). I chose to notice the resistance and to try and trudge through it. I set an intention *to understand how to use the energy of this artwork*. I described aspects of the artwork: *The thread is tied around each stone like a gift or like luggage. As if the threads are rescuing the stones from some buried place... There is a gentleness with which the stones sway. The threads they are hung from are delicate, easily broken. Easily tangled... The pieces are sharp, raw, unpolished. They form a line similar in 'rawness' to the shape of the golden rod. They mirror their container.* I described my felt experience at the time and wrote that despite wanting to focus my attention on the creative

dialogue process, I kept getting distracted by my thoughts. I asked the artwork; *how does it feel to be suspended by a thread? It feels vulnerable. Risky. I worry that my weight or my movement will cause a disturbance, a rupture. The more still I stay, the more I cultivate stillness, the safer I will be suspended here by a thread. I feel grateful to have the others here. But at the same time aware that their movement affects mine. We all affect each other, but also support each other. We cultivate stillness, patience, support, resilience. Be gentle with me.*

I found engaging in this process with this particular artwork to be very regulating and soothing to deal with some emotional challenges that were coming up for me in my personal life. The process gave me the space to reflect on my discomfort, to work with the discomfort, and to regulate my activated nervous system.



Figure 4 Artwork from fourth found object; pieces of found rock, metal rod, and sewing thread

Fifth Walk

For my fifth walk I set the intention *to feel energized*. As I left my house, I quickly realized that I was not in the mood to engage in a mindful walk. I felt a strong resistance to this process of self-reflection and decided not to force myself to be mindful. I found my ability to notice my resistance to the process, and to be gentle with it, to be a testament to the depth of the work that I am trying to do. Although mindfulness is a great practice to cultivate, it's okay to recognize when the motivation simply isn't there, to acknowledge it, and to accept it. The awareness of my emotional state and to my emotional limits and capacity allowed me to set healthy boundaries with myself. *Knowing when to rest is also self-care*.

Findings

To extract and analyse relevant and significant themes from the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis was used as a guideline. As supported by Moustaka's (1990) illumination phase, this process was undertaken intuitively while being informed by Braun and Clarke's structure. After transcribing my process journal and highlighting significant ideas pertaining to my research question concerning self-reflection and self-insight, a condensed version of my journal was written. From this summary, a list of recurring themes was recorded and later refined in order to distill important instances relating to my research question into seven overarching themes. The seven themes describe a series of processes that occurred throughout the research process, within and between each step in the proposed intervention. The seven themes are *curiosity as grounding; intention as containing; object-artwork as extension of the self; self-regulation through emotional distance; noticing resistance; tending to the vulnerable parts; and artwork as authentic mirror*. Informed by Moustaka's explication phase, these themes are intended to bring focus to the essences of the phenomena that I personally experienced

throughout the data collection process. The following sections will further elucidate these seven themes.

Overarching Themes

The experiences of orienting to the environment through curiosity; of remaining curious about stimuli through the senses; of seeing novelty in the found object through written description; and of feeling safe enough to engage curiosities resulted in the theme *curiosity as grounding*. In reading my journal, it was apparent that cultivating curiosity of my both my surroundings and of my internal experience provided a regulating experience. Moments in which I might have felt lost in the process or had a sense of somatic awareness, establishing a sense of curiosity through all five senses allowed me to regain connection to the present moment and to experience a sense of grounding.

Feeling safe enough to indulge my curiosities throughout the process required a sense of containment. The practice of formally setting an intention before engaging in various steps of the research process seemed to allow for a structure to the process that aided in establishing a boundaried experience. This phenomena was noted in the data under the theme *intention as containing*. Putting into words that which spontaneously surfaced in the form of an intention prior to each walk facilitated an acceptance of my desires in that moment and offered an invisible framework through which to make sense of the walk and the found object.

Through the process of curiously witnessing the found object – of allowing its *newness* to arouse emotions within me – and engaging in a guided meditation in which the qualities of the object are paired with a specific part of the body, I was able to project aspects of myself onto the object and to notice the qualities of the object as a reflection of what is alive in me. Thus, the object provided a symbolic stand-in allowing for the externalization of internal processing with

the object being a metaphor for aspects of the self. The theme *object-artwork as extension of the self* encompasses this process of projection onto the found object.

Working with aspects of myself through the metaphor of the found object afforded me a safe distance from the felt experience of difficult emotions that surfaced and allowed for self-soothing through creativity. As I opened myself to examine the more vulnerable parts of me and especially to bring to light my needs in relation to these vulnerable parts, the distance metaphor provided allowed me to comfort, through symbolic action taken upon the found object, difficult emotions as they arose. The theme *self-regulation through emotional distance* summarizes this concept. The space between the symbolic object and my internal experience was distant enough to allow me to recognize when I felt resistant towards engaging in such a vulnerable practice as working with objects imbued with my projected internal experiences. Embedded elements of mindfulness and somatic awareness further facilitated this ability. *Noticing resistance* as a theme embodies the significant moments in which I was able to recognize my own resistance to engaging in the deeper work and to examine it with a certain depth that would have otherwise not been attempted.

This distance furthermore provided an opportunity for me to transform the projected aspects of myself through creatively manipulating the object based on how I chose to *tend to the vulnerable parts* of me. Noticing spontaneous desires to care for the object; to caress it, to protect it, and to nurture it, afforded a space for self-compassion and reflection on what these vulnerable parts of me require. Bringing care to the wounded aspects of the object as a form of repair encouraged acceptance and compassion for the object, and in turn, for myself. Through this process of externalized creative transformation I could observe how my internal experience was also shifting. An intimate link between my internal world and its externalized manifestation

could form, perhaps creating a parallel experience of transformation and healing between the inner and the outer.

The ability to witness my desires of care towards the object highlights the level of self-awareness facilitated by the intervention. This awareness of self was also evident in my reports of somatic awareness while orienting to my environment and during the guided meditation. Self-awareness was further promoted through engaging in and witnessing the process of creative manipulation of the found object to create a final artwork. Creatively dialoguing with the artwork and engaging my inner witness led to insights into the physical qualities of the artwork as metaphors for the self and is described by the theme *artwork as authentic mirror*. The concept of the authentic mirror describes how the final artwork provided an opportunity to witness myself through externalization and to engage in an honest dialogue with aspects of myself that might have remained buried if not projected onto the found objects. The creative dialogue gave a voice to this mirror that reflected my inner self. Honing a practice of witnessing through curiously and openly engaging in the creative dialogue allowed me to see, hear, and listen to what my authentic mirror had to say.

Self-Reflection and Self-Insight

According to the findings in which seven themes are outlined to describe the most significant processes gleaned from the data, the proposed intervention addresses my research question concerning self-reflection and self-insight. As mentioned earlier, self-reflection and self-insight are important aspects of therapeutic potential. The findings illuminate areas in which self-reflection and self-insight were evident throughout the research process and stimulate possibilities of applying the intervention in an art therapy context to promote therapeutic potential for a client.

Curiosity ignited the motivation to move towards that which may be uncomfortable while the structure of the interventions allowed for the safety to further engage those curiosities to their depth. Using the object as an extension of myself allowed for me to witness aspects of myself through a new angle and to reflect more honestly on what I see. The contained space in which I could reflect with emotional distance on vulnerable aspects of myself and to provide care for those parts through creative engagement allowed for a compassionate approach to understanding myself and gaining insight into manifestations of protective defenses. The externalization of my internal processes through the symbolic object simulated a mirror through which I could act upon and transform my internal experience through symbolic action. All elements of each step of the research process incorporated mindfulness and facilitated self-awareness. The eventual artwork that performs as an authentic mirror is a space in which I can witness the weaving of every thread sewn from the self-reflective processes in which I engaged. Dialoguing with this manifestation was inevitably insightful as long as I was open to the process and allowed for the cultivation of my curiosity.

Discussion

Engaging in this research forced me to reconsider what constitutes therapeutic potential and what encompasses self-reflection and self-insight in the context of creative self-inquiry. A practice of self-reflection became an embodied process in which my felt experiences were observed, identified, and understood. The object-artwork provided a landmark point in which I could witness, through a metaphorical mirror, the manifestation of my self-reflection from a particular point in time. These landmarks, in the form of artwork, offered a visualization of a timeline in which I could observe how my interpretations and understandings of my own experience transformed over time. Acting as a container for what emerged throughout the

process and a holding environment for the vulnerable parts of me that needed safety, the artwork, as I witnessed it over time, reflected the stories I held inside me. The ability to witness and make sense of what emerged through this self-reflective process led to deeper insights about my embodied experience throughout the timeline of the research.

McNiff (2013) and Allen (2013) discuss mindful engagement and the facilitation of an inner witness while Ogden and Fisher (2015) present a process of mindful somatic awareness and orienting to the environment that promotes emotional regulation. I feel that my research inquiry came to reflect how these processes can foster self-reflection and self-insight through creative use of found material. Gaining knowledge about my felt experience through mindful engagement with an object found in my environment aided my ability to regulate my emotional state in moments of activation. I felt empowered by my capacity to comfort and nurture these vulnerable parts of me through externalizing them and acting upon their stand-in object. The process led me to feel confident and empowered in my ability to acknowledge moments of resistance and to know what I needed to regulate in a given moment.

Implications and Limitations of the Findings for Application in Art Therapy

As this creative research was undertaken as an heuristic self-inquiry and the results cannot necessarily be generalizable, the potential for application in art therapy is speculative. Mindfulness-based practices and guided meditations that focus on somatic awareness were not novel for me and the intuition with which I engaged in these exercises may not be as readily available for participants in other settings. Furthermore, my ability to be spontaneous and intuitive in the artmaking process is a skill honed over many years as a studio artist. Such openness and intuition in the process may not surface for persons for whom these exercises are new. The nature of this work required a willingness to look at and be with emotionally difficult

embodied experiences. For this reason, applying this intervention to an art therapy context should greatly consider timing and the emotional capacity of the client. In such cases, elements of the intervention can be adapted to cultivate mindfulness, grounding, and emotional regulation without going deeper into the realm of reflecting on difficult content, in particular for individuals with experiences of trauma. That said, the process provided an essential containment through its inherent emotionally distant stance by using metaphor through material as a mirror to the self. This distance may provide a safer context in which a traumatized person can contact their most painful parts and to work through difficult emotions through externalization.

Furthermore, the proposed intervention facilitated a sense of awareness of embodied feelings and sensations through meditation and art which could be useful in fostering a self-reflective practice for art therapists. Understanding the self through found material can enhance an art therapist's perceptions on the function of raw material in their art therapy practice and possibly expand their relationship to materials in a way that can promote more accessibility for their clients. As the use of found objects may be more accessible to individuals without an artistic background, the intervention may provide a less intimidating and more inviting view of art therapy or healing through the arts.

The creation of meaning through sense of place helped establish the found object as meaningful and significant, facilitating the emergence of a transitional object. Inspired by Afonso Rodrigues' (2018) participatory research with Brazilian women in London, I can imagine this intervention offering a grounding experience for newcomers with diverse and complicated migration histories. The particular environment that an individual is engaging with during this process might significantly alter the experience as I have presented it. Objects, perhaps especially natural objects, tend to promote a sense of nostalgia despite the diversity of nature

around the world. Nostalgia can come in the form of recognizing a sensual experience, or in the form of lacking a particular sensual experience in a certain moment. In my process with the found materials, the sense of place was very significant for me. Mindfully engaging with my environment helped me to establish a sense of belonging to place and to do so in a grounding and reflective way. Perhaps individuals with experiences of displacement and trauma can benefit from such an intervention that considers place and promotes reflection on how one orients to their environment while enhancing emotional regulation skills and grounding strategies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research questions related to found objects were stimulated throughout the research process. How can generational and familial objects encourage exploration of intergenerational phenomena? How can the creative use of materials found in one's environment facilitate therapeutic healing for individuals or communities with experiences of displacement, migration histories, and experiences of trauma? Such research that examines differences of place in relation to the participant could further enhance the understanding of using found objects in certain contexts. Furthermore, understanding how culture plays a role in the creative use of found objects in an art therapy context would be immensely pertinent. Karcher (2017) emphasizes the necessity of critical self-reflection practices for art therapists in order to confront inherent culturally-based biases related to their own identity and the identities of the communities they seek to serve. Further research on using material found in certain contexts can help aid in critical self-reflective practices for art therapists. Research that examines more specifically how the creative use or manipulation of sentimental objects found at home could contribute to therapeutic healing through mindful and curious engagement with the material.

Finally, throughout the research process I became inspired at the thought of promoting self-reflective practices in the community through sustainable art-based experiential workshops intended for public engagement. Participatory workshops could generate data that stimulates future research ideas to elaborate on the heuristic self-inquiry presented here.

Conclusion

This work was challenging but very honest. Working with the objects as an extension of myself provided a secure containment through emotional distance. The metaphor of the objects as stand-ins for parts of me facilitated the possibility of acting symbolically upon the object and thereby, bringing compassion and transformation to difficult embodied emotions. A space in which parallel transformations took place – the transformation of the object reflecting an internal transformation – provided a contained setting in which processes of self-reflection leading to self-insight could come to fruition.

Engaging in a creative heuristic self-inquiry structured the research in a way that allowed me to engage deeply with my proposed intervention. The findings reveal the possibility for self-awareness, emotional regulation, and self-insight through the mindful engagement with objects found in the environment, proposing an art-based intervention that could be applied in art therapy contexts. Different elements of the intervention could be adapted so as to invite the client to engage with their own material at a depth most appropriate to them.

Exploring my environment using tools for self-regulation ignited a possibility to learn about myself in a creative and compassionate way. A sense of empowerment was fuelled by the process in which I gained newfound tools for emotional regulation and self-awareness. I am driven to continue exploring the healing possibilities of found and foraged materials and the opportunities they afford for deep and sincere self-reflection and self-awareness.

References

- Afonso Rodrigues, M. A. (2018). Writing life narratives through art practice. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 15(2-3), 218-233.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1429866>
- Allen, P. (2013). Intention and witness: Tools for mindfulness in art and writing. In L. Rappaport (Ed.), *Mindfulness and the art therapies: Theory and practice* (pp. 51-61). Jessica Kingsley Publishers. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1511101>
- Bachelard, G. (1958). *The poetics of space*. Penguin.
- Bat-Or, M. & Garti, D. (2019). Art therapist's perceptions of the role of the art medium in the treatment of bereaved clients in art therapy. *Death Studies*, 43(3), 193-203.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1445138>
- Bat-Or, M. & Megides, O. (2016). Found object/readymade art in the treatment of trauma and loss. *Journal of Clinical Art Therapy*, 3(1), 1-30.
<http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/jcat/vol3/iss1/3>
- Bird, D. (2016). Heuristic methodology in arts-based inquiry of autobiographical therapeutic performance. In S. Pendzik, R. Emunah, & D. R. Johnson (Eds.), *The self in performance* (pp. 169-179). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53593-1_12
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brooker, J. (2010). Found objects in art therapy. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 15(1), 25-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17454831003752386>

- Camic, P. M. (2010). From trashed to treasured: A grounded theory analysis of the found object. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 4(2), 81-92.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018429>
- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Franklin, M. A. (2012). Know thyself: Awakening self-referential awareness through art-based research. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 3(1), 87-96.
https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.3.1.87_1
- Gotink, R. A., Hermans, K. S. F. M., Geschwind, N., De Nooij, R., De Groot, W. T., & Speckens, A. E. M. (2016). Mindfulness and mood stimulate each other in an upward spiral: A mindful walking intervention using experience sampling. *Mindfulness*, 7(5), 1114–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-016-0550-8>
- Hinz, L. D. (2019). *Expressive therapies continuum: A framework for using art in therapy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Juniper, A. (2003). *Wabi sabi: The Japanese art of impermanence*. Tuttle Publishing.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). Walking meditation. In *Full catastrophe living: How to cope with stress, pain and illness using mindfulness meditation* (pp. 114-119). Piatkus.
- Karcher, O. P. (2017). Sociopolitical oppression, trauma, and healing: Moving toward a social justice art therapy framework. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 34(3), 123-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2017>
- Keulemans, G. (2016). The geo-cultural conditions of kintsugi. *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 9(1), 15-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496772.2016.1183946>
- Koren, L. (1994). *Wabi-sabi for artists, designers, poets & philosophers*. Stone Bridge Press.

- McNiff, S. (2013). The role of witnessing and immersion in the moment of arts therapy experience. In L. Rappaport (Ed.), *Mindfulness and the art therapies: Theory and practice* (pp. 38-50). Jessica Kingsley Publishers. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1511101>
- McNiff, S. (2013). Opportunities and challenges in art-based research. In S. McNiff (Ed.), *Art as research: Opportunities and challenges* (pp. 3-9). Intellect.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Sage Publications. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412995641>
- Ogden, P. and Fisher, J. (2015). *Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Peterson, C. (2015). "Walkabout: looking in, looking out": A mindfulness-based art therapy program. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 32(2), 78–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2015.1028008>
- Prior, R. W. (2013). Knowing what is known: Accessing craft-based meanings in research by artists. In S. McNiff (Ed.), *Art as research: Opportunities and challenges* (pp. 161-169). https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.4.1.57_1
- Reid, L. A. (1969). Meaning, feeling, value, symbolism in the arts. In L. A. Reid (Ed.), *Meaning in the arts* (pp. 191-208). Allen & Unwin.
- Reilly, R. C., Lee, V., Laux, K., & Robitaille, A. (2018). Using found poetry to illuminate the existential and posttraumatic growth of women with breast cancer engaging in art therapy. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 15(2-3), 196-217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1429863>

- Sajnani, N. (2012). Improvisation and art-based research. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health*, 3(1), 79-86. https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.3.1.79_1
- Segalo, P. (2018). Women speaking through embroidery: Using visual methods and poetry to narrate lived experiences. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 15(2-3), 298-304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2018.1430013>
- Sela-Smith, S. (2002). Heuristic research: A review and critique of Moustakas's method. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42(3), 53-88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167802423004>
- Winnicott, D. W. (2005). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. In *Playing and reality* (pp. 1-25). Routledge.
- Wunderlich, F. M. (2008). Walking and rhythmicity: Sensing urban space. *Journal of Urban Design*, 13(1), 125-139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574800701803472>

Filename: Minuskin_MA_F2021.docx
Directory: /Users/daniminuskin/Library/Containers/com.microsoft.Word/Da
ta/Documents
Template: /Users/daniminuskin/Library/Group
Containers/UBF8T346G9.Office/User
Content.localized/Templates.localized/Normal.dotm
Title:
Subject:
Author: Dani Minuskin
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 7/12/21 4:24:00 PM
Change Number: 2
Last Saved On: 7/12/21 4:24:00 PM
Last Saved By: Dani Minuskin
Total Editing Time: 2 Minutes
Last Printed On: 7/12/21 4:25:00 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 44
Number of Words: 11,682 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 66,591 (approx.)