

#PRAYERPOCKETPLACE
ABR Issues

Tagging

#PRAYERPOCKETPLACE identificando
problemas da Investigação baseada nas
artes

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Abstract:

THE PRAYER POCKET PLACE (POCKET) is a sculptural installation created through open public workshops, fabricated by women, and centred in contemporary spirituality. In this formatted Visual Essay (Hertfordshire), *POCKET's* process and creation is charted visually – both as narrative and for ABR commentary. This project exemplifies conundrums inherent to Arts Based Research (ABR). Seemingly incompatible standpoints are introduced for consideration – purposefully without a prescriptive conclusion. The highlighted issues are: Academia versus Artist; Fine Artist versus Community Artist; Spirituality versus Sentiment; and Social Media versus Cultural Hierarchy.

Keywords:

A/r/tography; Arts-based research;
;Interdisciplinary research; Installation;
Women's narrative.

Resumo:

THE PRAYER POCKET PLACE (o lugar de oração de bolso) é uma instalação escultural criada através de oficinas públicas abertas, fabricada por mulheres e centrada na espiritualidade contemporânea. Nesse formato de ensaio Visual (Hertfordshire, n.d.), o processo e a criação do *POCKET* são traçadas visualmente – tanto como narrativa quanto para comentários sobre a Investigação baseada em artes (IBA). Este projeto exemplifica os enigmas inerentes das IBA. Os pontos de vista aparentemente incompatíveis são introduzidos para consideração – propositadamente sem uma conclusão prescritiva. As questões destacadas são: Academia versus Artista; Artista visual versus artista da comunidade; Espiritualidade versus Sentimento; e Media Social versus Hierarquia Cultural.

Palavras-chave:

A/r/tografia; Investigação baseada em artes; Pesquisa interdisciplinar; Instalação; Narrativa feminina.

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Figure 1. PRAYER POCKET PLACE, Wollongong City Gallery, NSW, Australia, 2011

Introduction

Arts based research (ABR) is interpolated with alarms. Why is this the case? Even a specialist in the field cannot be prompted to 'suggest the thing people least understand about ABR... It's not a simple question nor a simple answer.' As a practising visual, performance and media artist, academic, author, and educationalist, I agree. The tensions that divide university hegemony and ABR are palpable and may never be resolved completely. It has been my experience, as an author, that acceptance and change in academic pedagogy requires 'voice'. Since traditional researchers often hold sway², essays which test the system - such as this one - are often tossed before publication for 'lack of strong theoretical framing'. But thankfully, not this time. As an offering to this timely discourse, I speak from my personal practice in this essay. Successful and relevant research based in Fine Art, POCKET in itself may be a stage for a deeper consideration of ABR.

2 Perhaps it is time for the Review System to be reviewed. Like any other formidable institution, nothing need be changed if you throw out the dissenters...in an orderly process.



Figure 2. *POCKET* on exhibition at the Wollongong City Gallery, NSW

THE PRAYER POCKET PLACE



POCKET (Peitsch, 2015) is a Fine Art outcome I initiated and developed through public/community workshops at various locations. Hundreds of fabric pockets are gathered creating a 'space' for women to 'place' the hand-written letters of their thoughts, hopes and prayers for all time, all 'faces', cultures and spiritualities. This multi-sensory installation- linked to a historical catastrophic coal mining disaster in the Illawarra - features creative textiles and an original soundscape. It is permanently displayed at the Mt Kembla Heritage Centre, Wollongong, New South Wales. The dynamics of the project - rather than its full linear story³- is central to this current essay.

Academic versus Artist



POCKETS began its life embedded in fine art - created as it was - during my solo exhibition *SLEEVES & SHEETS, SOCKS & POCKETS*. I initiated and directed a two day public forum to articulate the exhibition's themes. *POCKET* is to be viewed first and foremost as a visually complete sculpture, as highlighted in the catalogue essay (Hulsbosch, 2011). However, to be accepted as research in the world of academic journals and to be recognized as 'rigorous scholarship' by some lecturers, it is necessary that *POCKET* be supported by words.

All too often, researchers construe ABR visuals or other non-verbal materials as 'the handmaiden' to research; at times valued merely as an alternate way of engaging participants or presenting gathered information (Lawrence, 2015). Academics, traditionally, believe 'words' themselves to be the highest form of intellectual

³ A recent, more detailed article outlining this project's cultural significance can be found in the 'Journal of Public Pedagogies, Issue 1' (Peitsch, 2015).

exchange. This longstanding predilection usually includes partialities for charts, statistics or other quantitative, seemingly concrete, tabulated evidence – except, newly, at a few Ivy League strongholds⁴ (Rossignol, 2017). Artists, traditionally, see visual or auditory expressions, in fact anything ‘other than words’⁵, as the superlative means of communication and expression. Both academics and artists are wholly passionate about their own areas of expertise and promote its standing



Figure 3. POCKET on exhibition at Belconnen Art Centre, Canberra, ACT, Australia, 2012

Figure 4. POCKET on exhibition at the Wollongong City Gallery, NSW with other sculptures

Resultantly, the world of academia developed the Creative PhD. This paradigm requires the submission of both a faultlessly argued exegesis and an exceptionally creativethesis⁶. Autoethnography – the innovative methodology I used as a postgrad

4 A Harvard Student's Final Thesis was a Rap Album, He Got an A.

5 Of course, I not referring to 'text' used as image in art.

6 ABR will be have arrived in its own right when academics are required to interpret their submissions in artistic form for further illumination - rather than ABR alone being forced to contextualise its art forms through wordy analysis in order be academically recognized. As said earlier, this is unlikely to ever happen.

- with an outcome in textual and artistic format - was slightly controversial in 2007. In 2017, this approach is well-accepted throughout the world (Ryan, 2012). Practise-based A/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, 2009) may be another methodology that well suits the practice of ABR inquiry, lying as it does between the clashing perspectives.

Fine Artist versus Community Artist

POCKET uses community as research to create Fine Art. Aligning with the dominance of individualism in western culture today, artists often believe themselves to be the primary source of creation. The emphasis is on the individual and their personal art production, otherwise known as solipsism. This approach has now also been extended to indigenous art, even though in the past it may have had communal sources. In contrast, community artists see the act of community and its group outcome as paramount to arts practise. The opposing points of view seem to give preference to either a process-based or outcome driven orientation. *POCKET* however, satisfies both preferences equally. *POCKET'S* gentle personally-probing narrative⁷ is noteworthy for being ABR, fine art and community art. It represents within society a sensory-rich spiritual *something*.



Figure 5. Women workshoped in all states of Australia made free-standing pockets, writing their 'prayers' in their own words and language.

⁷ 'I thought I wasn't a very creative person, but when I looked at my prayer pocket in the end, I could see that it was not only beautiful but it also told a story about God's presence in our lives', said one retreat participant. 'I'm going to stop saying "I'm not creative", because I am' (Schmaal, 2012).



Figure 6: A women-led worship service was held at one location. The gathered pockets formed the focal point of their Eucharistic celebration

Spirituality versus Sentiment

All *POCKET* participants brought their own perspectives on spirituality to the workshops. Spirituality is thought to be a polarizing subject of conversation in some circles. Nevertheless, Indigenous artists are often expected to represent the spiritual. Non-indigenous artists are often anticipated to acclaim the intellect as the basis for their art while disregarding the spiritual. Artists from a Christian cultural background are often credited as using 'only' an adoption or adaptation of a European culture's belief system. For brevity, I mention only a few belief systems here. These types of clichéd religious precepts are constricting for all spiritual constructs and beliefs - whether they be formal religions or non-formalized spiritual movements.

While it may be expected to consider 'spirituality' a discretionary sentiment for the average person today, *POCKET* demonstrates quite the opposite. None of the participants - representing wide-ranging belief systems or none at all - required instruction in writing their prayers that flowed easily and from their hearts. Lorraine Gatehouse suggests the cultural crisis of this decade is producing a resultant spiritual crisis, '...a time for reassessing just who we are, who we want to be and where we are going' (Gatehouse, 2016:4). Thus stated, *POCKET's* research is particularly timely.



Figure 7. Women machine sewed, hand-sewed, glued, decorated their pockets with their own original designs, infilled them with their supplications and sewed them shut - making the pockets their personal refuge.

Figure 8. Quilting skills are incorporated in making the attractive cover for the 'sacred space'. There is no open access to the prayer house. It stands as a secluded sanctuary of special containment.

Many who viewed the structure felt quieted by its presence. At many art and spirituality workshops, I pose a few introductory questions. In chart form, here are the responses given at several workshops.

Once a person acknowledges her universal questioning of the divine, she considers what it means to be human, and a door opens to a collective consciousness where steps can be made towards the possibility of something quite new and positive within society (Fox, 2011). It is only a step - but an important step in understanding the implications of what it is to be called to life - not a new religion (Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 2001).

SPIRITUALITY SURVEY - CHART 1	
Completed by 20 -25 year old students at a Sydney School of Design	
WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT 'THE DIVINE'	WHAT DO I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT 'THE DIVINE'
<i>An unknown almighty being</i>	<i>Who/if they are</i>
<i>fantastical, significant</i>	<i>why it is so fascinating</i>
<i>my belief: there is a higher power – its not 'one' entity</i>	<i>I like mystery</i>
<i>Created World – Worship by many religions</i>	<i>how came into existence</i>
<i>A state of beliefs</i>	<i>existence</i>
<i>He/She is everywhere</i>	<i>What happens after death?</i>
<i>Most People are on the fence</i>	<i>What do they think of evolution?</i>
<i>Nothing really</i>	<i>More about what people think about the divine</i>
<i>I don't know anything – only a few tales or stories</i>	<i>Nothing – I don't wish to learn about it.</i>
<i>It is in everything. Internal & External.</i>	<i>How it effects my path</i>
<i>Works in mysterious ways. All on a journey that doesn't always make 'sense' or feel 'fair'</i>	<i>Why some have it so hard</i>
<i>Doesn't have a 3D presence beyond logical I think</i>	<i>How it affects me. How to develop relationship with unknown</i>
<i>There's no divine</i>	<i>What is time and how does the universe fit into time.</i>
<i>When Karma is real!</i>	<i>Why good people are taken from us</i>
<i>God (Christianity) sent his only son to save our sins</i>	<i>Did this really happen.</i>

SPIRITUALITY SURVEY - CHART 2	
Completed by +30 year old participants in my Colloquium at a Diversity Conference	
WHAT DO I KNOW ABOUT 'SPIRITUALITY'	WHAT DO I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT 'SPIRITUALITY'
<i>The Core</i>	<i>Does everyone know they have it?</i>
<i>Growth</i>	<i>Development / Value</i>
<i>Unique & all encompassing</i>	<i>More</i>
<i>Everywhere</i>	<i>How to grow it?</i>
<i>Peace Meaning</i>	<i>Range of possibilities</i>
<i>Set of Spiritual Beliefs</i>	<i>Your A definition</i>
<i>Self Actualization</i>	<i>Self Actualization</i>
<i>Zero</i>	<i>[Symbol for infinity]</i>
<i>Connections</i>	<i>How to stay spiritual</i>
<i>Comfort</i>	<i>Self</i>
<i>One with nature</i>	<i>Well-being</i>
<i>Embodied</i>	<i>The need for it</i>
<i>Everything & Nothing</i>	<i>Why do people want to 'rule' it</i>
<i>Soul</i>	<i>How to get it?</i>
<i>light</i>	<i>nothing</i>
<i>Not much!</i>	<i>Know more about it.</i>
<i>Skeptical.</i>	<i>Understand blind faith</i>
<i>Its individual</i>	<i>How it manifests</i>



Figures 9 - 13. Showing some intergenerational workshop participants and resulting pocket outcomes.



Figure 14. So many pockets were made that an inner wicker form is housed under the covering of pockets. The blue collars signify the working class supported in their jobs by home-making wives.



Figures 15-21. Several examples of the beautiful pockets fashioned at the workshops. The pockets were mostly fabricated in blues, greens and whites reflecting the official colours of the Feminist Movement.

Social Media versus Cultural Hierarchy

There have long been difficulties documenting and accessing ABR such as visuals, movies, sound, and performance. Journals and academic publications struggle with the added technology required to enable multi-media outcomes. This is a problem for POCKET. An integral part of this project is the original Soundscape augmenting the reception of POCKET. Sadly, though expertly inserted into a submission, the journal promising to include the sound extract could not deliver it.

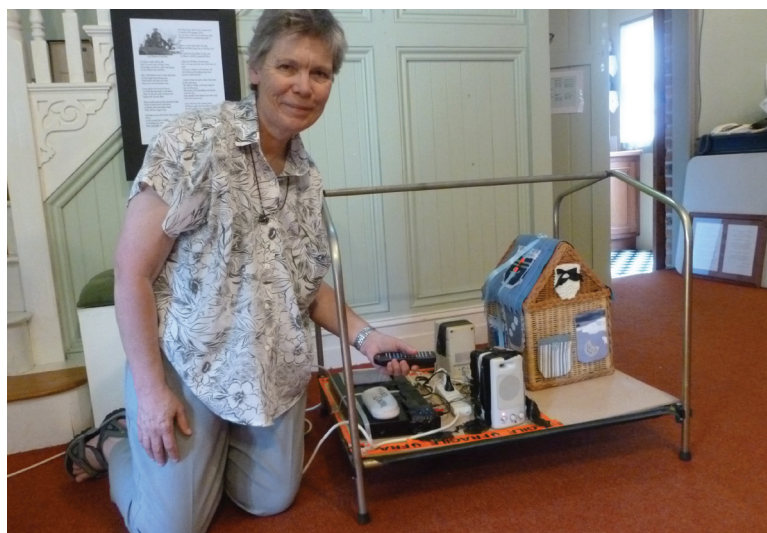
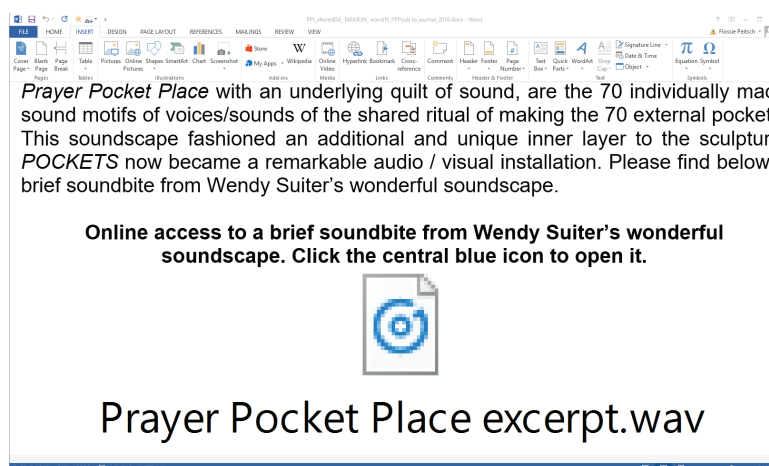


Figure 9. Wendy Suiter (Australian Composers), generated a lively soundscape including the chatter of the women working in community, the humming sewing machines, reflecting the structure of the fabric house.

Wide internet access may solve some of these issues. The #Hashtag symbol highlights the subject line of many Tweets and Facebook posts. It allows indexed access by many viewers interested in a 'lofty' topics. This practise facilitates non-hierarchical opinions which share the same virtual space, evenly and entirely. Spirituality is a universally lively and relevant topic (Wilber, 2000). Hence, the #Hashtag in this title indicates global conversation and acknowledges the worldwide basis for discussion.

Conclusion

POCKET is an arts based practise worth consideration. It is also research accomplished by a visual and auditory outcome, alone. It stands on its own feet, so to speak (Sullivan, 2005). The issues that plague ABR are many but the provocative and dynamic intercourse *POCKET* suggests is of research interest. The hands-on task *POCKET* is research that creates community through the arts (Ryan, 2012). This factor is evidenced in the self-directed sharing within small working groups leading to personal healing, community building with a strong sense of belonging and solidarity, realization of hope, and activation for the future (Lawrence, 2015). *THE PRAYERPOCKETPLACE* became, quite innocently in itself, a powerful 'form of sociality and creativity' (Peters, 2015). In fact, perhaps *POCKET* can be seen by others as- arguably - none other than truly dynamic research through the arts.

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